

**THE EFFECT OF DIRECT READING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION ON
STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION, METACOGNITIVE STRATEGY
AWARENESS, AND READING ATTITUDES AMONG ELEVENTH GRADE
STUDENTS IN YEMEN**

by

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

May 2007

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All praise goes to Allah the Lord of Universes.

It has been a real privilege to work under the supervision of Professor Ambigapathy Pandian. From the time I was under his supervision, I really got from his experience a model of how I may one day learn to supervise. From the outset he encouraged me to develop my own research, and offered appropriate suggestions, advice, and encouragement. Professor Ambigapathy has been a wise facilitator of my learning and development during the PhD process. Thanks to his warm and strict personality, thanks for his unfailing guidance, for setting me on the path to being an effective researcher and for always saying yes—even when he was busy and tired. As a matter of fact, if it had not been for his help and understanding, this thesis would not have been possible. I am forever in his debt.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to my previous co-supervisor, Dr. Gitu Chakravarthy who retired before completing this research. I must be very grateful for his valuable suggestions, advice, and useful criticism. My debt to his leadership, guidance, and support can never be adequately expressed with words. Suffice to say that I regard him as my role model of whom I will always be appreciative.

A special word of appreciation goes to Universiti Sains Malaysia for allowing me to pursue my PhD there and for the facilities offered by the department of English, School of Humanities, and the administrative and library staff.

A special word of appreciation goes to my country Yemen and Hadhramout University for granting me a scholarship to pursue my PhD in Malaysia.

I would also like to acknowledge with gratitude the co-operation extended to me by Mr. Khalid Hasan, the general director of Tarim Educational Directorate, Mr. Abdullah Bin Sahel and Salem Bin Omer, the principals of Tarim Secondary School, to do my field work. I also thank sincerely the teachers, particularly, Meshael Bel-Kasir and Abubakr Al-Mashhoor and the grade 11 students who participated in this study. Many thanks are also extended to Dr. Merza of USM for his suggestions regarding the

statistical relevance of the study. Similarly, my thanks go to my colleagues Mr. Balhuwisa and Mr. Abdu Atta who helped me in tabulating and entering my data.

My thanks are also extended to all my friends particularly, Abdul-Wahab Attamimi, Adnan Bin Shamlan, Rais Attamimi, Abubakr Al-Haddad, Atef Attamimi, Mohammed Al-Aidaros, Hasan Al-Aidaros, Mohammed Abdullah Bin Mersaf, and Khalid Bin Sinan who assisted me in one way or another during the period of this work.

Last, but definitely not least, my thanks go to my family. First, to my mother, thank you for all your prayers. Second, to the soul and memory of my father and grandmother, I only wish they could have been here to see this finished work, but I know that this is what they would have wanted. I extend my thanks to my wife (Um-Bashar) and children, Bashar, Sumaya, Ammar, Buthaina and Ayah and to my brothers Dr. Abdul Hakim, Dr. Jamal and Dr. Ibrahim as well as my sisters for their emotional support which gave me strength and determination to continue my graduate studies for the PhD in Malaysia.

To all those whom I may have forgotten to mention THANKS!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Anxiety and Difficulty
ANCOVA	Analysis of Covariance
ASRA	Adult Survey of Reading Attitude
CECY	Crescent: English Course for Yemen
COG.	Cognitive
DRSI	Direct Reading Strategy Instruction
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EFY	English for Yemen
ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
GMTE	General Mid-Term Exam
GSCE	General Secondary Certificate Exam
GSSQ	General Secondary School Qualification
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MET.	Metacognitive
MOE	Ministry of Education
MRSQ	Metacognitive Reading Strategy Questionnaire
RAE	Reading Activity and Enjoyment
RCT	Reading Comprehension Test
REO	Regional Educational Offices
SR	Social Reinforcement
SUP.	Support
TRI	Traditional Reading Instruction
USM	University Sains Malaysia

KEBERKESANAN PENGAJARAN STRATEGI MEMBACA SECARA EKSPLISIT TERHADAP KEFAHAMAN MEMBACA, PENGETAHUAN STRATEGI METAKOGNITIF DAN AMALAN PEMBACAAN DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR TAHAP SEBELAS DI YEMEN

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti keberkesanan pengajaran strategi pembacaan secara eksplisit terhadap peningkatan kefahaman membaca, pengetahuan strategi metakognitif dan amalan pembacaan dalam kalangan pelajar bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing di Sekolah Menengah Yemen.

Sejumlah enam puluh pelajar lelaki Sekolah Menengah Tarim di Hadhramout, Yemen dalam tahun akademik 2004 - 2005 dipilih sebagai sampel untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Sampel kajian dimasukkan dalam dua kumpulan berasingan, iaitu kumpulan kawalan dan kumpulan eksperimentasi. Kumpulan kawalan menerima pengajaran seperti biasa diajar di sekolah-sekolah manakala kumpulan eksperimentasi menerima pengajaran pembacaan melalui penggunaan DRSI. Fokus kajian ini adalah berasaskan DRSI iaitu '*independent variable*', manakala kefahaman membaca, pengetahuan strategi pembacaan metakognitif dan amalan pembacaan adalah '*dependent variable*' berdasarkan sasaran aktiviti DRSI.

Analisis data dikumpul sebelum dan selepas eksperimen dengan menggunakan Ujian Kefahaman Membaca, Soalan Strategi Membaca Metakognitif dan Protokol Peningkatan Kembali dan Analisa Amalan Pembacaan Orang Dewasa. Dapatan analisa melalui penggunaan *t-test* dan analisa *Covariance* menunjukkan peningkatan yang positif dalam kefahaman membaca di kalangan kumpulan eksperimental jika dibandingkan semasa *pre-test* dan dengan kumpulan kawalan. Pencapaian min kumpulan eksperimental adalah 73.27 dalam pembacaan kefahaman *post-test* dan kumpulan kawalan pula memperolehi 59.67.

Analisa data yang dikumpul untuk menganalisa pengetahuan metakognitif, menunjukkan pelajar dalam kumpulan eksperimentasi memaparkan satu peningkatan yang signifikan dalam kesedaran pembacaan secara berstrategi jika dibandingkan semasa pretest dan dengan kumpulan kawalan. Keseluruhan pencapaian min dalam *post test* 3.61 dan pencapaian min keseluruhan kumpulan kawalan dalam *post test* adalah 2.8. Amalan pembacaan pelajar juga dibandingkan di antara kumpulan eksperimentasi dan kumpulan kawalan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan kumpulan eksperimentasi memperolehi amalan positif terhadap pembacaan pada akhir kajian ini. Dapatan kajian ini adalah konsisten dengan kajian lain yang berpendapat, pengajaran yang berpandukan strategi adalah bermanfaat dalam meningkatkan kefahaman pembacaan, pengetahuan kefahaman pembacaan dan amalan pembacaan.

Kesimpulannya, kajian ini berharap guru mendapat manfaat dalam penggunaan DRSl di kelas pembacaan. Ini juga secara tidak langsung dapat meningkatkan kefahaman pembacaan, pengetahuan metakognitif dan amalan pembacaan.

THE EFFECT OF DIRECT READING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION ON STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION, METACOGNITIVE STRATEGY AWARENESS, AND READING ATTITUDES AMONG ELVENTH GRADE STUDENTS IN YEMEN

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether direct reading strategy instruction (DRSI) would be effective in enhancing reading comprehension, metacognitive awareness of reading strategies and attitudes toward reading among Yemeni secondary school students who study English as a foreign language.

The sample of the study consisted of sixty Yemeni secondary male students in Tarim Secondary School in Hadhramout Educational Directorate in Yemen during the academic year 2004-2005. Two intact groups were involved in the study. One class was used as a control group and the other as an experimental group. The control group was taught reading through the regular method used in the school and the experimental group was taught reading through using DRSI. The focus of this investigation is the DRSI, **the independent variable**, whereas reading comprehension, metacognitive awareness of reading strategies and reading attitudes are the **dependent variables**, the targets of DRSI activities.

The data for this study were collected before and after the experiment through using a Reading Comprehension Test (RCT), Metacognitive Reading Strategy Questionnaire (MRSQ), and Think Aloud Protocol (TAP) as well as Adult Survey of Reading Attitudes (ASRA). The analysis of data collected, using t-test as well as Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), showed that significant improvement has taken place in reading comprehension of the experimental group compared to their pre-test performance and that of the control group. The experimental group's mean score was 73.27 in their reading comprehension post-test, while it was 59.67 for the control group. With regard

to metacognitive knowledge, the results revealed that the students in the experimental group showed significant improvement in their awareness of reading strategies compared to their pre-test performance and that of the control group. The overall mean score of the experimental group in the post test was 3.61 while the overall mean score of the control group in the post-test was 2.38. Students' reading attitudes were also compared between the experimental and control groups. The results showed that the experimental group had obtained positive attitudes toward reading by the end of the study. Such results are consistent with some related studies which suggest that strategy-based instruction could be rewarding for both reading comprehension, reading strategies- awareness and reading attitudes.

In light of these findings, the researcher recommends that teachers should benefit from applying DRSI in reading classes, which may in turn develop students' reading comprehension, metacognitive knowledge and reading attitudes.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) occupies an important place in the Yemeni education system (Almaktary, 2001). Although it is not the medium of instruction in elementary and secondary stages, accessing key information at higher education in a great variety of fields is often dependent on having reading ability in English. Reading is, therefore, the most important skill for foreign language learners, because they have little exposure to the target language outside the classroom and most of the information in English comes through reading (Boss, 2002). In such contexts, students get more opportunities to read rather than to listen to English (ibid). This is why the main emphasis in most programmes of EFL is usually on the written skills especially reading. Alderson (1984:1) states that "[i]n many parts of the world a reading knowledge of a foreign language is often important to academic studies, professional success, and personal development. This is particularly true of English as so much professional, technical and scientific literature is published in English".

However, reading is a source of difficulty for second language (L2) learners. The problems that they encounter are due to a number of factors including lack of appropriate reading strategies, lack of background knowledge related to the topic of the target language or lack of attitudes toward reading, to name a few. Nevertheless, learners can overcome their difficulties when they receive the appropriate training (Carrell, 1985). At school, teachers can only provide some guidance, but they cannot provide students with all the information that they need. The best service that teachers could provide their students is to teach them reading strategies that might help them become independent readers so that they are able to access all types of materials on their own (Dreyer, 1998).

The present study focuses on reading in general but with particular focus on reading strategies. The motivation for this study is the conviction of the importance of the explicit strategy instruction in enhancing reading comprehension (Rabren et al. 1999; Pressley, 2000). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of direct reading strategy instruction, (hereafter referred to as DRSI), on developing Yemeni students' reading comprehension, metacognitive awareness of reading strategies, and attitudes toward reading. Obviously, the focus of this study rests on three key concepts: **comprehension strategies**, **metacognition**, and **affective domain** (reading attitudes). In order to orient the reader to the concepts which are investigated in the present study, a brief discussion of these concepts is made.

The first concept comes from interactive approaches and schema theory. It has been said that "L2 reading depends not just on language proficiency (e.g. syntactic knowledge, vocabulary) but on strategy use as well" (Auerbach & Paxton, 1997:240). Readers with limited L2 proficiency may resort to bottom-up strategies (e.g. word-for-word reading, translation). They can also compensate for a lack of L2 proficiency by using top-down and interactive strategies such as prediction, accessing prior knowledge (Clarke, 1980; Nolan, 1991). This entails that reading is more than using linguistic and decoding skills. Background knowledge and reading skills and strategies determine how far a reader can succeed in understanding a given text and these factors are more significant than mere linguistic proficiency. In other words, if a reader's linguistic knowledge is deficient, it will be compensated by a drawing on background knowledge, and vice versa. This principle assumes that top-down and bottom-up processes are equally important (Carrell, 1985; Carrell and Eisterhold, 1987).

The second concept is that "metacognitive awareness is key in proficient reading" (Auerbach & Paxton, 1997:240). Researchers in the area of reading strategy instruction have recommended the involvement of developing students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies (Brown et al. 1986; Ruddell and Unrau,

Teachers in this case should not only provide their students with a repertoire of reading strategies used by good readers (Sarig, 1987; Anderson, 1991) because these reading strategies alone cannot account for the effectiveness of reading comprehension. Thus, teaching metacognitive strategies along with strategies used by good readers could enable students to be aware of when and how to use such strategies.

The third concept comes from affective domain particularly reading attitudes. Interestingly, providing students with strategies accompanied with modelling of these strategies by teacher through the use of think aloud protocols, often provides students with benefit (Cohen and Hosenfeld, 1981; Block, 1986). The benefit of being trained to verbalise thoughts while reading enables students to be more aware of "what they do, which in turn gives them greater control over strategy choices" (Auerbach & Paxton, 1997:241) and enhances their enjoyment of English reading and attitudes toward reading (Mathewson, 1985).

The above key concepts of the study summarise the theoretical issues and background information deemed relevant to the context of this study. This serves the purpose of familiarising the reader with these aspects of reading on which this study focused. Starting with a brief explanation of these three concepts, this chapter moves on to describe the background to the study, which includes an overview of Yemen, the place where the study was conducted. It also gives a concise sketch of the education system in Yemen along with the historical background of English before and after the unification of Yemen. Then, it deals with the importance of English in the Yemeni society. The chapter then touches upon the current school textbook and the teaching of reading in English in Yemeni schools. It also reviews different Yemeni studies on reading comprehension. This is followed by the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, significance of the study, limitation and delimitations of the study, and definition of terms. The chapter ends by enunciating the organisation of the whole thesis.

1.2 Background to the Study

The relevance of a study is best appreciated if it is approached from the perspective of the context in which it takes place. Viewed from this perspective, certain facts and figures about Yemen and its educational background are significant to the study.

1.2.1 Geographical Location, Area, and Population

The Republic of Yemen is located in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula. It borders the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the north, the Sultanate of Oman in the east, and the Arabian Sea and the Red sea in the west (Mohie Al-Din, 2005).

Yemen occupies an area of 555.000 square kilometres excluding Al-Rub-al-Khali (the Empty Quarter desert). The population is distributed among twenty governorates of the Republic, the largest of which are Sana'a (the capital), Aden, Taiz, and Hadhramout. The total population of the Republic of Yemen is 20.5 million (Mohie Al-Din, 2005).

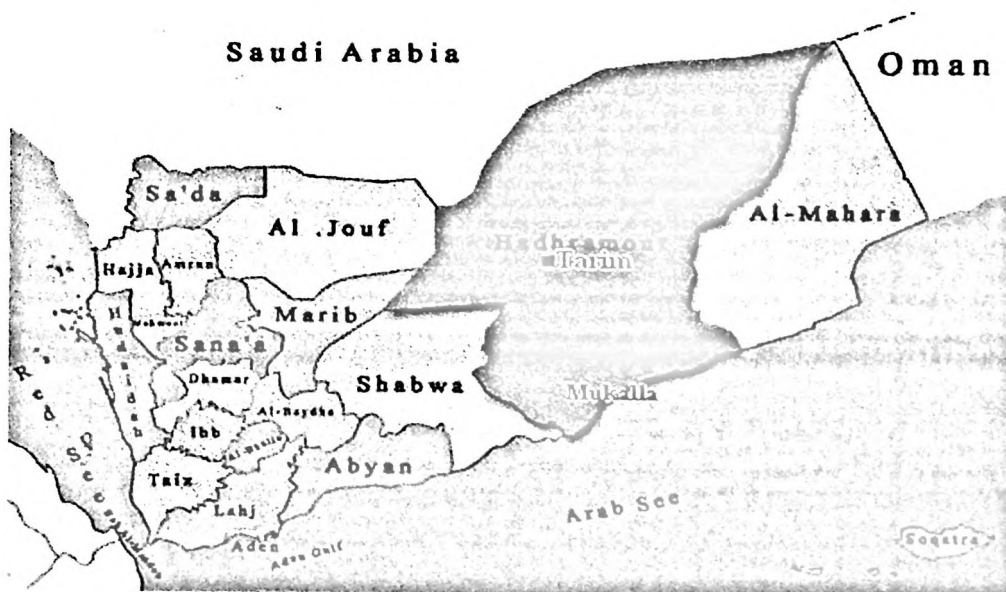


Figure 1.1: Yemen Map

1.2.2 Brief History of Yemen

Before unification, according to Chander and Palan (2004), Yemen was made up of several small states and semi independent kingdoms. Yemen gained strategic importance to European powers attempting to secure trade routes to India. The British occupied the port of Aden, in the southern part of Yemen, to safeguard their routes through the Red Sea, while the Turks took control of the northern part of Yemen. Following the end of the Ottoman Empire, North Yemen became a monarchy. The Monarchy was succeeded by the Yemen Arabic Republic in 1962. The British Crown Colony of Aden and other areas in South Yemen, upon gaining independence in 1967, became Peoples' Democratic Republic of Yemen. The two states were unified in May 1990. It is in the context of the unified Republic of Yemen, the present education system will be discussed in the following section.

1.2.3 General Structure of the Yemeni Education System

The Yemeni education system is regulated by a number of pieces of legislation (Ministry of Education, 2004). For example, basic education is compulsory for all children permanently residing in Yemen, and aims to allow all children to reach a certain educational standard. The duration of compulsory education was extended, from eight years in the southern part and six years in the northern part, to nine years in total by the year 1990. Completing the course successfully at one level of education is generally a precondition for proceeding to the next higher level (ibid).

Yemeni legislation has also greatly emphasised education as a means of development. The law of education, ratified by parliament in August 1992, has classified education in Yemen into three categories; namely: public education, vocational and technical education, and higher education (El-Zaemey, 2002).

Due to the emphasis given to the education in Yemen, three ministries concerned with education have been established. These are the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training, and Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (El-Zaemey, 2002). The constitution guarantees the right of all citizens to free education and that the government will endeavour to achieve social equality and equal educational opportunities (ibid).

At present, the structure of the Yemeni education system is classified into four levels. The system works from kindergarten and elementary education through to secondary education and finally to higher and university education (Ministry of Education, 2004). That is to say, 2 years kindergarten, 9 years elementary, 3 years secondary and 4 to 6 years at university level, depending on fields and specialisation.

1.2.3 (a) Pre-School Level (Kindergarten)

Education in Yemen begins with two years of pre-school education (Ministry of Education 2004). However, only a negligible number of children actually attend the few kindergartens that do exist in urban areas as well as in some rural areas. According to the Ministry of Education in Yemen, the social demand on the education before school (pre-school) is still limited perhaps by the following reasons:

- 1) Pre-school education is not considered as one stage of the regular education system; that means the child can join the following stage even if he/she does not complete this stage, in spite of the law of education (No.45-1992) considering it as one of the regular education stages.
- 2) Many families are not able to bear the high expenses of this stage of education. The most recent study conducted by Sharaf Addeen (1999), showed that most of kindergartens are managed by the private sector with expensive fees that the poor classes of population could not afford.

- 3) There is no awareness of the role of the importance of kindergartens for child development.

Admittedly, pre-school education in Yemen is largely conducted on an informal basis. Many children learn basic literacy skills in mosque schools as well as in private kindergartens in urban and some rural areas.

1.2.3(b) Elementary Level

For the majority of Yemeni students, education begins at the elementary stage. From the age of six years on, children are subject to compulsory school attendance (Ministry of Education, 2004). The elementary school which receives the six-year-old intake, covers nine grades and is designed to provide all pupils with an uniform elementary education and prepare them for moving on to more advanced education (ibid).

Students, at this level, study various subjects such as Arabic language, social studies, physical education, science and English. Arabic is the medium of instruction in elementary schools while English is introduced as a required subject starting from Grade Seven. It is a compulsory subject in the National Examination that is administered at the end of the nine years of the elementary stage.

1.2.3(c) Secondary Level

Students, who completed the elementary education level, can proceed to the secondary level in which they spend three years to get their general secondary school qualification (GSSQ) (Yar Mohamed, 1992). In the first year of secondary education, all students follow the same general course. In the second year, they are streamed into Scientific and Art sections, both leading to the GSSQ. Vocational education and technical training are also provided at the secondary level (ibid). After completing their

secondary school, students can make a decision whether to terminate their education or to pursue their studies in the academic, vocational or technical stream. Most of the students who study the general secondary school in Yemen have only one objective, that is, to enter a university.

1.2.3(d) Tertiary Level

Graduates of the general secondary school are entitled to continue their higher education in universities, colleges, and institutes, which offer a range of degrees, diplomas and certificates. Their acceptance into higher learning institutions is done according to their preferences and their results in GSSQ. All higher institution courses in faculties such as Medicine and Technology are taught in English and the number of years varies, as in the case of a first degree in medicine taking six years and a first degree in technology taking five.

As can be seen in Figure 1.2, on the completion of basic education at the age of 15 plus, students follow either general secondary school for three years or vocational education for three years. Students also can follow two years study in vocational training centres. On the completion of secondary education at the age of 18 plus, students can enrol in university education if they obtain good marks at the end of secondary schooling, or if not join technical education for two – three years.

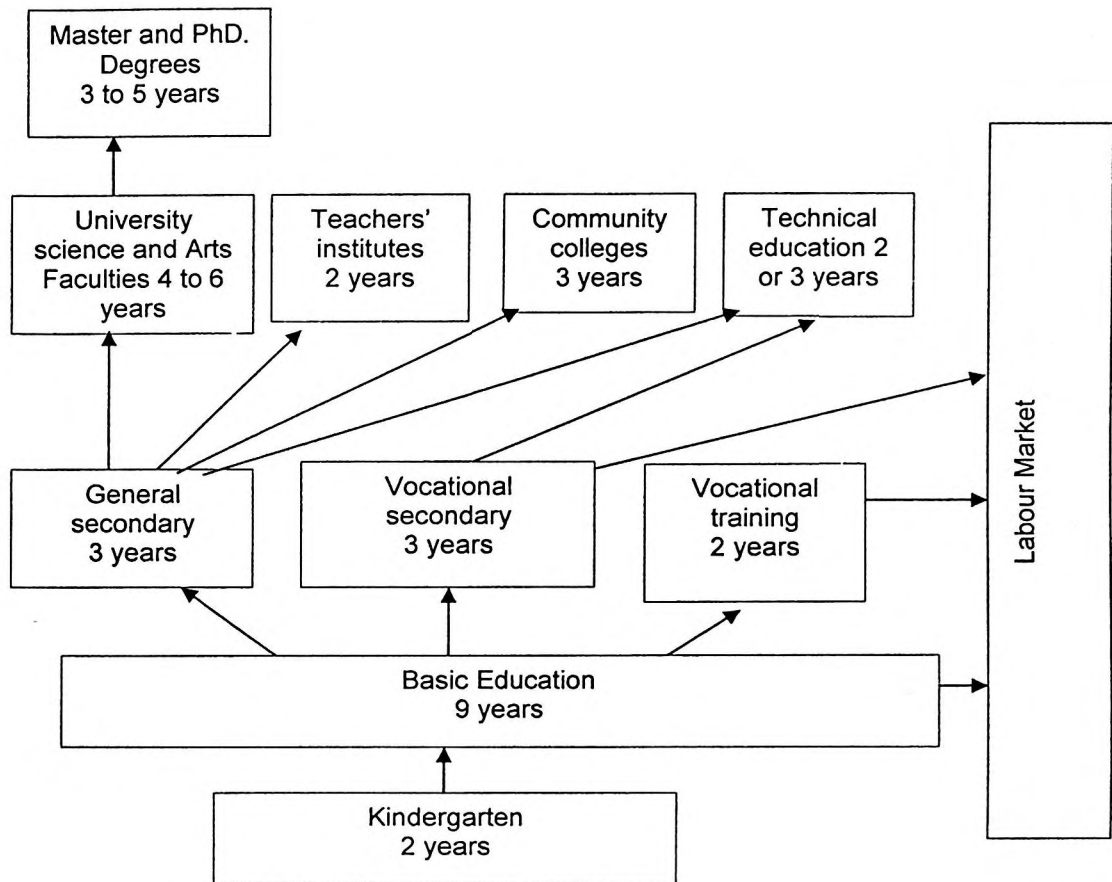


Figure 1.2: The Structure of Yemini Education System, (World Bank, 2004)

1.2.4 Governance of the Education System, School Organisation and Management

Primary and secondary schools are basically under the control of the Ministry of Education (hereafter referred to as MOE). The role of the MOE is to implement the educational policy of the Yemini government. Thus, in this regard, releasing funds for the appointment of new teachers or officers, building new schools, purchasing new equipment and furniture for offices and schools, curriculum designing and prescribing text-books, and so forth, are the main functions of the MOE.

In order to facilitate its work and to achieve its goals, the MOE has many Regional Educational Offices (hereafter referred to as REO) in all governorates. S

offices consist of financial, educational, administrative, and teachers' supervision sections. The role of these offices is to carry out the policies and the plans drawn by the MOE, and to monitor the schools.

The third body, in a hierarchical structure below REO, is the school. Generally, the schools are managed by a headmaster/headmistress, assisted by two deputies. The headmasters/ headmistresses are expected to manage the schools in accordance with the plans of MOE. This involves preparing teaching programmes, timetables, supervising the teaching of the individual teachers, assigning them different levels, recommending their transfers from one school to another and placing requirements of schools such as manpower, textbooks, furniture and other teaching aids.

1.2.5 Historical Overview of English in Yemen

In discussing the history of English in Yemen, it seems necessary to differentiate between two main stages: the pre-unification stage and the post-unification stage. The pre- unification stage refers to the period before 1990 when Yemen was divided into two countries, North Yemen and South Yemen. The post- unification stage refers to the period from the re-unification in 1990 and onwards.

1.2.5(a) The Pre-Unification Stage- Southern Part

Before independence in 1967, English came to South Yemen during the British colonisation period which lasted over 129 years from January 1838 till November 1967 (Bahmaid, 1985). As in other British colonies, English was used as an official language in all governmental departments, laws and regulations. Sometime later, English spread to some parts of the private sector. English also gained an internal status as it was used as a means of communication between the Yemeni people and the British (ibid).

As far as schools were concerned, English was taught as a compulsory school subject in primary, intermediate and secondary schools. It was the medium of instructions in secondary schools. Teachers of English were British, Indians, Sudanese and a few Yemenis. The materials used were imported from Britain and most of them were not particularly written for Yemeni students (Bahmaid, 1985).

In short, one may conclude that during the pre-independence stage, English had the status of a second language particularly in Aden (the capital of the southern part). Further details are not necessary, since the present situation, in the Republic of Yemen after unification, is quite different and needs more elaboration.

After independence, English was no more considered as the official language. It was taught as a required subject in schools because Arabic is the national and official language. Despite the many fundamental changes that took place under the new democratic system in the southern part of Yemen, English, as stated by AlKaff (1985), was regarded as the most important foreign language that students had to learn since English was widely used as an international language. It served the country for external communication, and for keeping people in touch with the latest developments in technology and other scientific fields. Its use as a medium of instruction was restricted to the faculties of medicine, technology, and science sections in colleges of education (ibid).

1.2.5(b) The Pre- Unification Stage- Northern Part

In recent history, the northern part of Yemen, remained under Imamate rule and closed to the outside world. The first attempts at introducing the English language to students in the northern part were made during the 1920s (Azzan, 2001). Students were taught Arabic as well as English in a random and unfocussed way. The types of

materials and techniques for the teaching of English were the responsibilities of teachers (ibid).

The education system in the northern part of Yemen was established formally after the revolution of 26th September 1962, which marked the change from monarchy to a republic (Azzan, 2001). This also marked a change from primitive and random education to a modern and formal one. It was then that the English language was introduced in the education system.

After the revolution, the doors of Yemen were opened to the world. It was felt that English was a necessary window to the world of science and technology, as well as for development in all spheres of life. It was thus decided to introduce English as a compulsory subject after the six-year-primary stage of education. Since no local English teachers were yet available to teach English, the Ministry of Education recruited Egyptian teachers (Al-Wasy, 2002). These Egyptian teachers, according to Al-Wasy, started using materials called, '*The Nile Course of English and English for Use*', which were used in Egyptian schools. These teachers used the materials in Yemeni schools until late 1960s. By 1970, the *Nile course* was replaced by another one, namely, '*The progressive living English for the Arab world*', which was used in the Gulf countries. However, this textbook did not fulfil the needs of teaching English in Yemen. Thus, a special textbook series called *English for Yemen (EFY)* was developed by the Ministry of Education and British council in Yemen, as a part of its technical cooperation with Yemen. This textbook series was used in Yemeni elementary schools until the year 1994 and in secondary schools until 1999, when it was replaced by a new textbook series called *Crescent: English Course for Yemen* (ibid).

1.2.5(c) Republic of Yemen: the Post-Unification Stage

Before unification, the education system had a different structure in North and South Yemen. At the dawn of unification of both South and North Yemen, which to

place on 22nd May 1990, the education systems of both the two regions were merged into one that consists of nine years of compulsory basic education, three years of secondary education, and two to six years of higher education (Yuki, 2003).

The education system in Yemen after unification has been undergoing dramatic changes. Despite the fundamental changes that have taken place under the new national system, English still has the status of a foreign language. It is seen as a key language to serve Yemen as a medium of international communication. Hillenbrand (1994:5037) describes the status of English in the unified Yemen as follows:

“Since unification, English is beginning to become the most important foreign language in Yemen. English is the lingua franca among the non-Arab groups (from the UK, German, the USA, Pakistan, the Philippines, Malaysia and other countries) working in Yemen. It must be noted here that with regard to the learning and teaching of English in the Yemeni schools and institutions of higher education, it is taught and learnt as a compulsory subject”.

Learners spend six years learning English from class seven at a rate ranging from five to six periods of 40 minutes per week. Teaching English continues even at the university level. English is taught as a compulsory subject in schools of humanities, and it is used as a medium of instruction in schools of sciences, engineering, medicine and agriculture (Al-Hamzi, 1999). Basically, the development of English in Yemeni schools is deeply grounded in the objectives which have been set by the MOE. These objectives, according to Al-Ghraphy (1999:3), are as follows:

- 1) “To teach the students to read and write the foreign language so that they can carry out their own academic research in English.
- 2) To provide the students with skills which will enable them to communicate orally, and to some degree in writing, with the speakers of the foreign language and with the people of other nationalities who also speak this language.
- 3) To bring the students to some degree of understanding of people across national barriers by giving them an insight into the ways of life and the ways of thinking of the people who speak the language they are learning.

- 4) To increase the students' understanding of how language functions and to bring them, through the study of a language, to a greater awareness of the functioning of their own language.
- 5) To enable the students to study abroad where English is the medium of instruction".

However, these objectives are not being fully achieved in Yemeni schools, reflected in poor performance of the students at secondary as well as tertiary levels (Ba-Matraf, 1997; Naif, 2003). The low standard of Yemeni students in English persists as a problem. Specific reference is made to the low standard of English in the new educational policy. A new decree, which is being formulated, is aimed at introducing English as a subject starting from Grade 4 and the allocation of greater English contact hours at elementary and secondary levels (Prime Minister, 2005). This indicates the present government's concern and commitment to improve the standard of English in Yemeni students.

1.2.6 The Importance of English in Yemeni Society

At present, English has developed and expanded in the Arab world (Kharma, 1998; Zughoul, 2003). It is widely used as an instrumental language for various purposes and enjoys a higher status than in the past (Kharma, 1998). According to Zughoul (2003), English is needed in the Arab world for the purposes of communicating with the world, education, development in science, technology, and commerce which have made English the most important language in different aspects of life. English is now associated with advancement in technology, trade, tourism, the Internet, science, commerce, politics, and so forth. As a result, the ability to speak, read, and write in English is required in many of the above fields, if not in all of them.

As Yemen is opening itself more to the world, the teaching of English in Yemen has become more significant. Many private English language and computer centres

have been established all over the country. Consequently, the demand on computer use has increased the demand for the English language. More importantly, courses in medicine, science and engineering at Yemeni universities are taught in English (Rugh, 2002). New developments in these fields are almost always published in English; therefore, students majoring in these fields must study these subjects in English in order to keep abreast of current knowledge and any developments in their fields (ibid).

Furthermore, English plays an important role in Yemen. It is the language mostly used in the information media such as television, press and international communication (Azzan, 2001). There are daily TV bulletins in English and weekly programmes reviewing international events together with another for teaching English to school students. In the print media, there are two English newspapers - Yemen Times and Yemen Observer - in which different topics of education, politics, commerce and technology are discussed by educators and writers in different fields.

Development of tourism and the increase in foreign tourists who arrive in the country every now and then have made the Ministry of Tourism sending many of its employees to language centres to improve their English. Economic developments in the country have also made English widely used (Badaroos, 1988). It has become an essential prerequisite for obtaining jobs in most sectors. Many foreign companies as well as the local ones in the country seek people who have a good command of English. Although Arabic is used in most government offices, English in Yemen, as stated by Ghanim (2005), is seen as essential to better oneself. All international organisations, most non-governmental organisations and some of well-paying government offices such as Yemania Airlines, the Commercial Bank of Yemen, require a good mastery of English. The perception that greater fluency in English guarantees better employment opportunities has, in turn, led to an increase in demand for English language courses. Language forecasters, according to Graddol (1997), have a prediction in which the international demand for English will increase throughout th

next three decades. A similar trend can be observed nationally. Many Yemeni students, according to Moharram (1997) and Ghanim (2005), are keen to pursue their post-graduate studies abroad or in those Yemeni Universities where English is used as a medium of instruction.

1.2.7 Current Textbooks in Yemeni Schools

It is also worth mentioning that due to the poor achievement and dissatisfaction with the textbooks used during the pre-unification stage, the Ministry of Education has decided to adopt a new textbook series called *Crescent: English Course for Yemen* (hereafter referred to as CECY). This textbook series has been prepared and published by Oxford University Press for English teaching in the Arab world (O'Neill et al. 1995). The overall objective of this textbook is the development of students' reading, writing, listening, speaking and critical thinking skills (ibid). It encourages interaction between the teacher and the students and provides the students with a lot of communicative activities, focusing mainly on communicative aspects of the language. According to Al-Romaim (2002:1), "there is no emphasis on translation or literature as was done in the past". The mother tongue is not to be used by either the teacher or the students except in some cases where translation into the mother tongue is necessary (ibid).

CECY contains several units of study. Each unit has a passage followed by questions. For instance, textbook number (5) has five units and a separate unit for extensive reading. Reading texts are of different types. They include dialogues, short description and narrative texts, puzzles, cartoon stories, letters, diaries, notices, maps, language tables, reports, idioms, and proverbs.

Reading in this textbook is considered as one of the four skills which must be developed in students (O'Neill et al. 1995). Students are taught to understand and interpret stretches of written language. For the early levels of **CECY**, the emphasis is

on the need to build-up controlled input and systematic practice of language before the pupils can use them. Therefore, activities such as choral repetition and picture to word, phrase or sentence matching and copying exercises are used in preparing the pupils for the advanced stages. The textbook, in the last three levels at secondary school, gradually puts more and more emphasis on skill- development and activities become more varied and more task-based. The last three levels are devoted to equipping students with a variety of strategies for tackling texts in a different way, depending on the purpose of reading. The basic aim at this stage is to enable students to be independent readers (ibid). The use of pair and group work communication is also promoted. This way of teaching is expected to enable students to use the language in the classroom and to encourage them to rely on self study (O'Neill et al. 1995).

Generally speaking, **CECY** has been adopted to be taught in Yemeni schools in the belief that it focuses on the communicative aspect of the language. Again, the new textbook has been adopted to replace the previous textbooks and also because it reflects the recent views on language and language learning with the aim of teaching language for communication, rather than the mere mastery of vocabulary and grammar rules. Therefore, the primary goal of learning and teaching is to use the language for communicative purposes, which implies that using the textbook effectively depends on how it will be taught.

1.2.8 Reading in English Classes in Yemeni Schools

This sub-section discusses reading comprehension in EFL at Yemeni schools with special emphasis on the secondary level of the Yemeni education system.

Crystal (1997) makes a convincing case for the use of English by pointing out its important role as the global language for international relations, international news, travel, safety, education and communications. Yemeni students, according to Sahu (1999), want to be in touch with the latest thinking and research, and developing

proficient reading skills is their best way to do this. This is especially true in Yemen because printed material as well as other media of information such as the Internet is readily available for students, even for those who live in remote areas. Nevertheless, most Yemeni students do not master reading adequately (Azzan, 2001). Instead they end up with skills of memorisation and recall, whereby they memorise their lessons and simply regurgitate the contents on demand. This lack of sufficient comprehension, evaluation and synthesis has repercussions for the whole education system.

The aim of teaching reading comprehension in Yemeni secondary school, therefore, is to teach strategies that will enable learners to interact communicatively with a variety of comprehension or written texts (O'Neill et al. 1995). However, current practices in the instruction of reading comprehension in Yemeni schools leave much to be desired. For most of EFL teachers in most Yemeni schools, reading comprehension means merely reading with good pronunciation, developing vocabulary, and asking and answering questions (Azzan, 2001). Therefore, most of the teachers concentrate on asking students to read aloud and answer questions orally when teaching reading lessons or translating new English words in that lesson into Arabic (Ba-Matraf, 1997). This overemphasis on teaching pronunciation sometimes produces students who can decode and pronounce words but fail to comprehend what they read (Yuill and Oakhill, 1991).

According to Battah (1999), some studies on teachers of EFL in some Yemeni schools have revealed that many of these teachers are unaware of reading comprehension as a cognitive skill. Likewise, a study conducted by Ba-Matraf (1997) provides some insights on the use of reading instruction on three secondary schools. Her study showed that students did not know how, when and why reading skills and strategies should be utilised. Teachers did not inform students about the nature of the strategies they use and how these strategies could be used to improve their reading

comprehension. Accordingly, students did not know why these strategies were used, or how and when they should be used (ibid).

Azzan (2001) states that the types of tasks that are set for English reading classes frequently reflect artificial objectives that demand more attention to the grammatical aspects which are rarely needed in daily life. Students are simply requested to stand up in class and read aloud while the teacher constantly interrupts, correcting pronunciation or explaining a word. After the comprehension passage is read aloud, the teacher once again poses questions from the textbook usually to students he/she feels are not paying attention. The teacher finally gives the correct answers, careful to show he/she already knew them without consulting the teachers' guide and then moves on to the next section of the textbook. The answers are usually whole sentences extracted in their entirety from the reading passage. Herein lies the incentive for students to memorise and reproduce texts without much understanding.

Given this situation, the most important skills in reading, such as skimming, scanning, inferring meaning and the like are not focused upon and developed with such an approach. Intensive and extensive types of reading are neglected for the rote memorisation of grammatical rules without any application on how students can use them to get meaning from the text.

Ironically, reading in English has the most pivotal role in university education, yet secondary students are not trained to read effectively (Azzan, 2001). Instead of being encouraged to understand and generate new ideas from what they have understood, they are simply taught to repeat almost verbatim ideas from the text (Ba-Matraf, 1997). Students, therefore, mostly develop amazing skills of memorisation and lack other skills like synthesis and appreciation.

Unfortunately, the inclusion of extensive reading passages in the English textbooks has only recently taken place with CECY. Previous textbooks had factual

passages with comprehension questions that only demanded regurgitation of facts from the passage. The new extensive reading sections in **CECY** allow the students to read for pleasure, yet even these passages tend to be skipped by teachers. Teachers are more interested in drilling grammar and other skills that are usually tested in final examinations (Azzan, 2001).

Such an approach has a negative bearing on the reading ability of many students learning English. In Yemeni schools, according to Azzan (2001), reading is used as an end by itself rather than a means to an end. In other words, the skill of reading does not receive the importance which it deserves. As a result of emphasising the grammatical aspects in the teaching of reading, EFL teachers in most Yemeni schools fail in their role to monitor the students' progress in reading comprehension skills and strategies (*ibid*). This may partially indicate why a majority of Yemeni students do not develop appropriate reading skills and strategies, though they are in contact with the target language for six years of schooling.

The consequence of such a way of teaching is that the students do not develop an adequate control of comprehension strategies. It has been stated by Ba-Matraf (1997) and Bil-Fagih (1999) that students at the secondary level cannot adjust their reading styles to their reading purposes; to them every reading task calls for thorough reading from the beginning to the end of the text. These findings support what Mikulecky (1985) suggests about L2 readers. According to Mikulecky, L2 readers are trapped in a feeling of security, in that they believe reading every word leads to better understanding of the text.

1.2.9 Yemeni Studies on Reading

Studies conducted by educators to improve reading in Yemeni students (at secondary and tertiary levels), show that reading is considered as an important

component of English language teaching in Yemen. In this respect, reading has been the focus of many studies in the country. Most of these studies concentrate on the educational aspect of reading with hardly any on cognitive and psychological aspects. The following is a brief review of some of those studies conducted on reading. They are discussed starting from the least recent.

AlKaff (1985) conducted a study for analysing the approaches used in developing English reading strategies at secondary school level. His study focused on evaluating the reading texts used in secondary schools in Yemen. The texts had been evaluated from the point of view of their suitability to the Yemeni situation, their exploitability for developing reading strategies, their authenticity and their readability with respect to the target audience. The results of his study indicated that the texts were structurally graded but they lacked authenticity. In terms of exploitability, the texts were, to a great extent, exploitable but no use was made of that in exercises. The author concluded that the tasks given at schools aimed at measuring outcomes of reading rather than helping students to develop reading strategies to achieve authentic purposes.

Yar Mohamed (1992) conducted a detailed analysis of the reading strategies used by Yemeni students who learned English at the tertiary level. The study investigated two related aspects of the reading process: reading problems arising in the creation of meaning as far as the systemic and schematic knowledge is concerned and reading solution as given by the reader. Reading strategies were investigated through a five-stage design where a different instrument was used in each stage. The data instruments used in her study were questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, cloze/recall tasks and verbal protocols. Her study consisted of 100 tertiary level students, coming from two different disciplines, namely, education and engineering. The results of her study presented a picture of the strategies the readers used in

reading texts in Arabic and in English in the form of some twenty-four different strategies, which were categorised as problem identifying and problem-solving ones.

Al-Mekhlafi (1995) investigated the effect of background knowledge on reading comprehension in English language at the university level. Forty students, majoring in English at Sana'a University in Yemen, were involved in the study. They were further divided into two groups based on their scores in two reading courses. These groups were labelled successful and unsuccessful readers and each group consisted of 20 subjects. All the two groups read two passages (familiar and unfamiliar) of 343 words each. Then they were given two recall tests. The performance of the 40 subjects in both groups was measured in both passages to examine the effect of background knowledge on reading comprehension in general. The results of the study showed that background knowledge had a great effect on reading comprehension as the subjects' performance on the familiar passage was much better than their performance on the unfamiliar passage.

Ba-Matraf (1997) investigated the techniques used for teaching basic English reading comprehension skills namely, skimming, scanning, getting the main idea of a text, and guessing meaning from the context. She aimed at finding out the teachers' awareness of these skills and how they helped their students to practice and develop these skills. Twenty secondary school teachers participated in the study. The data was collected using structured observation checklist, semi-structured interviews, and teachers' lesson-plans. The results revealed that most of the reading techniques used by teachers focused on practicing pronunciation and vocabulary, while less practice was given to skimming, scanning and identifying the main idea from supporting details. The results also revealed that teachers did not use direct and explicit instruction in practicing reading skills. It was noticed that teachers in these schools did not inform their students about the nature of reading techniques and how students can use these techniques in order to enhance their reading comprehension. The study recommend

the use of explicit teaching of reading skills through which students can build up a repertoire of reading skills and be aware of using such skills while reading.

Al-Tamimi (1999) investigated the effect of authentic texts on developing secondary students' reading comprehension. Eighty Yemeni students participated in the study. The participants were divided into two groups, experimental group and control group. The experimental group was taught through using a number of authentic texts while the control group was taught through using no-authentic texts. The results revealed that the experimental group scored significantly higher in post test, which supported the study hypothesis, namely authentic texts affected reading comprehension positively.

Bil-Fagih (1999) conducted a study on the frequent problems that face Yemeni secondary school students in reading comprehension namely to follow the organisation of a text and identify antecedents and references, to use their own words in answering questions about the text and to guess the meaning of difficult words through context. Two questionnaires were used in order to get some feedback about teachers' and students' perceptions towards the area under investigation. The subject of her study consisted of 120 students who were in their final year of the secondary school and 15 teachers who taught English to those students. The analysis of the data revealed that the students had exhibited glaring weaknesses in basic reading skills such as skimming, scanning and guessing the meaning of new words from their context. They had also manifested serious deficiencies in discourse-based reading skills such as recognising text organisation and identifying cohesive devices.

Alwalss (2000) conducted a study to investigate the reading skills and strategies adopted by Yemeni students at university level. The study also investigated the relation between language competence and comprehension on one hand, and between comprehension and reading speed on the other. One hundred and twenty six

students participated in the study. The study was conducted in two faculties, Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education, Sana'a University. With regard to language competence and comprehension, the results of the study revealed that students of faculty of Arts performed well in reading comprehension simply because they had better command and higher proficiency in language ability. The researcher found that speed has no effect on comprehension while language ability has direct influence on both speed and comprehension.

Azzan's (2001) study was concerned with analysing students' reading comprehension monitoring strategies. The study investigated the use of reading comprehension monitoring strategies among groups of good and poor readers, urban and rural students, boys and girls. The study also investigated whether good readers activate appropriate schema better than poor readers. Seventy eight second year students, studying English as a major subject at two departments of English at Sana'a and Mahweet Faculties of Education, under Sana'a University, participated in the study. The results of the study revealed that in the monitoring strategies both the groups demonstrated dependence on orthography to varying degree. The group of good readers tended to be relatively less dependent on orthography to decipher the meaning of the linguistic units, whereas, the poor readers showed greater dependence on individual word units which betrayed a lack of improved word processing strategies. In terms of style of reading, both groups fell prey to the practice received in the pre-university stages. Both the groups were pathetically prone to reading aloud and were unused to the healthy habits of silent reading. This disturbing phenomenon, as stated by Azzan, has obvious implications for improvising reading instruction in Yemen.

Albadri (2001) investigated the reading comprehension problems faced by the first year medical students in the faculty of medicine. Fifty medical students at Aden University were involved in the study. The data was collected using a questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire and the interview surveyed related to medical re