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Master Thesis

Developing Speaking Skills through Reading Graded Readers

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We hereby approve that the thesis by

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Developing Speaking Skills through Reading Graded Readers

be accepted in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the degree of

M.A. in TEFL

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the role of graded readers in developing students' speaking skills as well as the possible activities meant to develop the students' speaking skills through reading graded readers. The primary purpose of the study was not only to report and inform about all these, but also to investigate and find beneficial outcomes of these practices and attitudes.

The research was carried out in the Experimental English Classes (EEC) in the Department of English Programs (DEP) at the American University of Armenia (AUA). Two groups participated in the experiment: the experimental, which received the treatment by reading the books of graded readers series in addition to the textbook and the control group which used only their textbooks.

The study comprises the quantitative data. The data were collected through a self assessment checklist and pre-and post interviews (Oral Proficiency Type Interview). The data collected from the pre- and post-tests were analyzed by implementing the Mann-Whitney and Wilcoxon tests, in order to compare the test results of both groups.

The findings of the study indicated that graded readers are valid tools for developing students' speaking skills. Furthermore, the results of the analyses of the post interview and the self assessment checklist confirmed that learners had positive attitude towards the graded readers, as they provided the students with a lot of interactive activities which created an environment that was fun, enjoyable and effective for improving the students' speaking skills.

Chapter One: Introduction

"Reading is private. It is a mental, or cognitive, process which involves a reader in trying to follow and respond to a message from a writer who is distant in space and time".

(Alderson, 1984, pp. 2-4)

Reading is a cognitive ability residing in the reader that leads him/her to connect words and references. It is a process of predicting, inferring, synthesizing the meanings, ideas and values of the author by interpreting, perceiving and reconciling through one's values, expectations, attitudes and beliefs (Kern, 2000). It could be said that reading is an interaction between the writer and the reader. It is an interaction through which the reader becomes socialized into certain beliefs and value systems that reign in a society. Elley (1991) states that reading is not only a way to receive information, pleasure, and stimulus of imagination but it is also a good way to develop students' speaking skills.

As current teaching methodology emphasizes move towards more communicative approach, the demand and amount of speaking practice has increased and speaking has become one of the most vital aims for learning a foreign language. Many educators state that learners should learn to speak in a foreign language by interacting with others because speaking itself is an interactive process that allows learners to be active and creative in receiving, producing and processing input. This might be done with the help of books which then provide with various activities which can be a good way to develop students' speaking skills (Valette, 1973). Readers engaged in texts can begin to notice how words are used in context, how frequently certain words appear, or how some words convey different nuances of meaning in different contexts (Elley and Mangubhai, 2002).

Hence, the aim of the present study was to investigate the role of reading graded readers in developing students' speaking skills as well as to discuss the interactive activities that can develop students' speaking skills through reading graded readers.

Willingham, Labor, Morgan, & Reesman (1998) state that there are many ways that can develop students' speaking skills through reading materials. One of the many ways to improve students speaking skills is to help the students learn the language in real-life situations, use authentic materials or sing a song, read a poem or rhymes. In addition to this, discussions, imitations, interactions also help the students gradually develop their speaking skills.

The next chapter of this study presents a review of theoretical concerns along with the research questions that have been pursued during the study. In chapter 3 the discussion is continued by describing the tools that have been used for obtaining the data. In chapter 4 the findings of the study are presented and discussed. In the final one; chapter 5, the conclusions drawn from the findings are offered. The limitations, implications of the study and possible suggestions for further studies are also pointed out in the fifth chapter.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The aim of this research is to review the literature related to the role of graded readers in the development of speaking skills.

The following are the steps which construct the chapter

- Background and the aim of speaking

- Reading as a means of developing students' speaking skills

- Types of reading materials

- Graded Readers: the definition and the goals of graded readers

- Selection of Graded Readers

- Benefits and outcomes of graded readers

- Some drawbacks of graded readers

- Activities that can develop students' speaking skills through graded readers

- Interactions that can Develop Students' Speaking Skills through Graded Readers

- Interactions and their advantages

- Description of the oral proficiency interview

- Research questions

Background and the Aim of Speaking

As current teaching methodology moves towards more communicative approach, the demand and amount of speaking practice has increased and speaking has become one of the most vital aims for learning a foreign language (Miller & Aldred, 2000). Therefore, a lot of researchers

believe that "to most people mastering the art of speaking is the single most important aspect of learning a second or foreign language" (Nunan, 1991, as cited in Sze, 1995, p. 1).

Nunan (2003), states that speaking itself is an interactive process which suggests that learners be active and creative in receiving, producing and processing input. According to Nunan (2003), speaking is the oral production of various genres which includes reciting poetry to the audience, taking part in debates, participating in different discussions, and etc. Speaking in a foreign language requires that learners be able to express their thoughts and feelings in that language (Alderson & Bachman, 2004; Shumin, 1997). Freeman, (2000) believes that speaking in the target language requires such skills as "knowing when and how to say what to whom" (p. 121).

On the other hand Celce-Murcia, (2000) views speaking as the easy skill because learners may use "demonstration, repetition and various other strategies" (Celce-Murcia, 2000, p. 165) which, they think may help the learners make their output easily understandable.

In contrast, other educators consider speaking to be the most challenging skill. According to Vivanco (2009, p. 269) "the greatest difficulty that the learners encounter in attempting to speak is not the multiplicity of sounds, words, phrases and discourse forms that characterize a language, but rather the interactive nature of communication". Vivanco (2009) adds that in order to speak and to be understood by native/non native speakers of the target language, the speaker should master some essential elements of that language; grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, pronunciation and etc.

Another challenge is that while speaking the time is too limited, that is to say, there is no time to plan, edit and revise because speaking is done in a "real-time" (Nunan, 2003, p. 48). In addition to many challenges, Nunan (2003) believes that it is tricky to boost foreign language learners speaking because they have very little chance to use the target language in an authentic environment. Sze (1995) adds that teachers' dominance in classroom talk and degree of control over the students may give them limited opportunity to use the target language in classroom.

The issue how to overcome the above mentioned problems hindering the language learners has challenged linguists for many decades. Nunan (2003) believes that in order to speak in a foreign language one should be able to use grammar, vocabulary, fluency and pronunciation properly. Besides he/she should be able to produce meaningful spoken utterances needed for real life contexts. Thus, it becomes apparent that learners need English speaking environment which requires interaction.

Graves's (2008) study proves that teaching methods which require learners' active participation promote language learning. Therefore, Graves (2008) believes that the best way to engage learners actively in learning is to design and provide them with different learner-centered, speaking activities and let them work collaboratively. In other words, teachers should create proper classroom environment and provide learners with real life communication activities and meaningful tasks that will help them express their ideas and thoughts in that language (Alderson & Bachman, 2004; Graves, 2008). Sze (1995) believes that "tasks that promote conversation therefore facilitate language acquisition" (p. 4). Thus, students should participate in their learning as much as possible.

Reviewing the literature it becomes clear that speaking plays crucial role in language learning. As current teaching methodology emphasizes move towards more communicative approach where the speaking is in the centre of communication, it becomes essential for teachers to use competent methods that would create a proper setting and maximize the opportunity for learners to use the target language in discourse.

From the above mentioned literature it can be stated that developing genuine speaking skills within the constraints of classroom environment is one of the teacher's challenges. The elements of the language, the phonology, the lexicon and the structures can be acquired from books, tapes, programmed materials and the like. But their acquisition does not automatically lead to communicative competence. Oral communication must be nurtured and taught**.** This might be

done with the help of books provided with various activities which can be a good way to develop students' speaking skills (Valette, 1973).

Hence, readers engaged in texts can begin to notice how words are used in context, how frequently certain words appear, or how some words convey different nuances of meaning in different contexts. There is growing evidence that reading does, in fact, support this process. Elley and Mangubhai (2002) conducted a two-year study of 400 learners at school, in which an experimental group using a reading material showed better word recognition than the control group; after two years, the experimental group was more proficient in oral and written production as well. In addition to this, reading materials are an excellent staring point to enrich students' vocabulary which in its turn can contribute to the development of the students' speaking skills.

Types of Reading Materials

For any program in reading, regardless of the target language, there are essentially three options for materials: (1) "authentic" texts (i.e., texts that are written by native speakers for other native speakers, with no FL pedagogical motives in mind) that happen to fall into the linguistic range of the learners; (2) "paraphrased" texts or graded readers (i.e., authentic texts that have been adapted for FL pedagogical use, usually by paraphrasing where necessary to restrict the vocabulary to a pre-determined level, such as 1200 or 1800 words); or (3) "constructed" texts (i.e., stories written specifically for extensive reading, with a pre-determined vocabulary in mind; usually in a culturally familiar genre such as the romance or detective narrative) (Day & Bamford,1998).

Graded Readers: The Definition and the Goals of Graded Readers

Graded Readers are one of the types of reading materials, which are also called paraphrased texts. They are simplified stories and narratives and are usually easier to read than

factual pre-academic texts. These simplified stories are based on a controlled set of vocabulary words (the most frequently used) and grammatical structures to ensure text readability at the appropriate level of the learner. It is worth noting here that Michael West, the author of the General Service List (1953), is also one of the early advocates of simplified literary texts, or graded readers.

Waring (1997, p. 1) states "Graded Reading has a specific purpose: for readers to read enough material at one level to develop sufficient fluency and other forms of linguistic knowledge to enable them to move to a higher level. The ultimate goal of Graded Reading is to do so much of it that the learner can deal with native level texts fluently".

When chosen at the right level, these kinds of texts first are accessible and relatively easy to read. This may encourage students to realize that reading in English is not always a negative experience and may help change their attitude to reading in the foreign language.

Secondly, using stories and narratives to read and learn English has important psychological benefits. Most graded readers, because they are based on popular literary fiction, have an intrinsic narrative interest that textbook passages lack, and they provide background and world knowledge about the setting, events, and other aspects of the story. Being rich thematically, they are also an excellent source of discussions.

Hence, the whole idea of graded readers is not only to help learners gradually improve their reading skills but also to enhance their speaking skills by negotiating with each other, discussing the texts, and being involved in a lot of interactions such as role plays, pair, group works and other activities.

Selection of Graded Readers

It is very important to select the right book in the classroom. In order to evaluate the quality of the graded readers to be used effectively and serve the teaching and learning process,

the following criteria should be taken into consideration (Anderson & Armbruster, 1986, pp. 151-162).

The level of the story	"The level of the graded readers should be suitable for the students' level and should identify clearly the kinds of students which level will best fit".
Language difficulty	"Language difficulty should also be considered seriously. It should correspond to the language level students are provided with in their learning environment; otherwise it would be difficult for them to follow and comprehend and hence benefit from the graded reader itself".
Writing quality	"Accuracy is a very important factor. A graded reader ought to be a trustworthy source of language that should be presented in a correct manner".
The Presentation of the Reader	"This is very important to encourage students to overcome the difficulty of some texts. It also provides them with meaningful illustrations which should be exact and dependable".
	"This is a helpful device for students to get an overall idea about the whole content before they start the reading which will give them an opportunity to decide the pace and manner of

The Summary of the Reader	their reading. It will also help them decide whether to read the story or change it"
Age	Another important factor for selecting graded readers is considering the age of the students and selecting the right book appropriate for their age. (McConaughy, 1980).

Besides the above mentioned criteria Briggs & Forbes (2009) state that the texts should be related to students' interests, aim and background. Cultural factors are also important when choosing books for non-native speakers. Some children's books may contain references to situations, objects and experiences that are unfamiliar to non-native speakers (Alexander; Jetton & Kulikowich, 1995).

Hence, from the above mentioned criteria it can be concluded that the subject matter of a book is an important factor and that it is the teacher's responsibility to take into account all the criteria mentioned above while choosing a graded reader for his/her class.

Benefits and Advantages of Graded Readers

Reading graded readers has its benefits, outcomes and advantages. For the students who are not English native speakers and are not in English speaking community, reading can increase their exposure to the language. Besides improving the reading and speaking skills the students enrich their stock of vocabulary provided by graded readers. Bell (2002) states that graded readers motivate learners or students to read, build their confidence and develop their speaking skills when discussing the texts.

Another benefit of graded readers is helping the students to read extended texts. In traditional classrooms, students read short texts. Teachers teach them vocabulary, grammatical points, reading skills and strategies. However, when these EFL students enter the University, they are required to read for academic purposes which require reading longer texts. Extensive

reading such as reading graded readers help develop students' confidence and ability in facing longer texts in their university study (Maley, 2000).

In addition to the above mentioned benefits there are also many other advantages of using graded readers. The first advantage is the ease of selection or a variety of topics as there are many different graded readers to be selected in the market from different publishers.

The second is the ease of comprehension. Graded readers are written so that they can easily be understood when readers read them at the right level of their reading competency in a foreign language (Day and Bamford 1998).

The third advantage is that graded readers promote learner independence. Reading is necessary for learner independence. Students do not need to do it in a limited time or do it in a classroom. Graded readers encourage students to read independently.

The next advantage of graded readers is that they provide extensive language practice. Graded readers give the students much more extended context. The things that are in textbooks are short. They do not provide students enough contexts. Graded readers offer students the opportunity to read the same books to meet the same kinds of sentence structure, vocabulary again and again.

The last point is that graded readers can facilitate the development of speaking skills with the help of discussions of the texts or answering questions concerning the texts (William, 1986).

Some Drawbacks of Graded Readers

Even though graded readers have several advantages, they have some drawbacks too. The first problem is that graded readers are perceived as inauthentic texts because they are changed with the purpose of making them easier for the students.

The second problem is concerned with simplification. Simplifications by simplifying sentences by removing difficult words or changing passive voice into active voice can make the language and the content more difficult to interpret because you have to take away the context that the meaning depends on (Day & Bamford, 2002).

Activities that can develop Students' Speaking Skills through Graded Readers

There are a lot of effective activities which can develop students' speaking skills through reading graded readers. Some of them are presented above.

- "Jumbled chapter titles" where the students are given strips of paper with the chapter titles on to students in pairs or groups. They decide the best order for the chapters and think about the possible story. Then they discuss and compare the answers with the other groups and look in the book to see who was closest.

- "Guess the story from the cover" where the teacher shows only the cover of the book to the students and asks them to guess what the text is going to be about. This can be done either in groups, in pairs or individually. This is an effective way to enhance their speaking skills when they discuss, negotiate and express their ideas about the cover of the books with each other.

- "Picture descriptions" where the teacher enlarges or cuts the pictures or photos from the reader and uses them to familiarize the students with the main characters. Students can read the introduction page or the back of the book to guess who is who while discussing.

- "Comic Strips" where the teacher chooses a suitable chapter or chapters that can be broken down into chunks to make a comic strip. The students are encouraged then to be creative with the characters and try to speak as if they were the characters.

- "Radio plays" where in groups or pairs the students select part of the book to make into a radio play. Students are assigned character roles and one is the narrator. The students are

again encouraged to really get into the roles of the character they are playing and be creative as much as possible.

- "Horoscopes" where at an appropriate stage in the plot development, students discuss horoscopes for the characters predicting their future.

- "In the character's shoes" where the students role-play an interview with one of the characters. The students playing the roles of the characters must try to put themselves in the characters' shoes. Again another effective activity which can develop students' speaking skills (Waring, 1997).

- "Discussion" where a discussion can be held for various reasons. The students may aim to arrive at a conclusion, share ideas about an event, or find solutions in their discussion groups.

- "Simulations" which are very similar to role-plays. What makes simulations different than role plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. For instance, if a student is acting as a singer, she brings a microphone to sing and so on (Crookal & Oxford, 1990).

- "Information Gap" where the students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that other partner does not have and the partners will share their information. Information gap activities serve many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information. Also, each partner plays an important role because the task cannot be completed if the partners do not provide the information the others need. This activity can also serve as an effective way of developing students' speaking skills.

- "Brain Storming" were the students can produce ideas in a limited time. Depending on the context, either individual or group brainstorming is effective and learners generate ideas quickly and freely. The good characteristic of brainstorming is that the students are

not criticized for their ideas so students will be open to sharing new ideas (Kayi & Hayriye, 2006).

- "Storytelling" where the students summarize a tale or story they heard from somebody beforehand, or they may create their own stories to tell their classmates. Story telling fosters creative thinking. It also helps students express ideas in the format of beginning, development, and ending, including the characters and setting a story has to have.

- "Interviews" where the students can conduct interviews on selected topics with various people. The interviews can be done based on the topics of the graded readers.

- "Story Completion" where a teacher starts to tell a story, but after a few sentences he or she stops narrating. Then, each student starts to narrate from the point where the previous one stopped. Each student is supposed to add from four to ten sentences. Students can add new characters, events, descriptions and so on (Byrne, 1986).

Interactions that can develop Students' Speaking Skills through Graded Readers

Willingham; Labor; Morgan; & Reesman (1998) state that there are interactions with the help of which the above mentioned activities applied to graded readers can be carried out and which can better help in the development of the students' speaking skills. One of the many ways to improve students speaking skills is to help the students learn the language in real-life situations, use authentic materials or sing a song, read a poem or rhymes, dialogues, choral revision, chants.

 Hence, to acquire communicative competence students must be engaged in not only in speaking activities but also listening comprehension, reading comprehension, and self-expression in speaking and writing. For the communication activities, the main concerns are developing student motivation to speak and increasing fluency and ease of expression. Immediate correction of errors is avoided for it might inhibit student desire to speak (Bamford & Day, 2004).

There are some principles with the help of which the teacher can help the students develop their speaking skills through reading. It is important for the teacher to plan speaking tasks that involve negotiation for meaning. Moreover, it is important to give students practice with both fluency and accuracy while discussing the texts, then to provide opportunities for students to talk by using group work or pair work (Nunan, 2003).

Jacobs and Hall (2002) state that the following interactions applied to graded readers can serve as an effective tool to develop students' speaking skills. One of the interactions is group work which creates group responsibility among learners where the students support each other, e.g. weak learners do not usually have sufficient vocabulary, they are unsure of their speaking abilities, cannot express themselves well, they understand the text only partly, and they can be helped by their stronger peers.

Another type of interaction is pair work (Brophy, 1998). Putting two learners together means that they have more opportunities to use the English language while speaking. As with group work, the learners feel responsible for the result of their cooperation and start to learn how to negotiate their ideas and arguments.

In addition to the above mentioned interactions role play may be one of the most interesting and useful interaction for promoting speaking because it allows the learners to practice the target language before they can use it in a real environment (Nunan, 2003). The role play creates real world situations and allows learners to take on the roles of others, explore their own feelings, attitudes and values (Cherif &Verma, 1998). Since role play technique involves representation of realistic situations (Magos & Politi, 2008) it may provoke the students' willingness to speak in a target language by providing them with a chance, reason and need to speak (Kodotchigova, 2002). Krish (2010) states "role play can improve learners' speaking skills in any situation" (p. 3).

Stephen (1997) states that role play is very important in teaching speaking because it gives students an opportunity to practice speaking in different social contexts and in different social roles. In addition, it also allows students to be creative and to put themselves in another person's place for a while. Role plays are ideal activities in which students can show their creativity. They aim to stimulate a conversation situation in which students may find themselves and give themselves an opportunity to practice and develop their speaking skills.

Thus, from the above mentioned reasons it can be concluded that role play along with the above mentioned interactions applied to graded readers can serve as good tools for developing students' speaking skills in the target language.

Interactions and their Advantages

After having given a brief literature about the interactions, the advantages of the latter are discussed.

Advantages of role play can be summarized as follows, it may:

- Reduce anxiety level, since "learning becomes a role play" (Krashen, 1982, cited in Vivanco, 2009, p. 6).

- Encourage communication among learners by providing them chance and need to speak.

- Bring a very wide variety of experience into the classroom to train students speaking skills (Kodotchigova, 2002).

- Create natural environment for acquiring a new language (Krashen, 1985, cited in Vivanco, 2009).

- Create a nonthreatening setting and help shy learners overcome personal limitations connected with speaking (Kodotchigova, 2002; Wachs, 1997).

- Motivate and engage the students in learning process (Tyers, 2002)

Advantages of group work and pair work can be summarized as follows, they may:

- Enable the students to talk a lot because it increases the time for each student to practise speaking in one lesson.

- Help students avoid losing their face in front of a whole class, and thus it makes students courageous to speak (Atkinson, 1993).

- Help the students perform their abilities more readily in small groups than in a whole class, i.e. students of different levels can participate.

- Help the students learn work cooperatively.

- Help the students develop interpersonal skill; fostering development of tolerance, mutual respect and harmony (Harmer, 1991).

Description of the Oral Proficiency Type Interview (OPI)

The methodology part includes an Oral Proficiency Type Interview taken from the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages). Yoffe states that the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) is a criterion-referenced assessment instrument. It is a test that measures how well the student speaks and uses the language effectively and appropriately in real-life situations by comparing his/her performance with the criteria and level described in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1997).

Thus, the OPI is structured to elicit the best sample of real, communicative language the student can produce. The interview stretches the student's language abilities and pushes the student to his/her limits in the language.

As Oral Proficiency Interview is based on communication, the student may be asked to talk about herself/himself, his/her interests, her/his daily routine, etc. The tester may ask for direct information, descriptions, narrations, or opinions on a familiar subject.

Here are the following criteria which are taken into account while having the Oral Proficiency Type Interview (OPI)

- The functions or global tasks the interviewee performs

- The social contexts and specific content areas in which the interviewee is able to perform them

- The accuracy (i.e., degree to which the message is understood), and

- The type of oral text or discourse the interviewee is capable of producing (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines-Speaking (Revised 1999)).

In sum, during the interview, the tester may ask the student questions about a variety of topics that are of interest to you. The tester may also ask him/her to take part in a role play situation, intended to find out how well you may be able to handle a real-life situation (1997)

Research Questions

Thus, having given a brief overview of the relevant literature, the following research questions are formulated:

1. *Can speaking skills be developed via reading graded readers?*
2. *What are the students' attitudes towards Graded Readers?*

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The chapter describes the methodology of the current study that set out to investigate the students' attitudes towards Graded Readers and the possible ways of developing students' speaking skills through reading Graded Readers. This chapter provides detailed information about the participants, settings, materials used in the study, data collection and the description of the procedure of the study.

Design of Study

The research questions of the study were the following:

1. *Can speaking skills be developed via reading graded readers?*

2. *What are the students' attitudes towards Graded Readers?*

In order to seek answers for the research questions quantitative approach was implemented. Two groups were involved in the experiment; experimental and control groups. The results of the pre and post-tests of the experimental group were compared with the results of the pre and post-tests of the control group to see which group (experimental or control) were more successful; the experimental which conducted the classes with the graded readers or the control group who had classes with their traditional books.

Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in the Experimental English Classes (EEC) Construction Level, Department of English Programs (DEP) at the American University of Armenia (AUA).

The proficiency level of the students was defined as intermediate according to the EEC level division and the criterion used to place these students in this level was a placement test. The participants of the study were 24 students placed in two groups: 5 boys and 7 girls in the experimental group, and 8 girls and 4 boys in the control group. The students' age ranges from

11 to 16. The teacher was also the researcher. The mother tongue of all the participants was Armenian.

The course was provided for 7 weeks of 2011 academic year. The class met 3 times a week in one-hour sessions of English.

Description of Teaching Program
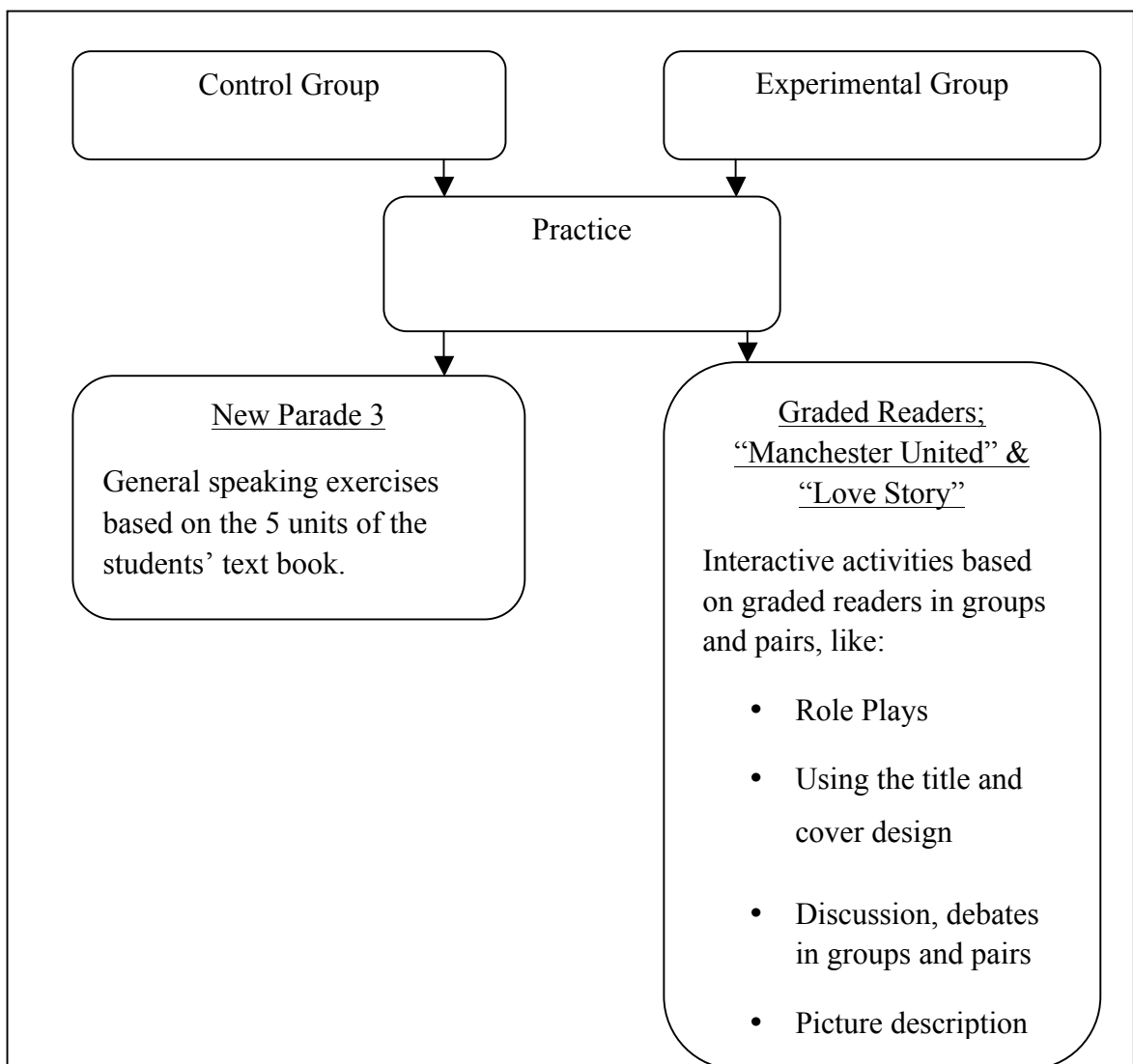
The following chart is a general framework of the research.

Figure 1 Research Program

Procedures for the Experiment

Two groups (experimental and control) with the same proficiency level and amount of class time were involved in the experiment. The students of both groups were intermediate level students. The researcher conducted the classes in both groups; experimental and control. In the control group the teacher used the textbook New Parade 3 and in the experimental group, in addition to their textbooks, students read graded readers, with the aim of developing their speaking skills. The two graded readers used in the experimental group had the following titles, "Manchester United" (a football team), by Kevin Brophy and "Love Story", by Erich Segal. Both graded readers were for intermediate level students. The class met 3 times a week in one-hour sessions of English.

For the results of the study to be valid the pre and post tests were audio-recorded and saved. The pre and post tests were evaluated independently by two raters the teacher and the co-rater. To insure inter-rater reliability between raters calibration was carried out. For this purpose, the pre test was piloted on five students' of the same level. The teacher and the co-rater used analytical rubric to assess each student's oral proficiency separately and then they calibrated themselves to see to what extent they agreed on their ratings. It should be noted that before conducting a pre test the teacher and the co-rater discussed the rubric and rating approaches.

Materials

Grellet (1981) states that selecting the right book for the learners is vital. The texts must be appropriate to the learners' level. The students need to know that they will not face tasks which are impossible for them to tackle. The texts must be indeed interesting for the learners, and relevant to their life experiences and emotions. In addition, the texts should deal with the theme which will not be offensive or requiring background cultural knowledge which the learners have not achieved so far (Carter & Long, 1991).

Taking into account the students' age, proficiency level and their needs two graded readers were selected. Both books were for intermediate level students. The graded readers enabled the

teacher to create a variety of interactive activities, which motivated the students to speak and express their ideas thus developing their speaking skills. The reading materials were given to the students beforehand so that they could get prepared for the interactive activities prepared by the teacher.

During the first 4 weeks the students read the graded reader "Manchester United" by Kevin Brophy, which was about a football team. The book enabled the students to learn a lot about the history of football and the most successful football players. The book provided a lot of pictures which gave the teacher an opportunity to use them in the class. The pictures were cut by the teacher for picture description purposes which served as an effective way of developing students' speaking skills (Waring 1997). Besides the pictures, the graded reader (Manchester United) gave the teacher an opportunity to create a lot of interactive activities which engaged the students (experimental group) in many discussions and debates both in groups and pairs. At the end of every week the teacher prepared matching exercises on the learnt vocabulary. They were supposed to match the words from their graded readers with the explanations given. The purpose of these matching exercises was to help the students foster the given vocabulary better, which in its turn contributed to the development of their speaking skills.

Another effective activity the book provided was the role play "The Red and the Blue" at the end of the book. The role play consisted of four parts which the students acted out at the end of the forth week. The role play "The Red and the Blue" was about a family who were all fond of football. For carrying out the role play the experimental group was divided into three groups. In each group there were four students. Through role play activities the students in the experimental group learnt how to express their ideas, opinions and how to interact with each other.

Both graded readers; "Manchester United" and "Love Story" had 7 short units. During the last 3 weeks the students did a lot of interactive activities based on the second graded reader "Love Story" by Erich Segal. First they had the activity "guess from the cover" both in groups and pairs

where the students were supposed to guess what the text was about. Then the teacher provided the students with other activities such as jumbled titles, simulations, role plays, in the character's shoes. The purpose of all those activities provided by the graded readers was to develop the students' speaking skills. Like "Manchester United" "Love Story" had also pictures in it which were later again used for picture description purposes.

During the term the control group had the exercises from the 5 units provided by their textbook (New Parade 3). Unlike the control group, which had speaking activities provided by New Parade 3, the experimental group was exposed to activities based on the graded readers (Manchester United and Love Story); activities with a lot of interactive activities and interactions which aimed to develop students' speaking skills.

Data Collection/Instruments

The present study contains only quantitative data. In this research, data were collected through the following instruments:

- Self assessment checklist acting as an attitudinal questionnaire (Appendix A)
- Oral-Pre and Post-Tests based on the guidelines of OPI (taken from the ACTFL (American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages) for interviewing purposes) (Appendix B)
- Oral Proficiency Type Interview (OPI) guideline/rubric for the low intermediate level (Appendix C)

Self - Assessment Checklist acting as an Attitudinal Questionnaire

Self-assessment is the process of critically reviewing the quality of one's own performance and provision (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002).

For the purposes of finding out the students' attitudes to graded readers and to what extent the type of interactive activities helped the students in the experimental group promote

their speaking skills a self- assessment checklist acting as an attitudinal questionnaire was designed.

The students were given the self-assessment checklist to complete at the end of the last week of the experiment. Because of the unfamiliarity of the participants with the attitudinal self assessment checklist culture, the teacher stayed and assisted them. The self assessment checklist was translated into the Armenian language.

The purpose of the self assessment checklist was explained to the students before its distribution. The participants were also told that their responses would be treated in strict confidentiality and no grammar and structural errors would be considered. Before completing the questionnaires the participants were asked to read carefully and ask questions for clarifications. Besides, there was no set time limit for the completion of the checklist.

The checklist consisted of 8 questions; 4 of which were "Can do" statements with a 5 point Likert scaling grade; 5=Excellent, 4=Good, 3=Adequate, 2=Poor, 1= Not at all which deal with the students' overall evaluation of their speaking abilities. And the rest 4 questions, with a 4 point Likert scaling grade; 4=Strongly Agree, 3=Agree, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree, were designed to look into the students' attitudes towards graded readers and the possible interactive activities that were used to develop the students' speaking skills.

Pre-and Post - Interview

Oral pre-and post-interviews both contained the same types of questions. The oral-pre and post-tests were open - ended questions which were designed to measure the students' speaking skills, vocabulary, fluency, accuracy and proficiency level. All the students were interviewed for 5 to 7 minutes based on the stages of Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). All the data collected were analyzed quantitatively.

The oral-pre-test was carried out on 27 June 2011, during the first week of the class whereas the oral-post-test on 07 August 2011, during the last week of the course. The data were recorded on a CD. The purpose of the recording was to compare the oral-pre and post-tests results and to get an overall idea of their achievement and improvement in speaking. Another reason for recording the oral tests was to trace the questions and answers and to collect the data efficiently.

According to Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) there are four main levels and three sublevels of speaking scales which are rated on 0 to 4 scales (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines-Speaking (Revised 1999)).

Levels: Novice (0 ~ 1) (the student is able to say memorized words or phrases), Intermediate (1 ~ 2) (the student is able to ask and answer simple questions and handle a simple question), Advanced (2 ~ 3) (the student is able to use major time to narrate, describe and handle complicated situations), Superior (3 ~4) (the student is able to talk about global issues and give his or her view point on the issues), Sublevels: Low, Mid, High.

Therefore, as the level of the students both control and experimental was Intermediate there was a need to find out on which Sublevel they were (Low, Mid, High). This was defined with the help of the scoring rubric.

The following criteria were taken into account in designing the scoring rubric; Fluency, accuracy, confidence and performance skills. In sum, there was an Oral Proficiency Type Interview based on the scoring rubric to decide the sublevels of the students. (Appendix A).

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

The present study aimed at looking into the possible ways of developing students' speaking skills through reading graded readers. The chapter provides details on the quantitative analyses of the pre and post interview results and the self assessment checklist and respectively, concludes with a summary of findings. The results of both quantitative data sets aimed at answering the following research questions guiding the study.

1. *Can speaking skills be developed via reading graded readers?*

2. *What are the students' attitudes towards Graded Readers?*

The quantitative data of the current study included the results of the pre-and post-tests for all the participants, and the self assessment checklist for the experimental group of the current study. As has been mentioned in chapter 3 both groups took the pre-test at the beginning of the study and the post-test at the end of the study. The pre-and post-tests were analyzed quantitatively using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS).

The tests were graded by both the teacher and the co-rater. To check the inter-rater reliability and the consistency between the teacher and the co-rater, Cronbach's reliability scale was employed.

For the pre-and post-tests Mann Whitney U and Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests were used to compare the scores obtained from the tests of both groups. The results of the self assessment checklist were analyzed through frequency analyses, where the numbers were converted into percentages.

Inter-Rater Reliability Analysis

Two oral proficiency type interviews (pre and post) were administered by the teacher during the course before and after the treatment. The pre-and post-tests were graded by both the teacher and the co-rater. To establish inter-rater reliability, that is to say, internal consistency of

the scores of the speaking tests (pre and post), statistical analysis was conducted using the Cronbach's Reliability Scale.

Reliability statistics tables provide the following values for Cronbach's alpha. Table 1 shows that the reliability is checked for 2 items (pre-test graded by the teacher, pre-test graded by the co-rater) that make up the scale.

a) Cronbach's alpha for pre-test graded by teacher and pre-test graded by co-rater is equal to 0.99 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Reliability Statistics for pre-test graded by teacher and co-rater

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.990	2

b) Cronbach's alpha for post- test graded by teacher and post -test graded by co-rater is equal to 0.982 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Reliability Statistics for post-test graded by teacher and co-rater

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.982	2

c) Cronbach's alpha for pre-test teacher and pre-test co-rater. (Table 3 shows that reliability is checked for 4 items (pre-tests graded by the teacher and pre-tests graded by the co-rater;

post-tests graded by the teacher and post-test graded by the co-rater) that make up the scale. Post-test teacher and post-test rater are equal to 0.967 (see Table 3).

Table 3: Reliability Statistics for pre-test graded by teacher and co-rater and post test graded by teacher and co-rater

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.967	4

To sum up the reliability tables illustrated above, it can be concluded that the inter-rater reliability was very high and there was a consistency between the rater and the co rater according to Pallant (2007, p. 98) "the values above .98 suggest very good internal consistency reliability for the scale with this sample". As the reliabilities are high, we may base our analyses on scores obtained from pre-and post-tests.

Analyses of Self - Assessment Checklists

This section presents the students' responses and attitudes towards graded readers and the type of interactive activities implemented in developing students' speaking skills. These results relate to the second research question. The participants from the experimental group (12 students) completed the checklist. It was administered at the end of the study, immediately after the post-test. Table 9 and 10 present the statistical results of the responses of the control group.

As mentioned above, the checklist consisted of 8 questions; 4 of which are "Can do" statements with a 5 point Likert scaling grade; 5="Excellent", 4="Good", 3="Adequate", 2="Poor", 1= "Not at all" which deal with the students' overall evaluation of their speaking abilities. And the rest 4 questions, with a 4 point Likert scaling grade; 4=Strongly Agree, 3=Agree, 2=Disagree, 1= Strongly Disagree, were designed to look into the students' attitudes

towards graded readers and the possible interactive activities that were used to develop the students' speaking skills.

The questions were analyzed separately and the results obtained for each of the questions are displayed in charts. (See Table 9/10)

Table 9: Responses of the Self assessment Checklist I

	Questions	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor	Not at all
Q1	I can express myself on a given topic	9.1%	27.3%	63.6%	-	-
Q2	I can describe aspects of my daily life	18.2%	72.2%	9.1%	-	-
Q3	I can use the vocabulary learnt during this course to express my ideas	9.1%	81.8%	-	9.1%	-
Q4	I can express myself easier and with less hesitation than before	18.2%	27.3%	45.5%	9.1%	-

Table 10: Responses of the Self assessment Checklist II

	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q5	I can speak English better than before due to Graded Readers	27.3%	63.6%	9.1%	-
Q6	The different types of Interactions (role play, group work and pair work) helped me be more creative and active	9.1%	72.2%	18%	-

Q7	Graded Readers helped me enrich my vocabulary	45.5%	45.5%	9.1%	-
Q8	The books were relevant to my age, needs and English proficiency level	45.5%	27.3%	18.2%	9.1%

The main aim of the first question was to find out the students' responses about their ability to express themselves on a given topic. Table 9 shows that 63.6% of the students in the experimental group think that they were able to express themselves on any given topic adequately.

Question two of the checklist aimed to find out to what extent the students could describe aspects of their daily life. As can be seen from table 9, 72% of the experimental group students thought that the course enabled them to describe aspects of their daily life well. Only the minority of the students which is the 9% thought that it helped them in describing their daily life activities to some extent.

Question three of the checklist aimed at finding out if the students could use the vocabulary learnt during the course to express his/her ideas. The majority of the students; 81%, thought that graded readers helped them enrich their vocabulary. This means that the interactive activities based on the graded readers increased the students' vocabulary in the experimental group which helped them express their ideas and thoughts.

Question four had the aim at finding out if the interactions helped the students to express themselves easier and with less hesitation than before. As can be seen in table 9, the majority of the students that is the 91% (of which 18, 2% excellent, 27, 3% good and 45, 5% adequate) were of the opinion that graded readers were of use to them. Only one 11-year-old student, who formed the 9%, was of the opinion that the term was poorly helpful for him. It should be noted that he was the only young student among his peers. Therefore, it comes to prove the fact that the

choice of the book is very important, as it needs to meet the students' age, needs and English proficiency level.

Question 5 of the checklist was designed to find out if reading the graded readers enabled the students speak English better than before. As can be seen in table 10, sixty three percent of the students of the experimental group thought that graded readers were useful tools which helped in improving their English speaking abilities, while another 27% of the students thought that graded readers were of great use to them. Therefore, from the above results, it can be concluded that the students thought having graded readers during the class of the experimental group helped them in developing their English speaking skills.

Question 6 referred to the respondents to get the answer whether the different types of interactive activities (role play, group work and pair work) provided by the graded readers helped the students be more creative and active. It can be seen in table 10 that the majority of the students which is 81% agreed that graded readers were useful and that the activities and interactions based on the readings helped them be more creative and active. However, 18% thought that graded readers were of no use. This 18% were those students whose age and English proficiency level was low as compared with the other students.

Question 7 was asked to find out if reading graded readers helped the students in the experimental group enrich their vocabulary. As can be seen in table 1, the majority of the students were of the opinion that graded readers were effective tools that helped them enrich their vocabulary. It can be concluded from the results that the matching exercises based on the graded readers were of great use enriching the students' vocabulary.

Question 8 aimed at finding out whether the books were relevant to the students' age, needs and English proficiency level. The majority of the students that is the 72% agreed that the graded readers were greatly relevant to their age, needs and English proficiency level. Only 18% of the students disagreed that the graded readers were useful. Those were the students whose age varied

from the other students in the class and whose English proficiency level was lower than the rest of the class. This again comes to prove that the choice of the book is important.

Thus, taking into account the opinions of the majority of the students, which is the 75%, it can be concluded that the overall effect of the graded readers and the interactive activities on the on the development of the students' speaking skills was good. In addition to this, concluding from the results, it was obvious that graded readers were of great use to the students to enrich their vocabulary and finally it met the students' age, English proficiency level and needs.

Pre-and Post-Test Analyses

The quantitative data for the first research question were obtained through pre- and post-tests, which were administered in both the experimental and control group before and after the treatment. As the sample size of both groups were small (less than 30), non parametric Mann-Whitney U Test and non parametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test were used for between and within group comparison to investigate whether the implementation of graded readers has a beneficial effect on the development of students' speaking skills.

Mann Whitney U Test is used to test the differences between two independent groups on a continuous measure. This test is the non-parametric alternative to the t-test for independent samples. Instead of comparing the means of the two groups, as in the case of t-test, the Mann-Whitney U Test actually compares medians. It converts the scores on the continuous variable to ranks, across the two groups. Then it evaluates if the ranks of two groups differ significantly. As the scores are converted to ranks, the actual distribution of the scores does not matter (Pallant, 2007; Gerber, 2005).

To begin with, it is appropriate to present the means of pre and post test scores. Table 4 suggests that the experimental group has the highest score for the post-test results (150.50) as compared with that of the control group (102.50).

Table 4 - Mean Ranks of the Groups

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Pretest	Experimental	11	14.50	159.50
	Focus	11	8.50	93.50
	Total	22		
Posttest	Experimental	11	13.68	150.50
	Focus	11	9.32	102.50
	Total	22		

Mann -Whitney Test for –between Group Comparisons

Mann-Whitney U Test was used to reveal if there was any significant difference between the performance of the experimental and the control group at the onset of the study. Secondly, the test was performed to show if the improvement of speaking skills of the experimental group was more significant as compared with that of the control group.

To find out if the performance of the experimental and the control groups was similar before the study, Mann-Whitney U Test was performed between the scores of both groups on the interview pre-test scores. Table 5 presents the results.

Table 5: Mann-Whitney Test of pre-tests scores of the control and experimental groups

	pre test
Mann-Whitney U	27.500
Z	-2.168
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.030
Exact Sig.	.028

Table 5 displays a Z value of -2.168 with a significant level of p=0.028 of the pre-test results of both groups (experimental and control) which is less than 0.05. It means that there is a significant difference in pre-test results of both groups in favor of the control group.

To find out if the performance of the experimental and the control groups was similar after the study, Mann-Whitney U Test was performed between the scores of both groups on the interview post-test scores. Table 6 presents the results.

Table 6: Mann-Whitney Test of post-tests scores of the control and experimental groups

	post test
Mann-Whitney U	36.500
Z	-1.577
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.115
Exact Sig.	.116

Table 6 displays a Z value of -1.577 with a significant level of p=.116 of the post-test results of both groups (experimental and control) which is less than 0.05. It means that there is a significant difference in post-test results of both groups in favor of the experimental.

Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests on within Group Comparison

To determine whether the participants of the experimental group have significantly improved their spoken production due to graded readers, Wilcoxon Test was needed. Wilcoxon test was performed on the pre and post achievement tests of each group.

Table 7 displays the results of the analysis of pre and post test scores of the experimental group. It has the Z value of -2.225 with a significance level of p=.026 which is less than 0.05. It means that there is a significant difference between pre and post-test results for the experimental group in favor of post –test.

Table7: Wilcoxon Test Statistics (experimental group)

	posttest – pretest
Z	-2.225[a]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.026

Table 8 depicts the analysis of pre and post test scores of the control group. It shows that the Z value is -2.847 with a significance level of p=0.004 which is less than 0.05. It means that there is a significant difference between pre and post-test results for the control group in favor of post –test.

Table 8: *Wilcoxon Test Statistics (control group)*

	posttest – pretest
Z	-2.847[a]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.004

Effect size of Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests

Effect size of each group is calculated (experimental and control) to measure the magnitude of the treatment effect within each group. Cohen (1998) defines effect size as "small effect, r=.1", "medium effect, r=.3" and "large effect, r=.5" (p. 25). The following formula is used to compute the effect size of the groups: r=Z/square root of N where N=total number of cases.

The effect size of Wilcoxon Test for the experimental group is as follows:

Effect size r=Z/square root of N, where N is a total number of students (cases). So, r=2,847/square root of 22=0, 61.

The effect size of Wilcoxon Test for the control group is as follows:

Effect size r= Z/square root of N, where N is a total number of students (cases). So r=2,225/square root of 22 = 0, 47.

Thus, according to Cohen (1988) Criteria "0.1 small effect", "0.3 = medium effect" and "0.5 = large effect". So, for the control group we have medium effect close to the large one, but for the experimental one we have a large effect size. Hence, it can be concluded that the interactive activities provided by the graded readers were very beneficial for the experimental group, therefore, had a positive impact on their language proficiency.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss what the findings of the study mean and what can be learned from them. In this connection it is also necessary to discuss the limitations in gathering, using and utilizing the date in the scheme of this study, the implications and the suggestions for further research that this study can offer for some areas of inquiry.

Hence, the study was set out to address the following questions:

1. *Can speaking skills be developed via reading graded readers?*

2. *What are the students' attitudes towards Graded Readers?*

Aims and Procedures of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the activities provided by the graded readers in developing speaking skills. Moreover, it set out to investigate the attitudes of the students' towards graded readers in the experimental group and the possible ways that were used to develop students' speaking skills through reading graded readers. Thus, the primary purpose of the study was not only to report and inform about all these, but also to investigate and find beneficial outcomes of these practices and attitudes. To achieve this purpose, the present study was carried out over one EEC term. Two groups participated in the current study, the control and the experimental group. The researcher used the same teaching program with one difference; the difference was the use of graded readers followed by different interactions and activities in the experimental group, while the control group used their textbooks.

To collect data the pre-and post tests and a self-assessment checklist acting as an attitudinal questionnaire were used. All the data were analyzed in relation to the research questions.

Summary of Findings

The research findings are summarized in accordance with the research questions.

1. *Can speaking skills be developed via reading graded readers?*

2. *What are the students' attitudes towards Graded Readers?*

According to the findings (the oral pre and post tests), both the experimental and the control groups had significant improvement in speaking. The quantitative data revealed that both groups performed better in the post test.

The results gained from Mann Whitney U Test which aimed at finding out if the performance of the experimental and the control groups was similar before and after the study indicated that there was a significant difference in pre-test results of both groups in favor of the control group and a significant difference in the post test results in favor of the experimental group.

The results obtained from Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests, which aimed at finding out whether the participants of the experimental group have significantly improved their spoken production due to the graded readers, indicated the same results as Mann Whitney U Test.

Hence the results gained from both Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests and Mann Whitney U Test indicated that there was a significant improvement in the post test results in favor of the experimental.

It is worth mentioning that although both groups (the experimental and the control) performed better in the post test the effect size numbers revealed that the experimental group had large effect size as compared with the control which had medium effect close to large.

Hence, it can be concluded that the interactive activities provided by the graded readers were very beneficial for the experimental group, than the traditional exercises done in the control group.

The results obtained from the post test support the similar study done by Elley & Mangubhai (2002) in which the experimental group using graded readers showed better word recognition than the control group (Chapter 2).

All in all, Graded Readers proved to be a valid tool for developing students' speaking skills, as they can offer a variety of interactive activities. The students favored all interactions, but there is a need to mention that the students mostly liked role plays, in which they had a lot of improvisation which in its turn helped them develop their creativity greatly (Cherif &Verma, 1998).

One issue that needs to be emphasized is that the activities based on their graded readers made the students become very artistic which supports the idea of Bailey (1994).

That the students liked Graded Readers was obvious from the results of their attitudes gained from the self assessment checklist. They were all willing to bring interesting pictures, postcards, songs related to the reading materials. On the students' initiative songs were included into the class activities. One of the songs was "We are the Champions". This was also a good way to develop their speaking skills along with vocabulary and fluency.

Hence, the current study showed that Graded Readers had a positive effect on students' achievement in improving their speaking skills. The results of the post interview and the self assessment checklist indicated that students improved not only their speaking but also their creativity, self expression and vocabulary.

Limitations of the Research

The first limitation of this study was that this study was conducted within one term (10 weeks). Another limitation is that the current study is not in a large-scale: it included only 22 students. Thus, the findings of this research are limited to AUA and its results cannot be generalized to other educational institutions.

The third limitation that needs to be pointed out is that since the study was limited to intermediate level students, it was not possible to see the effectiveness of Graded Readers on the other levels of students.

Implications and Applications

The findings of the current study indicated that graded readers can be used for the development of students' speaking skills. The results obtained both from the pre and post interviews along with the self assessment checklist showed that graded readers helped the students improve their speaking in comparison with the control group.

The study also showed that the students in the experimental group had positive attitudes towards the use of graded readers in their classes.

In sum, there is a need to highlight that graded readers offered many benefits to the teacher and his/her learners. It is a flexible tool which can develop speaking skills, vocabulary and creativity.

Suggestions for Future Research

Several areas are suggested for future research. Taking into account the above mentioned limitations, it is suggested to carry out further research by involving a large number of participants to have more generalized results.

An interesting direction of further research might be to investigate how graded readers can be used to develop students' writing skills.

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