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**The Effects of Teaching A Story-Based Program via The
Discussion Method on Improving English Majors' Reading
Comprehension Skills and Their Attitudes Towards
Learning English**

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The Effects of Teaching A Story-Based Program via The Discussion Method on Improving English Majors' Reading Comprehension Skills and Their Attitudes Towards Learning English

By:

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of using a story-based program taught through the Discussion Method on improving first year Faculty of Arts students' reading comprehension skills, and their attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. The study used a pre-post control group design. Fifty students were randomly assigned to either a control or an experimental group. Students of the experimental group were instructed using a suggested challenging short story-based program, whereas, the control group received traditional treatment. A pre-post reading comprehension skills test and an attitude scale towards learning English as a foreign language were the tools of the present study. The results of the present study showed two main categories of findings. Compared to the students of the control group, the students of the experimental group showed significant differences in their acquisition of reading comprehension skills. Second, there

was evidence of an improvement in the experimental group students' positive attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. Based on the results of the study, recommendations and suggestions for further future research were presented.

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Introduction:

Nowadays people live in the age of information in which language proficiency is viewed as crucial for the educated people. Many educators believe that specific knowledge will not be enough for mature future citizens. Educational programs should prepare learners for that age through helping them acquire the skills required for the present and future ages. Reading comprehension skills are among those required skills.

Samir (2007) states that, in many parts of the world, a reading knowledge of a foreign language is often important for academic studies, professional success, and personal development, and that reading ability is the most important skill needed by learners of English as a foreign language.

One of the ways to plan for tomorrow is to provide learners with a variety of activities that help them improve their reading comprehension skills.

About the importance of teaching reading, Hedge (2003) states that any reading component of an English language course may include a set of learning goals for the ability to read a wide range of texts in English. This is the long-range

goal most teachers seek to develop through independent readers outside EFL/ESL classroom; building a knowledge of language which will facilitate reading ability; building schematic knowledge; the ability to adapt the reading style according to reading purpose (i.e. skimming, scanning); developing an awareness of the structure of written texts in English; and taking a critical stance to the contents of the texts.

When learners read, they get better chances for exchanging ideas especially when the classroom atmosphere is less threatening. As their involvement in the classroom activities increases, they develop an interest in language activities. Learners read because they want to get something from the written text: facts, ideas, enjoyment, and even feelings. They want to get the message the writer has expressed. The authentic reason for reading is not only to improve their language proficiency, but to use what has been acquired from reading in the learners' daily life outside the classroom.

Many authors (Asraf, et.al. (2003); Krashen (1993); Tsang (1996), and Hayashi (1999) recommend extensive reading as a way to improve learners' language proficiency. Asraf, et.al

(2003:1) suggests that one of the best ways to help students increase their language proficiency is to encourage them to read extensively. Krashen (1993), as a result of an examination of research on in-school reading and "out of school" self-reported free voluntary reading conducted in many different countries, concludes that free voluntary reading or sustained independent reading results in better reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, spelling, and grammatical development. A study by Hayashi (1999) of the effects of extensive reading on Japanese university students' proficiency in English found that students who reported reading more English books experienced significantly greater improvement in reading ability and vocabulary knowledge than those who reported reading less, as measured by pre- and post-tests. The students reported that the extensive reading program helped them to improve their English language in general. Tsang (1996) compared the effects of three different programs on writing performance. It was found that of the three programs, the one that included extensive reading was found to be significantly effective.

Reading comprehension skills are among the language activities which deserve great attention in research and

instruction. For FEL classroom, reading is carried out for a certain purpose. Learners of EFL should be concerned with reading with comprehension rather than mere reading of letters and words. Hyland (1999:14) argues that reading is a purposeful activity therefore, a teacher should help students acquire the relevant Reading Comprehension skills, and master suitable strategies that are best suited to achieving them.

According to Pang, E. et.al.(2010:14) comprehension is the process of deriving meaning from connected text. It involves word knowledge (vocabulary) as well as thinking and reasoning. Therefore, comprehension is not a passive process, but an active one. The reader actively engages with the text to construct meaning. This active engagement includes making use of prior knowledge. It involves drawing inferences from the words and expressions that a writer uses to communicate information, ideas and viewpoints. It is also necessary to state that fluency in reading means being able to read text accurately, quickly and with expression. This means that fluent readers recognize words quickly and know where to place emphasis or pause during reading.

Reading instruction is important for EFL \ ESL students. Mikulecky (1990:vii) states that reading, "can enhance the acquisition of standard English in many ways, including:

- An increase awareness of the language (meta-linguistic awareness)
- Immersion in second language resulting in increased acquisition ;
- Models for improving writing in English ;
- Improved vocabulary ;
- Increased cultural background knowledge ;
- The transfer of some first language reading skills ;
- Improvement of first language abilities. "

There are two main ways of reading: silent reading and reading aloud. In our daily life, we practice silent reading; reading a story, reading a set of information, or reading newspaper. Silent reading is the reading for meaning. The student recognizes the words and interprets their meanings to himself. Silent reading involves looking at sentences and understanding the message they convey. This means that we make sense of a written text. We do not say the word we read, not even whispering it. Reading aloud is more difficult than silent reading in that it integrates both reading and speaking. In addition, when reading aloud, we take care of

accurate punctuation, intonation, and tone. For example, reading a poem aloud differs from reading a novel or an essay. The reader also may stress some words to convey a certain message as politicians and journalists do. Reading comprehension includes the ability of readers to skim (quickly running one's eye over a text to get the gist), and to scan (quickly going through the text to find a particular piece of information).

Studies by Chun (1997) investigated the effectiveness of particular types of annotations on reading comprehension. In a series of three studies conducted with 160 university students of German, they found that presenting words with both visual and verbal annotations facilitated reading comprehension more than words with no annotations or with verbal annotations only.

In his study, Bell (2001) studied two groups of young adult Yemeni elementary-level learners. One group was taught by the Extensive Approach, while the other was taught by the Intensive Approach. After two semesters, Bell revealed that the extensive group achieved both significantly faster reading speeds and significantly higher scores on measures of reading comprehension.

Among the authors who showed their increase concern about students' reading comprehension were Quandt (1977), Swaby (1984), Bos et.al. (1989), and Alderson (2000). According to Quandt (1977:85), one of the resources that a reader can draw upon when deriving meaning from the printed page is an intensive book of decoding skills. Decoding skills are those that use clues within the word itself in order to determine what the word is. A proficient reader reads rapidly because he or she has learned to use a minimal number of clues from the text. Swaby (1984:64) declares that reading comprehension has been regarded and viewed as a major skill that is made up of a number of individual sub-skills. Four broad categories of reading comprehension skills are referred to in literature: literal comprehension skills, inferential comprehension skills, evaluative skills and critical comprehension skills. Bos et.al.(1989) investigated the effectiveness of an interactive vocabulary instructional strategy on the content area text comprehension of adolescents with learning disabilities. A multiple-choice test was used as the tool of measuring reading comprehension. The program lasted six months. Results indicated that the students in the SFA instructional condition had significantly better scores. These results showed that interactive

strategies for teaching content facilitated the acquisition of text comprehension skills.

About levels of comprehension, Alderson (2000:7-8) mentions that there are different views about these levels. There are literal meaning of the text, inferred meaning, and critical evaluation of the text. This distinction relates the product of reading and enables us to describe some of the observed differences in comprehension among learners. However, Akhmar (1999:1) indicates that dividing comprehension into literal, referential and critical strands is intended as a guide when preparing reading assessments. But in teaching, those levels are integrated in what we call reading sub-skills.

Tierney and Cunningham (1980) mentions that the review of literature on teaching reading comprehension discusses over 200 reports on the topic and that literature reflects a distinct imbalance when viewed from the perspective of those concerned with students' comprehension of short stories and narratives. Also, several authors and researchers such as Baker & Stein (1978); Lapp & Flood, (1979) have suggested that students generally experience more difficulty with exposition than with narration. The schematic representation

of the content of short stories may directly influence understanding, especially of difficult ones. Van Dijk, et. al. (1976) found that the students had no difficulty interpreting such stories if a title or any preview was given”

A number of techniques for aiding students in understanding short stories and narratives have been recommended. For example, comprehending a story can be compared to filling in the empty slots in a pre-existing story schemata. However, most of these techniques lack empirical evaluation.

Zakaria (1994) conducted an empirical study to investigate the effects of using a suggested program based on advanced organizers on fifth-graders' acquisition of Arabic-grammar. Results indicated that there were significant differences (favoring the experimental group) between means of scores obtained by subjects of both the treatment and non-treatment groups in; recall, comprehension, and application..

Deutsch (2004) affirms that teachers and students report low and failing grades on reading comprehension tests. ESL/EFL students speak English with greater ease than they read. Reading does not come as easily to them as speaking. Yamashita (2007) claims that when students are motivated

and encouraged to read about things relevant to their life, their attitudes towards learning the language are positively affected. Because the use of authentic material in reading programs is liable to criticism, Brown and Eskenzai (2004) claim that the primary criteria for selecting an appropriate authentic text should be the reader's current vocabulary knowledge and the desired vocabulary knowledge throughout the curriculum, in addition to grammar difficulty and text cohesiveness.

According to Wallace (2006:.86) there are three main types of reading activities: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities. She claims that 'most contemporary reading materials reflect these stages, though in rather different ways' and states that these three activity types are 'now a common feature of discourse about reading. Pre-reading activities usually involve the reader in looking for specific information in the text, reading quickly, scanning the text for the answer. Other pre-reading tasks involve preparing the reader for the article and also encompass other approaches, which can involve using visual material to raise issues surrounding the text. Whilst-reading activities encourage learners to be flexible, active and reflective readers as to use evidence of what has preceded to predict

the continuation of a text. Post-reading activities are defined as activities at the end of the reading comprehension text that mainly include questions based on the text.

While Hedge (2003:218) states that extensive reading helps in developing reading ability, it should be built into EFL/ESL programs provided the selected texts are "authentic". Alyousef (2005) thinks that it is the teacher's responsibilities to motivate the students to read by selecting the appropriate materials.

Focusing on teaching reading comprehension skills using authentic texts, Berardo (2006) indicates that several studies have found out that authentic materials can increase reading comprehension by introducing students to new vocabulary and expressions. Investigated reading comprehension of 127 second year Spanish language students at a state university, Berardo found a tendency for better recall scores on authentic, as opposed to simplified, versions of the same texts. Moreover, Crossley, M.et.al. (2007) investigated differences in linguistic structures between sampled simplified and authentic reading texts using computational tools. They found that simplified texts demonstrate more syntactic complexity than authentic texts do. In this respect, Carney and Franciuli (1992) believe that the use

of authentic reading texts leads to significant results when these texts are taught to more mature students.

Collecting data based on observation, a teacher questionnaire, and case studies, Mourtaga (2004) classified the reading problems of Palestinian students into four types: reading problems related to the misunderstanding of the reading process; reading problems related to insufficient linguistic competence in general, and practice of reading in particular; reading problems related to differences between English and Arabic.; and reading problems related to the English spelling\sound system. Mourtaga (2004) concludes that although the reading problems of Arab EFL students vary and their reading competence seems to be below the threshold level, non-traditional techniques might make a change.

Based on the researcher's observation and analysis of the above literature that it has become evident that most of them have dealt with the use of the advanced organizer approach in courses such as mathematics, science, and Arabic teaching. The other studies deal with reading comprehension skills in a traditional way. The present study is conducted in the belief that specific teaching procedures need to be and

can be empirically validated. Thus, it attempted to examine the effects of using a story-based program taught through the Discussion Method on improving 1st year Faculty of Arts students' reading comprehension skills, and their attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. The previous studies investigating reading comprehension skills and learners' attitudes towards language learning have made it clear that there are important factors that may affect the preparation of a suggested program for improving the students' reading comprehension skills: the students' interest and authenticity of short stories. The researcher thinks that most of the previous studies call for new approaches of helping learners acquire reading comprehension skills. Most studies assure that traditional methods are really ineffective. Therefore, the researcher thinks that using a story-based program taught through the Discussion Method would probably improve the first year Faculty Of Arts' reading comprehension skills and their attitudes towards learning EFL.

Background of the problem:

Despite the importance of reading comprehension skills to learners of English as a foreign language, the researcher has noticed that these skills receive little attention in Libyan

schools. Reading comprehension is taught to the students as part of a linguistic exercise course. Many English language students think that reading comprehension is a matter of looking for the meanings of unfamiliar words in a dictionary, saying the words, phrases or sentences properly.

After field visits, informal observations, informal interviewing a sample of EFL teachers in Sebha, the researcher observed that the traditional method of teaching which mainly focuses on reading a written text, then answering several questions based on that text was used by teachers. That method has received a lot of severe criticism. Many students, also, complained that they did not have the tools to achieve high scores in reading comprehension tests.

The following remarks have been revealed:

1. Many reading passages in the students' textbook present materials that are not interesting to them and cause boredom.
2. Most of the students suffer from a low level of reading comprehension and this is due to the way they are instructed.
3. Many teachers complain of the low level of the students in reading comprehension.

4. Most students hold negative attitudes towards learning English.

Thus, it becomes obvious that there is a need to change the current method of teaching reading and to adopt an alternative method that may help improve students' reading comprehension skills and may have a positive effect on their attitudes towards learning English.

The researcher's observations about the problem were supported by results and recommendations of many previous studies that referred to the students' low level of reading comprehension skills.

Statement of the Problem:

First year Faculty Of Arts students, at Sebha University have not been trained enough to acquire reading comprehension skills as most of their preparatory and secondary school teachers used to teach them reading comprehension skills in a traditional way. Based on several classroom visits and meetings with many teachers, the researcher observed that they used either lecturing or the Grammar-Translation Method when teaching reading. Two months before conducting the present study, the researcher conducted a pilot study to check a group of twenty students' achievement on a reading comprehension

test. Ten students were able to answer the general questions based on the given text. Only seven students could identify the item to which a pronoun refers. Three students could summarize the main idea of the text. All the students were neither able to predict outcomes nor judge the accuracy of the information given in the text. Therefore, the researcher thinks that using a story-based program taught through the Discussion Method would probably improve the students' reading comprehension skills and affect positively their attitudes towards learning EFL.

Significance of the study:

This study is important because it seeks to:

1. Shed the lights upon the importance of using challenging short stories to improve EFL students' reading comprehension skills.
2. Help the first year Faculty of Arts students' acquire reading comprehension skills which are required during their future academic life.
3. Pave the way for a change, on the part of teachers, to manipulate recent approaches to the teaching of reading comprehension.

Objective(s) of the study:

1. To investigate the effects of using a story-based program taught through the Discussion Method on improving 1st year Faculty of Arts students' acquisition of reading comprehension skills.
2. To investigate the effects of using a story-based program taught through the Discussion Method on improving 1st year Faculty of Arts students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language.

Questions of the study:

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the effect of using a story-based program taught through the Discussion Method on improving 1st year Faculty of Arts students' acquisition of literal, referential, and critical reading comprehension skills?
2. What is the effect of using a story-based program taught through the Discussion Method on improving 1st year Faculty of Arts students' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language?

Hypotheses of the study:

The following hypotheses are tested.

- 1- There are statistically significant differences (favouring the treatment group) between means of scores of the control

and the experimental groups in the post measurement of reading comprehension skills test.

- 2- There are statistically significant differences (favouring the treatment group) between means of scores of the control and the experimental groups in the post measurement of the Attitude Scale towards Learning EFL.

Limitations of the study:

This study was limited to:

1. Most of the stories included in the suggested program are authentic, challenging and short and they are within the linguistic background of the sample of the study.
2. The results of the study are limited to ^{1st} year Faculty Of Arts, Sebha University in Libya where the researcher used to work during the time of the study.
3. The reading comprehension skills included in the program are: suggesting a suitable title for a text, guessing the meaning of some items, identifying the main idea, discovering to which item an underlined pronoun refers to (referential), predicting some events to finish a challenging short story, and answering some questions based on those stories. Other skills are not within the scope of the present study. In general, the

program includes literal, referential, and critical reading comprehension skills.

Definitions of Terms:

Reading comprehension: Shnotz and Ballstaedt (1994:4941) define reading comprehension as "an adaptive, dynamic process wherein readers apply different cognitive strategies according to both their aims and the given situational context". According to the present study, reading comprehension refers to the reader's ability to read with understanding, and achieving better in the three levels of reading comprehension: literal, referential and critical.

Challenging short story: In the present study, a challenging short story is that one which includes the main parts of a story: introduction, plot with a logical sequence of events, but that is open-ended; in the sense that it gives the chance for the reader to predict the ending event(s) based on his/her comprehension of the story. Each reader is challenged to predict the ending in his/her own words.

Literal comprehension: This level of comprehension involves surface meanings. Students are asked to find information and ideas that are explicitly stated in the text.

Referential comprehension: This level of comprehension is also called interpretive. At this level, students go beyond what is said and read for deeper meanings. Students are asked to summarize the main idea of a text, draw conclusions, make generalizations, and predict outcomes.

Critical comprehension: At this level of comprehension, students are asked to evaluate ideas and information. Students are also asked to differentiate between facts and opinions, and judge the accuracy of the information given in the text.

The researcher tried to make use of those levels of reading comprehension in designing the suggested program.

Variables of the Study:

The independent variable was:

The suggested short story-based program taught through the Discussion Method.

The dependent variables were:

- a) Students' reading comprehension skills.
- b) Students' attitudes towards learning EFL.

Design of the Study:

Due to the nature of the study, two groups (experimental and control) were pre-post tested. Twenty five male and female students of first year Faculty of Arts, Sebha University were in each group.

Subjects: The sample of the study consisted of fifty male and female first year Faculty of Arts English majors at Sebha university. The students were assigned to either the experimental or the control group on a random basis. Pre -test data on the reading comprehension skills test and on the attitude scale were obtained to ensure group equivalence.

Tools of the study:

The tools of the study are as follows: (Prepared by and available with the researcher)

1. A pre-post reading comprehension skills test. (See Appendix A)
2. An Attitude Scale for judging students' attitudes towards learning EFL. (See Appendix B)

The suggested short-story program:

Designing the program went through the following procedures:

1. Deciding on the general objectives of the suggested program.
2. Deciding on the behavioral objectives of the suggested program.
3. After designing the framework of the suggested program, it was evaluated by submitting it to a jury of specialists in TEFL.
4. Designing the whole program
5. Judging the whole program by the same jury for its contents and general form.

The program consisted of 7 challenging short stories. The researcher adapted the material of these lessons from different sources. The researcher considers certain criteria for selecting the reading materials, i.e. being interesting, challenging and appropriate to students' age, educational level, with an appropriate length and within their linguistic background.

To achieve that end, the program as well as the Reading Comprehension Skills Test were submitted to the judgment of a group of eleven jury members who agreed on their validity and suitability. Two jury members suggested some

modifications; the researcher made those changes and then built the program.

II- Reading Comprehension Skills Test:

This test consists of three parts:

Part (One): includes five items asking the students to:

- a) suggest a suitable title for the text.
- b) guess the meaning of some items.
- c) identify the main idea of the text.
- d) discover to which item an underlined pronoun refers to.
- e) predict some events to finish the story.

Part (Two): includes five multiple choice items based on the given

challenging short story.

Part (Three): invites the students to answer ten questions based on

the given challenging short story. Five points are given for each

test item. Maximum score for this test is [100].

The procedure of teaching the experimental group:

Before administering the program, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and the students agreed to participate.

1. The class was divided into 4 groups, one short story per

- group.
2. A time limit was set for the activity with a deadline (30 minutes).
 3. All the members read the short story and then discussed both what the writer has said, and what they thought about it.
 4. Each group chose one person who read aloud, and the others in the group were responsible for answering the questions based on the story they had read:
 5. By the end of reading each short story, the students were expected to:
 - a) suggest a suitable title for the text.
 - b) guess the meaning of some items.
 - c) identify the main idea of the text.
 - d) discover to which item the underlined pronoun refers to.
 - e) predict some events to finish the story.
 - f) answer some questions based on the story.
 5. Once the groups have finished, the researcher lead a discussion as a whole, commenting on the students' answers.
 6. The students were invited to choose a different challenging short story for the next turn.

Pre test data on the pre-performance on reading comprehension skills test (RCST) were obtained to ensure group equivalence. Pre-test data on (RCST) showed group equivalence as the t-value (0.034) was insignificant at .05 level. See Table (1):

Table (1)

Means, standard deviations, t-value of means and significance of differences of the two groups in the pre-performance on reading comprehension skills test (RCST)

Group	Number of Students	Means	Standard Deviation	Degree of Freedom	"t" Value
Cont.	25	31.84	8.85	48	0.034
Exp.	25	31.92	7.15		

Maximum score =

100.

Pre test data on the Attitude Scale (AS) towards learning EFL were obtained to ensure group equivalence. Pre-test data on (AS) showed group equivalence as the t-value (0.51) was insignificant at .05 level. See Table (2):

Table (2)

Means, standard deviations, t-value of means and significance of differences of the two groups in the pre-performance on the Attitude Scale (AS)

Group	Number of Subjects	Means	Standard Deviation	Degree Of Freedom	"t" Value
Cont.	25	30.01	7.44	48	0.51
Exp.	25	31.04	6.64		

Findings and Discussion

Hypothesis one predicted a statistically significant difference between the means of the students' scores on the pre-post test of reading comprehension skills favoring the post application.

Most students of the experimental group were successfully able to suggest titles, discover the item referred to by certain pronouns. However, it was not easy for many of them to guess the meaning of certain items or to predict certain events to finish the story. Later, they could do that job successfully. With more practice in reading, the students showed that they were more interested in reading the selected challenging short stories and were successfully able to do the exercises based on each story.

Results:

Hypothesis (1) :

The first hypothesis predicted that the experimental group would surpass the control group in the post-performance on the pre-post test of reading comprehension skills favoring the post application.

Analysis of data using "t"- test showed that the experimental group achieved significantly higher scores than the control group on the post-performance of the test of reading comprehension skills, since "t"-value (10.97) is significant at (.01) level and beyond.

Table (3)

Means, standard deviations, t-value of means and significance of differences of the two groups in the post-performance Reading Comprehension Skills Test. (RCST)

Group	Number of students	Means	Standard Deviation	Degree of Freedom	"t" Value
Cont.	25	38.08	7.199	48	10.97 *
Exp.	25	68.68	11.61		

Maximum score = 100.

Analyzing data using the "t"-test of significance showed a significant difference favoring the experimental group post

performance on the reading comprehension skills test where the experimental group in the post testing achieved a higher significant degree of improvement than on pre-testing.

The experimental group surpassed the control group in the post-performance on the reading comprehension skills test. This result may be attributed to the effectiveness of the suggested program, the enjoyment offered by the authentic challenging short stories and the use of the Discussion Method.

Initially, many students showed some hesitance, awkwardness and sometimes loss of confidence during reading. However, with time they showed a good level of fluency in reading. That means that the students could read the short stories properly, quickly and with understanding when they were encouraged. Those good readers could do that because they did not have problems with word recognition. As a result, they could focus on the meaning of what they read. Their achievement was significant as most of them were able to achieve better with regard to the three levels of reading comprehension: literal, referential, and critical successively. The students' most difficulties were found in the last level.

On the other hand, the improvement achieved by the control group students in post testing cannot be neglected. This improvement may be attributed to the accidental discussions held by the students of both groups when they met each other.

Hypothesis (2) :

The second hypothesis predicted that the experimental group would surpass the control group in scoring on the Attitude-Scale towards learning EFL.

Analysis of data using "t"- test showed that the experimental group achieved significantly higher scores than the control group on the post-performance on the Attitude Scale, since "t"-value (12.20) is significant at (.01) level and beyond. (See Table 4)

Table (4)

Means, standard deviations, t-value of means and significance of differences of the two groups in the post-performance on the Attitude Scale (AS)

Group	Number of Subjects	Means	Standard Deviation	Degree Of Freedom	"t" Value
Cont.	25	38	7.83	48	12.20 *
Exp.	25	68.12	9.21		

Analyzing data using the "t"-test of significance showed a significant difference favoring the experimental group post performance on the post-test of the Attitude Scale where the experimental group in the post testing achieved a higher significant degree of improvement than on pre-testing.

It is worth mentioning that results obtained on the Attitude-Scale towards EFL, showed that students who scored high in their pre-attitude assessment were found to be scoring much higher in the post measurement on the same scale. Also, students who scored relatively low in the pre-scale tended to score higher in the post performance on the same scale. This means that both successful and less successful students have benefited from the suggested challenging short stories-based program as well as the Discussion Method. That made them feel more positive about learning EFL.

Thus, authentic challenging short stories proved to be useful for foreign language learners because they could help the students read with understanding and with pleasure.

In short, the current study aimed at investigating the effects of using a story-based program taught through the Discussion Method on improving 1s^t year Faculty of Arts students' reading comprehension skills, and their attitudes

towards learning English as a foreign language. Based on the results of the study, there is clear and unambiguous evidence that the challenging short stories-based program could successfully improve the students' reading comprehension skills and build positive attitudes towards learning EFL.

The results of the present study agree with the results of other studies such as those of Zakaria (1994), Asraf, et.al. (2003), and Deutsch (2004) who concluded that learners achieve low scores in reading comprehension tests when reading is taught in traditional ways; whereas, they achieve significant improvements when reading programs are taught through other recent approaches. The results of the present study, also, agree with those of Alyousef (2005), and Yamashita (2007) who claim that students' attitudes are usually positively affected when they are motivated and encouraged to read about topics that are familiar, authentic and relevant to their life..

Recommendations of the study:

In the light of the results of the study, the following recommendations are presented:

1. Using authentic short stories in reading classes.

2. Making reading classes success-oriented by offering more time for reading challenging short stories.
3. Encouraging students to talk with each other about what they are reading in order to build background and expand comprehension.
4. Using reading for pleasure to enhance first year Faculty of Arts students' reading comprehension skills.
5. Holding workshops to train teachers on how to teach reading comprehension skills through short stories.
6. Providing the library of the Faculty of Arts with many different short stories.

Suggestions for Further Studies:

The following topics are suggested as areas that need further investigations:

1. Investigating the effects of using reading for pleasure in improving listening and speaking skills of the first year Faculty of Arts' students.
2. Investigating the effects of using reading for pleasure in improving the writing skill of English majors.
3. Investigating the effects of using reading for pleasure in improving slow-learners' language skills.

4. Investigating the effects of using short stories in improving the oral fluency of Arab learners of EFL.
5. Investigating the effects of using short stories taught via active learning strategies in improving learners' attitudes towards learning English.

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