The Application of Pragmatic Inference in Teaching Reading Comprehension to Kurdish EFL Students: An Experimental Study

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is an essential skill in learning a foreign language, and it is one of the most important means for language learners to acquire information. The ability to comprehend any reading text requires interpreting it by making accurate connections between the linguistic representations or literal meaning of words and sentences and their pragmatic outcomes, which enable learners to infer the intended meaning of the text.

The present study is based on Relevance Theory as the theoretical foundation and examines the implementation of pragmatic inference in teaching reading comprehension to EFL university students.

This study seeks to explore a) whether the pragmatic inference approach to teaching reading is more effective than the conventional one; b) whether teaching pragmatic inference improves students' reading proficiency. The study employs a quantitative quasi-experimental design in which a pre-test, post-test, and reading proficiency test were used for the purpose of data collection. The samples were (56) Kurdish EFL second stage students majoring in English at the University of Sulaymaniyah. The students were from two classes: the experimental class and the control class. The two classes were taught using different reading teaching methods within six weeks of experimental teaching.

The key findings of the study revealed that there are significant differences between the two groups of the study; the experimental group outperformed those in the control group quite significantly and with tangible improvement in their reading proficiency.

The study can be of great significance for teachers and curriculum designers since it draws their attention to this ignored area of study.

Key words: Pragmatic inference, reading comprehension, relevance theory, EFL students.

1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the fact that context is an essential feature of understanding any text, little attention is paid to teaching reading comprehension through context. It is always the case that different readers receive different meanings and have different understandings out of the same text, as a passage contains both explicit and implicit meaning; the reader can utilize the relevance to infer the implicit meaning in the context. For students, it is relatively hard to deal with reading materials, particularly those that require readers to make inferences. They can only master the basic meanings of the words, but cannot understand the meanings of the words deeply and they can't apply the words in the exact language context. While they can easily get the surface meaning, understanding the implicature is rather a hard task.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The major aim of this study is to investigate the influence of implementing pragmatic inference in teaching Kurdish EFL second year university students' reading comprehension. The extent to which teaching pragmatic interference affects Kurdish EFL students' use of the English language and inferencing meaning out of context.

1.3 Research Questions

The current study is intended to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between the traditional method of teaching reading comprehension and teaching it through pragmatic inference?

2. Is students' reading proficiency improved by teaching pragmatic inference?

1.4 The Hypotheses

1. According to the new teaching method, applying pragmatic inference in teaching reading can be more effective than the traditional methods.

2. By adopting teaching pragmatic inference, student's reading proficiency can be improved.

2. Theoretical Background

Language is a practical communication tool used to understand the meaning of something that people utter as the direct message of the speaker to the listener; effective communication in the target language is one of the most important goals of foreign language learners (Jaszczolt, 2002). Active use of the target language in a communicative context is a demanding process, and there are various factors that contribute to being able to comprehend utterances. Pragmatic and contextual information have essential roles in terms of determining what a speaker wants to convey and what a listener needs to grasp the intended meaning (Blakemore, 1992).

For the purpose of deep understanding of what is communicated, the hearer needs to interpret the language expressions by utilizing the intended meaning in a context. In the process of understanding, individuals are required to perceive, interpret, and find a connection between their perception and interpretation of what they know (McLean, 2003). In this sense, communication is taking place between the speaker and hearer, while reading is a communication process between writer and reader.

Reading is one of the most crucial skills for succeeding in academic fields. Learners' academic achievement is mainly related to their reading comprehension skills (Grabe, 1991). It is considered an indispensable skill to comprehend what they read and to have better success in other subjects offered at the university level (Meniado, 2016).

2.1 Pragmatic Inference

As explained by Sperber and Wilson (1995), the process of inferential comprehension is non-demonstrative, but even under the best circumstances, communication may also fail. The recipient can neither decode nor deduce the intention of the communicator. The best thing the listener can do is build a series of assumptions on the basis of the evidence provided by the communicator's ostensive behavior. Inferencing is the process of connecting advanced knowledge to text-based information in order to build meaning beyond what is directly said; it is creating personal meaning from texts.

Geis (1982, as cited in Grygiel, 2016), "Human beings are 'inferencing' creatures, trained to 'read into' what is said as much as is consistent with the literal meaning of what is said and the context in which it is said" (p.46). Drawing inferences is part of our behavior as rational beings, regardless of the language we speak. Thus, it may sometimes seem to us that we are not able to draw the correct inferences in a different language because we have not mastered it fully, but actually, very often, it is the cultural differences affecting contextual retrievals of background information that we are lacking (Ariel, 2010).

Pragmatic inferencing (PI) can be considered the process of drawing a conclusion from familiar facts or evidence. Therefore, inferences are logical conclusions based on advanced knowledge and observations. They are only indirectly activated by explicit language structures (Grygiel, 2016).

2.2 Relevance Theory: Theoretical Foundations

Relevance Theory (RT), seen as a psychological model for interpreting the cognitive understanding of language, was developed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in 1986.

Relevance theory is explained by a definition of relevance and two general principles:

Relevance: "An assumption is relevant in a context if and only if it has some contextual effect in that context" (Sperber and Wilson 1995: p.122).

Cognitive principle of relevance: "Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance" (Sperber and Wilson 1995: p.260).

Communicative principle of relevance: "Every utterance (or other act of inferential communication) communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance." (Sperber and Wilson 2002:604).

Relevance can be defined as "a property of utterances and other inputs to cognitive processes that makes them worth processing. These inputs might be external stimuli such as sights, smells and sounds of utterances, or internal representations such as thoughts, memories, or conclusions of inferences" (Wilson and Carston, 2007: p.244).

The RT is seen as opposed to the classical code model, in which information is encoded into a message and decoded by another party with a different copy of the code. The inferential model of communication, on the other hand, is considered an alternative to the traditional code model and refers to encoding the communicator's intended meaning into a signal that is decoded by the audience using an identical copy of the code, i.e., communication is achieved by producing and interpreting evidence. During the course of communications, the cognition inference is considered the basis, and the coding decoding is attached to it. (Wilson and Sperber, 2006; Yus, 2006).

The core part of relevance theory is a notion of relevance; it is considered as a general view of human cognition. Contextual effect

and processing effort are the two main factors that involves in the process of seeking for the expected relevance; "the greater the cognitive effects (benefits), the greater the relevance; the smaller the processing effort (cost) required to derive these effects, the greater the relevance" (Mazzarella, 2013). Here are some examples Mary, who has a chicken allergy and dislikes most meat, calls the host of the dinner party to find out what is on the menu. There are three things he might genuinely tell her:

(1) We are serving meat.

(2) We are serving chicken.

(3) Either we are serving chicken or ($7^2 7^2$ – 3) is not 46. (Wilson and Sperber, 2006: p.609)

According to the main features of relevance, all three utterances would be relevant to Marry, yet the second sentence would be more relevant than either one or three. It offers more cognitive effect: it makes Mary gets all the consequences derivable from the first sentence. The second is also more relevant than the third, as it requires less processing effort.

2.3 Types of Pragmatic Inference

2.3.1 Deixis

Deixis is a word originated from the Greek verb meaning 'indicating' or 'pointing'. Deixis, in pragmatics, is a linguistic expression used by a speaker to refer or identify entities. (Valeika & Verikaite, 2010). Deictic expressions are those which derive part of their meaning from their context of utterance such as the speaker, the addressee, the time and place of the utterance in which is it used (Thomas,2013; Hurford et al., 2007).

It can be said that to understand these linguistic expressions, we need to comprehensively understand the context in which these expressions are used. For instance, who are the writer, speaker, the listener or readers with

time and place of using deictic expressions. More explanation can be seen in the following examples:

(4) I am tired.

(5) It is begun to rain.

(6) I will put this here.

It is difficult to completely understand the above three sentences without an explicit indication of the contextual information, as it is very hard to assign reference to the deictic expressions contained in the three sentences. The full interpretation of the three utterances certainly depends on the immediate context of the utterance, the speaker's intention, the hearer's inference, and their relative distance.

Deictic expressions are usually categorized into five types namely, person deixis, special deixis, temporal deixis, social deixis and discourse deixis.

Firstly, person deixis, Levinson (1983) begins with person deixis, which can be found in the form of personal pronouns in the linguistic expressions. The second type of deixis is temporal or time deixis, which denotes intervals on the time axis. Thirdly, spatial deixis is related to the concept of distance or the specification of the location of objects relative to the participants in a speech event, i.e., the speaker and/or the addressee. The fourth type is social deixis, which can be broadly defined as the speaker's social status codification, the addressee, or a third person or entity referred to, as well as the social relationship holding between them (Huang, 2006: p.163).

2.3.2 Presupposition

It is agreed that presupposition phenomena in language is considered one of the main factors behind the development of semantic and pragmatic theories of language and communication during the past decades

(Verschueren and ÖStman, 2009).

In this regard, Potts (2015) defined presupposition as a set of information that the speaker presents in its utterance as assumptions for the real meanings in the context. It is seen as background information that the speakers take for granted. Furthermore, presupposition can be described as a proposition or inference whose truth is ignored in the utterance and whose main function is to perform as a precondition of some kind of suitable use of that sentence (Huang, 2006).

In order to help the addressee, interpret the meaning of the sentence and contribute to the efficiency of communication, Presupposition trigger plays a significant role (Valeika and Verikaite, 2010). Any lexical item or linguistic construction that is responsible for the presupposition in any text is described as a "presupposition triggers". (Levinson, 1983; Domaneschi, 2016).

1.   Definite description

(6) John's car is expensive.

>> John has a car.

2.   Factive verbs

(7) Zara didn't realize that the show was live.

>>The show was live.

3.   Non-factive presupposition

(8) Shara dreamt that she was in Paris.

>>She was not in Paris

4.   Implicative verbs

(9) Lana Managed to drive the car

>>Lana tried to drive the car

5.   Iterative Items

(10) The train came/didn't come again.

>> Train came before.

2.3.3 Implicature

The term 'implicature' was first coined by Paul Grice to describe what is implied, suggested or meant by the speaker differently from the literal meaning of what is being said (Katsos, 2003).

It can be realized that implicatures are considered pragmatic aspects of meaning that have certain recognizable characteristics. Partially, it is derived from the literal or conventional meaning of an utterance and yielded from a specific context shared between the speaker and the hearer (Brown and Yule, 1983).

2.3.3.1 Conversational Implicature

In making utterances, a conversational implicature is implied by the speaker; it is a part of the meaning which is not contribute to the direct or explicit meaning of the utterance (Allott, 2018).

Conversational implicatures, which can be further categorized into two sub-types: they are Generalized and particularized implicature.

Levinson (1983) indicates that without reference to any specific characters in the context, generalized conversational implicature can take place.

When the speaker seeks to qualify or scale its statement with language that is delivered to the listeners, an inference aiming at not using a stronger or more informative term, this is known as making a scalar implicature (Karjo, 2011). Scalar implicatures are based on the first submaxim of Quantity. Generally, the utterance of a given value on a scale will implicate that, as far as the speaker knows, no higher value applies (Birner, 2013). Scalar implicatures are based on a range of quantifiers ordered in terms of informational strength, for example in quantity: some, most, all; in frequency: sometimes, often, always (Gazdar, 1979). In coordination: and, or; numerals: one, two, three; modals: allowed to, required to; gradable adjectives: good, amazing.

(11) Rose read some of the novels.

It implies, not all the novels

(12) Sam bought two books.

It implies, not more.

(13) He is allowed to leave.

          It implies, not required to

On the contrary, when we need to have local or special knowledge in a very particular context in any conversation, it is described as particularized implicature, and this type is very common, which leads to calling it implicature only (Griffith, 2006).

For example:

(14) Sara: Are you having some of this chocolate cake?

    Amelia: I'm on a diet. (Allot, 2018, p.2).

Amelia asserts that she is on diet and also intentionally implies that she is not having any of the cake.

2.3.3.2 Conventional Implicature

The conventional meaning of the words used by the speaker is called conventional implicature (Grice, 1975). On conventional implicature, Grice (1975: 44-45) states that:

"In some cases, the conventional meaning of the words used will determine what is implicated, besides helping to determine what is said. Below are some examples to illustrate more:

   (15) He is a Korean; therefore, he knows to speak in Korean.

  (16) Zara is blind but he is smart.

  (17) Even his brother did not think that John will travel.

  (18) Ali can read Japanese. Moreover, he can write poems in the language.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current study is primarily a quantitative study, which involves collecting data from an experiment designed through pre-, post-, and reading proficiency tests to examine the improvement of Kurdish EFL students' reading proficiency after they are exposed to pragmatic inference. In order to prevent class from disruption, quasi-experimental research has been applied by the researcher in which the researcher, tests an intervention using intact groups of individuals. The researcher had to use the existing classes in second grade and label one class as experimental and the other as a control group, as a random assignment of students into two groups was not possible.

3.2 The Sample

Richards and Schmidt (2010) state that any group of individuals chosen to represent a population is referred to as a "sample". The paper has targeted a sample of (101) second-year students of the department of English at the University of Sulaimani, College of Basic Education, while only (56) remained in the post-test phase due to their missing one of the pre-, and post-tests. Two classes were selected to collect data. They were divided into two groups: (A) control group (CG) and (B) the experimental group (EG). As far as the research is conducted as a quasi-experiment, when randomization was not possible, convenience sampling was chosen.

3.3 Instrument

For the purpose of this study, language testing in the form of a pre-test and a post-test was designed. The test consists of three passages with fifteen questions; each passage has five items. The first five questions are multiple-choice items that examine the students' ability to discover the implicit meaning. The second and third sets of questions consist of different types of pragmatic inferences (deixis, presupposition, and implicature) that take the style of agree/disagree and true/false. Choosing these different forms of questions provided practicality in terms of administering and scoring the gathered data. The experimental group, in order to evaluate their reading proficiency, went through a RC test that consists of two passages with ten items

categorized into two questions. The first six questions are multiple-choice items and the last four items are true/false.

The main purpose of conducting the reading comprehension test is to determine whether teaching pragmatic inference enhance the reading proficiency of students? (see Appendix A and B)

In order to reach the main objective of the study, two major types of tests (diagnostic and achievement tests) have been adopted in conducting the current study. The achievement type of test was chosen to measure students' mastery over the subject after what students have been taught and studied over a period of time. The reason behind choosing the diagnostic test was to support students in the areas where they needed assistance.

3.4 Pilot Test Administration

It is preferable to conduct a pilot test before undertaking any tests. A pilot study is a mini-version of a full-scale study or a trial run done in preparation for the complete study (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001: p.1)

The pilot test for the pragmatic inference test and reading proficiency test were conducted on October 11 and 12, 2022, in which fourteen second-year students at the University of Sulaimani, Department of English/Evening Class, College of Basic Education, were chosen at random. The results of the pilot test showed that some of the items required to be modified. The same piloting procedures were conducted for the reading proficiency test. It revealed that some items also need modifications.

3.5 Validity and Reliability of the Test
3.5.1 Validity

One of the most crucial requirements for language testing is validity, which makes the test more effective. It refers to the extent to which the test measures what it is supposed to measure (Heaton and Harmer, 1988: p.159; Polit and Beck, 2010: p.377).

The materials adopted for conducting the pre and post-tests, were derived from the topics discussed throughout the course of the experimental study. Before the application of the pre-posttests, the content of the tests was validated by many professionals and university instructors to evaluate their relevancy and appropriateness. Further, the nature of the questions is recognition; the general implicit meaning was targeted by the first question to measure the capability of students to discover the pragmatic meaning of context, while questions 2 and 3, target implicit meaning through types of pragmatic inference, namely deixis, presuppositions, and implicatures. The researcher has designed the passages that are aligned with the research questions.

3.5.2 Reliability

Reliability is another essential characteristic of an effective test. It is defined as "the degree to which the results of a study are consistent" (Brown and Rodgers 2002: 241).

For determining and measuring the reliability of the current research tests, via the utilization of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program, Cronbach's alpha scale was applied, which obtained a degree of (0.856) which confirms that the items in the tests are reliable and acceptable. As for the reading proficiency test, the Cronbach's alpha was (0.815). (See Table 1).

Table (1) Pilot Test Reliability Results

Tools	Reliability Statistics	
	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Test	0.856	15
Reading Proficiency Test	0.815	10

3.6 The Scoring Scheme

The PI test consists of three passages. Each passage has a set of five items. The test was scored out of thirty; therefore, each item was scored out of two.

During the test, students were instructed that if they left any item unanswered, it is considered as wrong answer and got no marks.

As for the reading comprehension test, the two passages were graded on 20, 2 points per each item.

3.7 The Instructional Materials

For the current study, the instructional period of the treatment lasted for six weeks, with one session per week. Both the materials and instructional period were the same in the CG and EG, with different teaching reading methods. The materials were selected from different reading comprehension sources, such as: Wood (1991), Alexander (2002), Burgmeier et al. (2012), Haugnes and Maher (2014).

4   Results and Discussion

This section is devoted to show the results of the experimental study. The collected data from both pre-and post-tests and reading proficiency analyzed and discussed.   SPSS has been employed to analyze the data retrieved from the students' tests.

It begins by presenting the results of the pre-test data analysis carried out to examine if the students' performances in the pretest were similar before the treatment started.

In order to begin the study and ascertain the homogeneity of the students, the researcher administered a pretest to both control and experimental   groups

Table (2) Descriptive Statistics of the Control and Experimental Groups on the Pre-test

Group	No	Test	Mean	Std	SEM
CG	28	pre-test	12.7857	3.14298	0.59397
EG	28	pre-test	12.2143	4.15761	0.78571

From Table 2, it can be observed that the pre-test mean scores of the control and the experimental groups were (12.78), (12.21) respectively. Two findings can be realized from these mean scores: both groups were weak and had approximately the same background knowledge of the subject matter and the difference between them is slight. To test whether there is any significant difference among the mean scores or not, independent-samples test was used. These results of data analysis provide the author with the information that difference between EG and CG is not statistically significant. That is to say, before the experiment teaching, the students of the two classes have no differences in reading proficiency. (See Table 3)

Table (3) Independent T-test sample of the Comparison between Pre-test Mean Scores of Control and Experimental Groups in Background Knowledge

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig Two tailed	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	0.948	0.335	0.580	54	0.564	0.57143	0.98496	-1.40329	2.54615
Equal variances not assumed			0.580	50.262	0.564	0.57143	0.98496	-1.40666	2.54952

Table (4) The Paired T-test Values Resulted from the Comparison for Significance between Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores

Groups	No	Test	Paired Difference			T-test value	df	Sig
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
CG	28	pre test	12.7857	3.14298	0.59397	7.903	27	.000
	28	post test	16.1429	3.17063	0.59919			
EG	28	pre test	12.2143	4.15761	0.78571	11.042	27	
	28	post test	19.4286	4.83374	0.91349			

In table (4) both pre and post-test mean scores were compared to measure the progress between both groups. The results show that the progress achieved by both groups was significant. This is because the critical t- test values are (7.903), (11.042) respectively under (27) degrees of freedom at the 0.05 level of significance. The highest level of significant difference was obtained between the pre- and posttests scores by the experimental group. Conversely, the least achievement was achieved between pre- and posttests scores by the control group. It can be seen that this result was due to the effect of PI in enhancing learners' reading proficiency.

To answer the first research question (Is there a significant difference between the traditional method of teaching reading comprehension and teaching it through pragmatic inference?), and to check any significant difference in the improvement of reading comprehension of the two groups after the instructional materials, an independent t-test was done on the post-test. For this reason, the final comparison was made between the post-test mean scores of the students in both control and experimental groups. This comparison can help one in deciding the preference, if any, new teaching method, applying pragmatic inference in teaching reading can be more effective than the traditional methods. Table (5) displays the results.

Table (5) Unpaired T-test Values for the Comparison in the Post-test Mean Scores, Standard Deviation and P-value of the Subjects' Score of the Control and Experimental Groups

Group	No.	posttest	Mean difference	df	P - value	
					calculated	tabulated
Control	28	16.1429	3.2857	54	3.008	1.67
Experimental	28	19.4286				

As table (5) indicates, the computed t-test that was obtained from learners is (3.008) under (38) degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance while the (tabulated P-value= 1.67) under the same degrees of freedom and at the same level of significance. This result denotes that the calculated P-value is greater than the tabulated P-value so that the difference between the two groups was significant.

Regarding the second research question (Is students' reading proficiency improved by teaching pragmatic inference?) Person correlation Coefficient was used to determine the correlation between reading comprehension and pragmatic inference.

Table (6) The Pearson Correlation Coefficient Between Reading Comprehension and Pragmatic Inference

Pragmatic inference and Reading comprehension.	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Covariance	Person correlation Coefficient
	28	19.4286	4.8337	0.00	0.743
		12.93	2.463	0.00	

From Table (6), it shows that the means of the students' reading comprehension and pragmatic inference are (19.4286) and (12.93) respectively. Based on the results of the study, teaching PI correlates positively with reading comprehension. Pearson Correlation Coefficient between reading comprehension and pragmatic inference is (r) = 0.743, number of students (n) = 28, teaching PI and students' reading proficiency have a statistically significant linear relationship (p) = 0.000.

When |r|> 0, it is positively correlated; When |r|< 0, it is negatively correlated. Generally, there are three levels: when r < 0, it is lower correlation; When 0.4 ≤r < 0.7, it is significant correlation; When 0.7≤r < 1, it is higher correlation. This can indicate that there is higher correlation between reading comprehension and pragmatic inference.

4.1 Discussion of the Test Results

The main purpose of the current study was to ascertain the influence of implementing PI in teaching EFL university students' RC. In other words, the extent to which teaching PI would impact EFL students' use of the English language and inferring meaning out of context.

The results of the study, which were attained from the analysis of data pertaining to the pretest, made it clear that the differences between the means of the experimental and control groups were not statistically significant as they had similar background knowledge. However, the treatment given to the EG had affected this group's performance to a large extent; nonetheless, there was also a slight increase in the results of the CG.

In reference to the first research question (Is there a significant difference between the traditional method of teaching reading comprehension and teaching it through PI?), and to determine the

improvement rate, the mean scores of the pre- and post-tests of CG and EG were compared thoroughly, and the presented findings indicate that the PI has a significantly positive effect on the experimental group's RC. In other words, there was a statistically significant difference between the results that were achieved by the learners in the CG who were taught reading according to the traditional ways of teaching reading and those in the EG who were taught reading by implementing PI.

This indicates that understanding different types of PI will help students infer meaning from the context. Pragmatic inference types have a vital role in helping students infer the writer's intended meaning throughout the passages. Accordingly, deictic expressions might be familiar to students, and they might use them in their daily practices, but recognising them within contexts to infer meaning is generally missing. The sole recognition of deixis cannot fulfill the lone purpose of PI, which has been intended to be achieved throughout the course of the EG. Students can utilise deixis as contextual clues to comprehend the writer's main intention in any written text. Furthermore, focusing on presuppositions students can make inferences about what is said in order to arrive at an interpretation of the speaker's intended meaning and explore how a great deal of what is unsaid is recognised as part of what is communicated. Presupposition triggers do not convey new information but rather consist of background information, and the lack of such background information or contextual support by students is reflected in various processing effects, such as the interpreting of a syntactically ambiguous structure and helping them to construct meaning. In order to promote students' reading comprehension abilities, conventional

implicature can be beneficial. For students, using conventional implicature might be of great help in discovering the implied meaning as it involves connectors such as even, therefore, but, etc., which can help to overcome the informational gap between what the participants in a conversation think that they are saying and the conventional meanings of the words they are using.

One of the major findings reached through the teaching of EG is that most of the students realised that they should not look up the meaning of every word in the passage in a dictionary in order not to lose the general meaning and central idea of the passage during reading. It can also be observed that comprehending text is much more than decoding or sounding out words. Making a connection between the letters, understanding their combinations to form the words, or figuring out the main focus of the group of sentences are not all that is needed to be able to succeed in reading comprehension tests.

The above discussion is in harmony with the research conducted by linguists such as Halliday (1985), Coulthard (2014), Hatch (2006), Finch (2000), and Griffiths (2006) who show that the analysis of language is not only carried out at word and sentence levels but in larger units such as conversation and paragraph. Any text may contain two kinds of meaning: semantic meaning and pragmatic meaning. As Thomas (1995) emphasised, understanding the meaning of an utterance and understanding the speaker's intended meaning are two important elements of pragmatic comprehension. The intended meaning can sometimes be different from the literal meaning of a language expression.

As paragraphs consist of both words and sentences, students are supposed to dig deep

into the intended meaning of the author and draw logical conclusions about meaning instead of the surface meaning, which was mainly utilised by participants in the CG. Apparently, understanding pragmatic meaning is more difficult than understanding linguistic meaning. Therefore, pragmatic meaning can be considered another important factor in text comprehension.

In responding to the second research question (Is students' reading proficiency improved by teaching pragmatic inference?) which sought to measure the improvement of students' reading proficiency after teaching PI, it can be realised that despite the fact that students' achievement in reading comprehension can be affected by their proficiency level of English, taking part in an EG where students are taught to infer meaning while reading texts supported them in improving their reading proficiency.

In the process of reading, readers are required to comprehend the text with the help of decoding the writer's words and constructing an approximate understanding of the writer's intended message (Johnston and Kirby, 2006). To achieve success in reading skills, the reader is required to construct intended meaning, analyse and evaluate content for accuracy, make relevant connections with background knowledge and life experiences, and, most importantly, detect the implied meaning of the text.

5. Conclusions, Pedagogical Implications, and Recommendations

From the deep study of the subject and its findings, some conclusions and recommendations can be drawn.

5.1 Conclusions

1. The results showed that the EG outperformed the CG. This implies that PI is an effective method for teaching RC and has an outstanding impact on improving students RC.

2. From the cognitive and communicative perspectives, RT provides a very persuasive theoretical basis for analyzing RC. It can be said that there are some other social and cultural factors, such as beliefs and background knowledge, that contribute to the outcome of human cognition, including RC.

3. Pragmatic inferences such as deixis, presupposition, and implicatures can play a crucial role in helping students understand the intended meaning of any sentence or text.

4. It is clear that, though students have no obvious difficulty in reading, they still have certain problems interpreting the text successfully. Therefore, it is argued that the process of RC should become the focus of teaching reading in order to develop students' reading proficiency, especially their PI ability. We should place emphasis on the process of developing students' pragmatic competence rather than the product of reading.

5. Observing the nature of reading makes us understand more clearly what is going on in the process of reading and what makes reading effective and efficient: First of all, try to read beyond the words, pay attention to details and ideas based on the writer's suggestions and your own background knowledge, and try to predict what might happen next. From a series of events, you can often infer the outcome.

6. The analysis of the nature of reading made clear that the reader has to activate his encyclopedic knowledge, lexical knowledge, and logical knowledge to make inferences during the reading.

7. It's crucial for the reader to find the meaning the writer doesn't state directly in the text, and it is essential to seek the optimal relevance between the writer and the reader.

5.2 Recommendations for the teaching of reading comprehension

In this study, the pedagogical significance of this study is this: PI should become an integral part of the teaching of RC by using the model of RT which can also help elucidate the cognitive process of RC and students' abilities in this regard. Thus, it can be stated that the teaching of RC should aim to cultivate students' inference abilities, train learners to improve strategies for inference making, and expand their background knowledge.

In light of the results obtained from this research, the following are the pedagogical implications of the research for both teachers and students.

5.2.1 Recommendations for the EFL Teachers

Some implications can be made for other teachers in their teaching of RC to learners based on the experimental study of applying PI. The teacher should take the following into consideration during implementing the teaching method:

5.2.1.1 Promoting English Learners' Ability in Predicting the Meaning of Words

Instead of looking at the meaning of each single word in the dictionary, students should be encouraged to make a guess at the meaning of the unfamiliar words during text comprehension. It is recommended not to explain the meaning of difficult words or expressions to the students beforehand. To get the exact meaning, students should be allowed to use the dictionary, which is an important and necessary activity too, only after having tried to understand the text by predicting. During RC, it is often the case that the dictionary does not give us a satisfactory answer to the meaning of an unknown word in the text. So, meaning should be inferred from the context.

5.2.1.2 Promoting English learners' Separating the Ostensive Facts from the Implicated opinions

Much of what you read is designed to influence your thinking. A critical reader judges which statements to accept and which to read further by distinguishing facts from opinions. Sometimes it is not very easy to recognise whether a statement is a fact, an opinion, or a combination of both. A statement of a fact is usually the one that can be verified or proven, checked for its accuracy, or tested by experiment, while a statement of an opinion cannot usually be proven true or false. A statement of opinion formed by the readers themselves usually expresses the writer's personal beliefs, feelings, attitudes, values, or judgments about a certain subject. Opinions are often based on inferences, guesses or conclusions. Although opinions cannot be checked for accuracy, writers usually can support their opinions with evidence, facts and other reasons before they ask readers to accept what they say in the text. So, if we want to enhance students' inference ability, it is important to provide students with reading activities that require them to infer the writer's opinion using facts in the text.

5.2.1.3 Cultivating Active Thinking

The teacher makes the students comprehend the communicative intention of the text by using the cognitive context of the reading materials. In this comprehension process, the teacher should pay more attention to cultivating the students' active thinking through inferring and critical thinking. It is necessary for the teachers to offer enough relevant clues to the students to make them infer. So, the teacher should read up on the teaching materials and be familiar with the students.

5.2.1.4 Give Importance to Background Knowledge

Although linguistic knowledge is the foundation for comprehending text, background knowledge also plays a positive role in inferring the deep content of the context. The teacher should not only inculcate(teach) relevant background knowledge in the intensive reading but also encourage students to do extensive reading to accumulate relevant background knowledge.

5.2.1.5 The Teacher should have a Definite Understanding about Pragmatic Inference and its Implications

RC is a complex process, yet the relevance theory points out that successful communication depends on whether the two parties can find the optimal relevance in a dynamic cognitive environment. This sheds light on us and teaches us how to find relevance and how to guess and judge the information existing in the reading material, so this can help us find an effective way to teach RC to our students.

5.2.1.6 Training Course for Teachers

It would be wise to conduct trainings and workshops by professionals in order to be aware of the latest methods of teaching reading. There are some difficulties around the application of PI in teaching RC, as not all teachers are fully aware of this subject or do not pay enough attention to pragmatics. Thus, training courses might be helpful for this purpose.

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Appendix A
Pragmatic inference Test
Task One
Direction: Read the following passage, then choose the correct answer.
(10 Marks)

Engineering students are supposed to be examples of practicality and wisdom, but when it comes to my college education, I am an idealist and a fool. In high school, I wanted to be an electrical engineer, and, of course, any wise student with my aims would have chosen a college with a large engineering department, a famous reputation, and lots of good labs and research equipment. But that's not what I did.

I chose to study engineering at a small liberal-arts university that doesn't even offer a major in electrical engineering. Obviously, this was not a practical choice; I came here for a better reason. I wanted a broad education that would provide me with flexibility and a value system to guide me in my career. I wanted to open my eyes and expand my vision by interacting with people who weren't studying science or engineering. My parents, teachers, and other adults praised me for such a clever choice. They told me I was wise and mature beyond my 18 years, and I believed them.

I headed off to college sure I was going to have an advantage over those students who went to big engineering "factories" where they didn't care if you had values or were flexible. I was going to be a complete engineer: a technical genius and thoughtful person all in one.

Now I'm not so sure. Somewhere along the way, my noble ideals crashed into reality. After three years of struggling to balance math, physics, and engineering courses with liberal arts courses, I have learned there are reasons why few engineering students try to combine engineering with liberal arts courses in college.

The reality that has blocked my path to become the typical successful student is that engineering and the liberal arts simply don't mix as easily as I assumed in high school. Individually, they shape a person in very different ways; together, they threaten to confuse. The battle to combine the two fields of study is difficult.

1. The author wanted to_____.
A) be an example of practicality and rationality
B) be a combination of engineer and humanist

C) coordinate engineering with liberal-arts courses in college
D) be a sensible student with noble ideals.

2. The author believes that by communicating with people who study liberal arts, engineering students can _____.
A) balance engineering and the liberal arts
B) receive guidance in their careers
C) become noble idealists
D) broaden their horizons

3. In the eyes of the author, a successful engineering student is expected _____.
A) to have an excellent academic record
B) to be wise and mature
C) to be imaginative with a value system to guide him
D) to be a technical genius with a wide vision

4. The author's experience shows that he was _____.
A) creative
B) ambitious
C) unrealistic
D) irrational

5. The word "they" in "…together they threaten to confuse." (Line 3, Para.5) refers to _____.
A) engineering and the liberal arts.
B) reality and noble ideals
C) flexibility and a value system
D) practicality and rationality

Task Two

Direction: Read the following passage about the KRG scholarship, then

indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statements. (10 Marks)

In June 2010, the Kurdistan Government of Iraq announced that they can offer a bunch of scholarships to university graduates to study abroad for both Master's and PhD degrees. Applicants should have applied for their desired course at one of the recognized universities by the Ministry of Higher Education in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Both conditional and unconditional offers were accepted by the Ministry. Universities were sending student requests to the Ministry and it has some criteria to choose from. Therefore, students could have applied at any time when their requirements met the criteria. It was a great opportunity for academics, even people outside the government universities were eligible to apply. To facilitate the application process, the Ministry began to create an online portal for all universities which linked directly to the Ministry.

Moreover, after obtaining the acceptance offer, both conditional and unconditional, students have to get the final approval from the Ministry before the commencement of their course. English language courses were also similar in terms of financial support from the government. After reviewing the applications by the Ministry, only the accepted names were announced publicly. Each university had its own online portal for students to apply for the scholarship. In terms of the country of study, the Ministry classified the countries into two main categories; type A and type B. Despite the fact that the living expenses in type A countries are higher, the Ministry highly recommended students get offers from these countries due to the high quality and ranking of their universities. In type A countries, students were paid a monthly allowance of 1800 USD and the tuition fee for their study. There, many options from various universities were available for students. For instance, some students obtained conditional offers from UK universities specially to finish English language courses. I studied there due to the variety of IELTS centers. The standard of living in the type B countries is not low but students were only paid 900 USD as a monthly allowance to cover their living expenses. After receiving the applications, the Ministry

of Higher Education managed to support students to have acceptance letters for both Master's and PhD candidates. Students had no previous experience in applying for universities abroad.

Agree, if the sentence agrees with the information in the passage

Disagree, if the sentence contradicts with the information in the passage

1. The scholarship has no deadline for the applicants.
Agree   Disagree

2. The scholarship was not available for all people.
Agree   Disagree

3. Conditional offers were obtained by all the students to finish English courses.
Agree   Disagree

4. You can infer from the passage that the author studied in type B country. **Agree   Disagree**

5. There was a direct support from the Ministry of Higher Education to all applicants.
Agree   Disagree

Task Three

Direction: Read the following passage then decide whether the given statements are true or false. (10 Marks)

Yesterday, after teaching for six hours, I drove home on a rainy and slippery street. I was starving as the central café of the University closed again due to the harsh weather. After returning home, I jumped toward the fridge to find something to eat.

So, I started searching. I realized that there was nothing much I wanted to eat. Even though I knew there were not any eggs left, I regret not buying some on my way home. Before getting home, I imagined that I could find something in the fridge. In the end, I managed to order some food from a nearby restaurant. In order to prevent this, I plan to buy some necessary items; I should go to the weekly market then.

1. The writer did not buy any eggs.

a. True

b. False

2. This is the first time that the University café was closed.

a. True

b. False

3. The author has a car.

a. True

b. False

4. The main purpose of the writer in this text was to tell us about the

University café.

a. True

b. False.

5. The writer intended to buy some food in the future.

a. True

b. False

Thank you!

Appendix B

Reading comprehension Test

Task One

Direction: Read the following passage, then choose the correct answer.

(12 Marks)

Biofuels and the Environment

Leading investors have joined the growing concern about governments and companies rushing into producing biofuels as a solution for global warming, saying that many involved in the sector could be risking future profits if they do not consider the long-term impact of what they are doing carefully. It is essential to build sustainability criteria into the supply chain of any green fuel project in order to ensure that there is no negative effect on the surrounding environment and social structures. The report produced by the investors expresses concern that many companies may not be fully aware of the potential dangers in the biofuel sector. Production of corn and soya beans has increased dramatically in the last years as an eco-friendly alternative to fossil fuels but environmental and human rights campaigners are worried that this will lead to destruction of rain forests. Food prices could also go up as there is increased competition for crops as both harvests and sources of fuel. Last week, the UN warned that biofuels could have dangerous side effects and said that steps need to be taken to make sure that land converted to grow biofuels does not damage the environment or cause civil unrest. There is already great concern about palm oil, which is used in many foods in addition to being an important biofuel, as

rain forests are being cleared in some countries and people driven from their homes to create palm oil plantations. An analyst and author of the investors' report says that biofuels are not a treatment for climate change but they can play their part as long as governments and companies manage the social and environmental impacts carefully. There should also be greater measure taken to increase efficiency and to reduce demand.

1 . ____ are worried about the growth in biofuels.

a. Few people

b. Many people

c. Only these leading investors

2. Biofuel producers ____ know about the possible problems.

a. do not

b. might not

c. must not

3. Environmentalists believe that increased production of corn and soya.

a. has destroyed rain forests.

b. may lead to the destruction of rain forests.

c. will lead to the destruction of rain forests.

4. Biofuels might

a. drive food prices up.

b. drive food prices down.

c. have little or no impact on food prices.

5. The increased production of palm oil

a. just affects the environment.

b. just affects people.

c. affects both people and the environment.

6. The author of the report says that biofuels.

a. have no role to play in fighting global warming.

b. can be effective in fighting global warming on their own.

c. should be part of a group of measures to fight global warming.

Task Two

Direction: Read the following passage then decide whether the given statements are true or false. **(8 Marks)**

You are what you eat, say scientists

Scientists have shed new light on the effects our diet has on our mental health. Researchers say what we eat affects and alters our brain chemistry up until the age of 30s. They say this explains why older adults are more emotionally stable and resilient than under 30s. The research was conducted by a team led by Lina Begdache, a professor of health and wellness studies. Researchers said that while the link between our diet and diabetes, heart disease and obesity is well established, there is a paucity of research on the influence our dietary intake has on mental health. The researchers also suggested that mental well-being stimulated healthy eating, healthy practices and exercising. The research was carried out via an anonymous internet-based survey. It was sent through social media platforms to different professional and social group networks. Professor Begdache found that adults under 30 who ate fast food more than three times a week scored higher on levels of mental distress, anxiety and depression. She said that for adults over 30, the study found that eating less carbohydrates and more fruit reduced anxiety, and depression. Begdache pointed to research showing how a Mediterranean diet was as good for our brain as for our body. She said: "It has all the components that are important for the healthy structure of the brain."

1. Eating has always had impact on our brain health.

a. True   b. False

2. Eating fast food frequently scored higher on levels of mental distress, anxiety and heart diseases.

a. True   b. False

3. The term "carried out" used in the beginning of the seventh sentence means "conducted"

a. True   b. False

4. There is a direct correlation between eating fruit and anxiety and depression.

a. True   b. False

Thank you!

پوختەی تویژینەوە

تێگەیشتن لـه خوێندنـەوه بـه یەکێـک لـه کارامەییـه سـەرەکییەکانی فێربوونـی زمانـی بیانـی دادەنرێت، و یەکێکـه لـه هـۆکاره بنەرەتییەکانـی بەدەسـتهێنانی زانیـاری لـه لایـەن فێرخوازانـی زمانـەوه. توانـای تێگەیشـتن لـه هـەر دەقێکـی نووسـراو پێویسـتی بـه ڕاڤەکردنـی دەقەکانـه لـه ڕێگـەی دروسـتکرنی پەیوەندییەکـی ورد لـه نێـوان واتـای ڕسـتەیی وشـه و ڕسـتەکان لەگـەڵ دەرئەنجامـه پراگماتیکییەکانیـان؛ کـه وا فێرخـوازان واتـای مەبەسـتداری دەقەکان هەڵبهێنجـن.

ئـەم تویژینەوەیـه «تیـۆری پەیوەندیـداری» کـردووه بـه بنەمـای تیـۆری و لێکۆڵینـەوه دەکات لـه جێبەجێکردنـی هەڵهێنجانی پراگماتیکـی لـه وتنـەوەی تێگەیشـتن لـه خوێندنـەوه لـه لایـەن فێرخوازانـی زمانـی بیانـی (ئینگلیـزی) لـه زانکـۆدا.

ئـەم تویژینەوەیـه هـەوڵ دەدات وەڵامـی ئـەوه بداتـەوه کـه ا) ئایـا هەڵهێنجانـه پراگماتیکییـەکانی وانەوتنـەوەی خوێندنـەوه کاریگەرتـرن لـه میتـۆده کۆنـەکان؟؛ ب) ئایـا وتنـەوەی هەڵهێنجاندنـه پراگماتیکییـەکان توانـای خوێندنـەوەی خوێنـدکارەکان بـەرز دەکەنـەوه؟

تویژینەوەکـه دیزاینێکی نیمچـه تاقیـکاری چەندایەتـی بـەکار دەهێنێـت کـه تێیـدا تاقیکردنـەوەی سـەرەتا، تاقیکردنـەوەی دوای چارەسـەری و تاقیکردنـەوەی لێهاتوویـی خوێندنـەوه. بەشـداربووانی تویژینەوەکـه بریتـی بـوون لـه (٥٦) لـه فێرخوازانـی زمانـی بیانـی (ئینگلیـزی) قۆناغـی دووەم پسـپۆری زمانـی ئینگلیـزی لـه زانکـۆی سـلێمانی. خوێنـدکارەکان دوو پـۆل بـوون: پۆلـی چارەسـەری و پۆلـی کۆنتـرۆڵ. وانـەکان لـه دوو پۆلەکـەدا بـه میتـۆدی جیاوازیـی فێرکردنـی خوێندنـەوه لـه مـاوەی ٦ هەفتـەدا لـه فێرکردنـی تاقیکاریـدا وترایـەوه.

لەبـەر ڕۆشـنایی دۆزینـەوه سـەرەکییەکانی ئـەم تویژینەوەیـه دەتوانرێـت بوترێـت کـه جیاوازیـی گـەوره لـه نێـوان دوو گروپەکـەدا هەیـه ;تواناکانـی گروپـی چارەسـەر زۆر زیاتـر بـوون لـه تواناکانـی گروپـی کۆنتـرۆڵ لەگـەڵ بەرەوپێشـچوونێکی هەسـتپێکراو لـه تواناکانـی خوێندنەوەیانـدا.

ئـەم تویژینەوەیـه گرنگییەکـی زۆری بـۆ مامۆسـتایان و دانەرانـی بەرنامـەی خوێنـدن دەبێـت ,چونکـه سـەرنجیان بـۆ ئـەم لایەنـه پشـتگوێ خـراوه ڕادەکێشـێت.

کلیلەوشـه: ئەنجامدانـی پراگماتیکـی، تێگەیشـتن لـه خوێندنـەوه، تیـۆری پەیوەندیدارێتـی، خوێندکارانـی زمانـی ئینگلیـزی وەک زمانێکـی بیانـی

ملخص

يعتبـر الاسـتيعاب مهـارة أساسـية فـي تعلـم اللغـة الأجنبيـة، وهـي أحـدى أهـم الوسـائل التـي يسـتخدمها متعلمـو اللغـة لاكتسـاب المعلومـات. تتطلـب القـدرة علـى فهـم أي نـص مقـروء تفسـيره مـن خـلال إقامـة ارتباطـات دقيقـة بيـن التمثيـلات اللغويـة أو المعانـي الحرفيـة للكلمـات والجمـل والمعانـي الناتجـة عنهـا، ممـا يمكـن المتعلميـن مـن اسـتنتاج المعنـى المقصـود للنـص.

تأخـذ الدراسـة الحاليـة نظريـة الارتبـاط كأسـاس نظـري وتفحـص تطبيـق الاسـتدلال التداولـي فـي تعليـم فهـم القـراءة لطـلاب اللغـة الإنجليزيـة كلغـة أجنبيـة فـي الجامعـة.

تهـدف هـذه الدراسـة إلـى اسـتكشاف أ) مـا إذا كانـت الطريقـة المتعلقـة بالاسـتدلال التداولـي فـي تعليـم القـراءة أكثـر فعاليـة مـن الطريقـة التقليديـة؛ ب) مـا إذا كان تعليـم الاسـتدلال العملـي يحسـن مـن مهـارات القـراءة للطـلاب.

تسـتخدم الدراسـة تصميمًـا كميًـا شـبه تجريبـي حيـث تـم اجـراء اختبـارات سـابقة واخـرى لاحقـة واختبـار لمهـارات قـراءة الطـلاب، واسـتبيان لغـرض جمـع البيانـات. فتـم اختيـار عينـات مـن (56) طالبًـا مـن طـلاب اللغـة الإنجليزيـة كلغـة أجنبيـة مـن المرحلـة الثانيـة فـي تخصـص اللغـة الإنجليزيـة فـي كليـة التربيـة الأساسـية/ جامعـة السـليمانية. تـم توزيـع الطـلاب علـى صفيـن دراسـيين: الصـف التجريبـي وصـف الضبـط. تـم تدريـس الصفيـن باسـتخدام طـرق تعليـم قـراءة مختلفـة علـى مـدار سـتة أسـابيع مـن التدريـس التجريبـي.

أظهـرت نتائـج الدراسـة وجـود اختلافـات ملحوظـة بيـن مجموعتـي الدراسـة؛ حيـث تفوقـت المجموعـة التجريبيـة بشـكل كبيـر علـى المجموعـة الضابطـة وحققـت تحسـنًا ملموسًـا فـي مهـارات قراءتهـم.

هـذه الدراسـة يمكـن أن تكـون ذات أهميـة كبيـرة للمعلميـن ومصممـي المناهـج، حيـث تلفـت انتباههـم إلـى هـذا المجـال المهـم الـذي غالبًـا مـا يتـم تجاهلـه.

الكلمات الاساسية: الاستدلال التداولي، والفهم القرائي، ونظرية الصلة، وطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية