Sami Is a Critical Thinker, but He Is a Striving Reader

د. / فهد بن عبد الله الحربي

جامعة طيبة – المملكة العربية السعودية

ABSTRACT

The aim of this case study is to find how an ESL striving reader can tap into critical thinking and language strategies when working to comprehend narrative and expository texts in a second language. A ten-year-old child, Sami, came from Saudi Arabia six months before meeting the researcher. He was frustrated because his English skills were at a low level, and in particular, because he could speak and read Arabic fluently. Therefore, the researcher wanted to use the skills Sami had as a fluent reader in his first language to assist in teaching him a second language. The researcher determined four strategies that the student could master in his first language and then in his second language. The plan includes more than twenty sessions, and before the sessions started, the student was given a pre-test, and after finishing the sessions, a post-test. The results show that the student's comprehension was improved after finishing the interventions.

KEY WORDS:

Drawing, Story Map, memory table and Word Map

الملخص

الهدف من دراسة الحالة هذه هو معرفة كيف يمكن للقارئ الناشط في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية الاستفادة من التفكير النقدي واستراتيجيات اللغة عند العمل على فهم النصوص السردية والتفسيرية بلغة ثانية. جاء الطفل سامي البالغ من العمر ١٠ سنوات من المملكة العربية السعودية قبل ستة أشهر من مقابلة الباحثة. كان محبطًا لأن مهاراته في اللغة الإنجليزية كانت منخفضة ، وعلى وجه الخصوص ، لأنه كان يستطيع التحدث باللغة العربية وقراءتها بطلاقة. لذلك ، أراد الباحث استخدام المهارات التي يمتلكها سامي في القراءة بطلاقة بلغته الأولى للمساعدة في تعليمه لغة ثانية. حدد الباحث أربع استراتيجيات يمكن للطالب إتقانها بلغته الأولى ثم بلغته الثانية. وتتضمن الخطة أكثر من عشرين جلسة ، وقبل بدء الجلسات ، أعطي الطالب اختبارًا أوليًا ، وبعد الانتهاء من الجلسات اختبارًا بعدًا. تظهر النتائج أن فهم الطالب قد تحسن بعد الانتهاء من التدخلات.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الرسم وخريطة القصة وجدول الذاكرة وخريطة الكلمات

INTRODUCTION

Sami came to the United States a year ago. He came with his parents without any idea about the challenges he would face in the first day of his classes. He had no friends, and his language was quite limited, which was frustrating for him. In fact, during the first week, he refused to go to the school and asked his parents if they could return to Saudi Arabia. English was the most difficult challenge that Sami faced in the United States because he found English to be a difficult language, and he felt like he would not succeed at school. Even though he liked reading in the Arabic Language, which is his first language, he hated reading in English because he was frustrated could not understand what he read. Therefore, the researcher wanted to answer the question, "How does an ESL striving reader describe his critical thinking and strategies when working to comprehend narrative and expository texts in English?"

Sami was studying Arabic language as a first language in the Sunday school class. In fact, he was the best student in his classroom because he was reading Arabic fluently and his understanding of the text in the Arabic language was above his grade level. Therefore, the researcher wanted to evaluate how he could use the high ability he had in his first language to assist him while he was studying English as a second language. The goal of the tutoring was improving Sami's comprehension from the third-grade level to the fifth-grade level, his expected level. Sami works well as an independent learner, which means that when he masters any strategies that he learned with his teacher, he can then do it independently. Therefore, it was important for the researcher to teach Sami strategies that he could use by himself when learning English as a second language. To do that, the researcher first taught him how to use the strategies in the Arabic language and then asked the students to apply those strategies to his English. The strategies that we used to improve his comprehension were story map, word map, memory table and drawing. The researcher met with the student more than twenty hours at the Sunday school and at student's home. The student spent most of the time reading texts in Arabic and English, and the researcher used pre-assessment and post-assessment to see the effect of those strategies (see Appendix I). Also, the researcher collected data (e.g., story map, word map, and drawing) that had been used to assess Sami's comprehension.

LITERATURE SEARCH

The Relationship between First and Second Language

Separation between the first language and second language it is impossible since both exist together in a person's mind; also, the full integration between two languages is not guaranteed because the learner can keep languages apart. However, there is a link and partial integration between first and second language (Marsden, Morgan-Short, Thompson, &

Abugaber, 2018). There are two hypotheses that look at the investigation of the relationship between reading in first and second language. The first hypothesis is called the linguistic interdependent, where learners transfer their ability for reading in their first language to their second language, so there is a significant correlation between reading on first and second language. The second hypothesis, which is called the linguistic threshold hypothesis, claims that L1 reading ability transfers to L2 reading if the proficiency for the learner is higher than the linguistic threshold (Wang, Sabatini, O'reilly, & Weeks, 2019). A study examined those hypotheses by collecting data from 186 adult native English speakers reading in English and Spanish. The results indicate that "neither hypothesis is wholly reflective of the second language reading process There is considerable consistency (in all studies reviewed) in the amount of variance accounted for by first language literacy (upwards of 20 per cent). However, linguistic knowledge is consistently a more powerful predictor (upwards of 30 per cent) (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995, p. 1). In her study Carrell (1991) examined the relationship between first and second language by comparing two groups. The first group consisted of students who are English native speakers studying Spanish as a second language, and the second group consisted of students who are Spanish native speakers studying English a second language. The two groups were measured by multiple-choice reading comprehension tests in each language. The result showed that the contribution of both L1 reading ability and L2 language proficiency was statistically significant (Carrell, 1991). Therefore, it seems reasonable to significantly predict the students' ability on their second language after assessing their ability in the second language (Liu, Gardner, Belinkov, Peters, & Smith, 2019).

Reading is an extremely complex process, and information obtained through an informal inventory can be similar complex (Lipson & Wixson, 2003b). Therefore, it is important to tap into students' high ability in their first language when learning the second language. One study investigates the reading strategies that students used in Turkish and English and how that influences the reading instructions for Turkish and English. The eight participants, who were enrolled in a pre-intermediate level class of a one-year intensive English were asked to use strategies while reading on both languages. The result indicates that strategy instruction had a positive effect on both Turkish and English reading strategies and reading comprehension in English (Salataci & Akyel, 2002).

Improving Students' Comprehension through Instructional Strategies

To improve students' comprehension levels, it is important to help students predict the meaning of unknown vocabulary words. If students do not know the meaning of the vocabulary in the text, they will not understand the text. Vocabulary and reading comprehension have reciprocal relationship (Laufer & Aviad–Levitzky, 2017). Moreover, Lipson

and Wixson (2003b) show that the relationship between vocabulary and reading extends beyond a significant impact on comprehension. Therefore, having a rich vocabulary background allows a student to learn new words more easily than occurs for a person who does not have that background(Laufer & Aviad–Levitzky, 2017). In contrast, students with limited vocabulary might not be able to understand the meaning of the text (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007). In fact, interactive ability to know the meaning of vocabulary is important for comprehension(Nurjanah, 2018). The role of understanding unknown vocabulary meanings are as follows (Baumann, Ware, & Edwards, 2007):

- Context clues (read sentence around the word)
- Word-part clues (break the word into root suffix and prefix)
- Context clues (reread the sentence around the word)

Many polysyllabic English words that are encountered in social science and natural science are derived from Greek or Latin words (Lane, Gutlohn, & van Dijk, 2019). Therefore, some students confront some difficulties to grasp the meaning of those words. In order to help students gain the meaning of that particular vocabulary, the vocabulary self-collection strategy was developed and supported by social constructivist, transactional, and activity theories (Yang, Kuo, Ji, & McTigue, 2018). Lipson and Wixson (2003b) defined word analysis strategies for identifying printed words that are not recognized immediately on sight. Strategies for unknowing words are as follows:

- Context analysis (meaning-based) the most common method
- Morphemic (meaning-based) break down the word into root, suffix, and prefix
- Phonic analysis (sound-symbol) isolate phonemes

One strategy that the researcher used with the striving reader is mapping words (see Appendix II). This is a generative vocabulary strategy that enables students to determine the meaning of new words. These steps that should be followed to utilize this strategy:

- Students first will take pretest.

The next step is to introduce the morphemes and the strategy through four steps:

1. Intro and prefixes (provide an example)
2. Suffixes (provide an example)
3. Word roots
4. Word mapping strategy:
- Map the word part
- Attack the meaning of each part
- Predict the word's meaning
- See if you're right
- Practice the strategy

- **Posttest**
- **Ensure students use the strategy**

Another strategy used improve the student comprehension is story map instruction: "This procedure, mapping stories by identifying important information about the characters and events presented therein" (Gardill & Jitendra, 1999, p. 2). Story maps are visual tools that delineate the most important ideas in the story (Gardill & Jitendra, 1999). Story map strategies has a positive impact on students on students' comprehension, especially for narrative passages (Baumann & Bergeron, 1993).

SETTING AND PARTICIPANT

Sami was one of the researcher students at Sunday school studying Arabic as a first language. He came to the United States in the fall of 2017 from Saudi Arabia. His age was 10 years old, and he was in the fifth grade when he moved to the United States. He read Arabic as a first language fluently when he began studying English as a second language. Even though he was in the fifth grade, his English was below that, so in comparison to his classmates, he was a striving reader. Last semester, The researcher met Sami four times after Sunday school. In first session (45 minutes), the researcher assessed Sami in his first language, Arabic, and he had strong reading and writing skills in it. According to Lipson & Wixson (2003a), students who develop strong sociocultural, linguistic and cognitive skills in their primary language (L1) tend to transfer those attitudes and skills to learning other cultures and languages, and they are more successful at learning to read and write in English. For instance, an example of his strong memory was that Sami had memorized 15 chapters of the Holy Quran.

One Friday afternoon, the researcher met Sami at his home, and asked his father if we could meet at the same time every week. In the first session, we talked for more than one hour about Sami's journey to Texas. We then played a card game that included many questions that gave the researcher a clear idea about Sami's attitude before taking any kind of action with language. According to Caldwell and Leslie (Caldwell & Leslie, 2009), when testing a student prepare a room and an appropriate passage and ask the students before beginning the test about his feelings toward school. Sami asked me to read a card question for him instead of reading it by himself because he thought he might not understand it if he read by himself. That did not surprise me because Caldwell and Leslie stated that English learners show a gap between their listening level and their reading level. Sami's responses indicated several points. First, Sami was still having a difficult time adjusting to his new life in the United States. He missed his friends and had not made new friends in the United States. I asked him, "Would you like to stay here in the United States or go back to Saudi

Arabia? Why?" Sami responded, "I want to go back to my school, I miss all my friends. I hope I can go back today." These responses indicated he needed more time to adjust to his new life, which would be easier when he had new friends in the United States. Second, when he was in Saudi Arabia, he only read at school, and he did not read otherwise. When I asked him if he read at home when he had free time, he said "I did not have time to read, I was playing video games all the time." It seemed his parents did not encourage him to read at home or take him to a public library. Therefore, reading was of low interest to him, which was reiterated when I asked him to rank a list of activities from 1 to 10 (one was the worst and 10 was the best); Sami ranked reading at two because he thought reading was boring. Third, Sami also was having a difficult time learning English as a second language because he thought he was a very poor English reader: "Everyone reads better than me. I cannot read like my classmates.

METHODOLOGY

The study is emic case study because the researcher was involved with his striving reader. The researcher worked with Sami to improve his comprehension in English as a second language. In fact, the researcher had a good relationship with Sami and his family. To improve Sami's comprehension, the researcher decided on strategies that I believed would improve his comprehension. Those strategies are story map, mapping word, memory table, and drawing.

With each strategy, Sami learned how to master it in Arabic language first, then he used it in English. Because he was so advanced in Arabic, it helped him to understand the idea behind each strategy. For example, Sami was taught to use a mapping story with an Arabic narrative story, and then he was given the same story that he read in Arabic that was translated to English. To answer the main question for this study, the researcher collected examples from his student's work to demonstrate how his comprehension improved. Also, the student was given pre-test before starting the intervention, and at the end of the intervention, the student was given the post-test to see how his comprehension was improved.

Word list was an example of collecting data. Through a word list, the examiner/educator/reading specialist presents lists of increasingly complex, grade-level equivalent high-frequency and content/discipline area words. The QRI-5 word lists affords information to "assess accuracy of word identification and automaticity of word identification and to determine a starting point for reading the initial passage" ([Caldwell & Leslie, 2009, p. 2](#)). The student reads aloud/decodes each of the 17-20 words on the possible word lists from pre-primer (pre-kindergarten) to middle/high school lists. The student reads through the words while the examiner/educator/reading specialist writes the sounds and behaviors being exhibited. At the conclusion of each list of 17-20 words, the examiner/educator/reading

specialist counts the "correct automatic" words and the number of "correct identified" words. These two categories are added together to show the "total number correct." Considering that number and the readers' affective response, the "independent level" has a "total number correct" percentage of 90-100%, "instructional level" has a "total number correct" percentage of 70-85% and "frustration level" has a "total number correct" percentage below 70%. Students who score at an "independent" or "instructional" level on a word lists, will probably decode a passage of similar readability level successfully" (Caldwell & Leslie, 2009, p. 43). This further demonstrates the level of word identification in isolation and will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Narrative passages and expository passages were used to determine the student's comprehension before and after the sessions. Those passages were taken from Qualitative Reading Inventory-5. The QRI-5 (Caldwell & Leslie, 2009) passages are organized from pre-primer (pre-kindergarten) through middle/high school with increasing difficulty. At each grade-level equivalency there are passages narrative and expository texts, and for pre-primer through grade level three, there are texts with and without pictures. Before students reads the passage selected by the examiner/educator/reading specialist, their prior knowledge is assessed through concept questions specific to the content and text type of the passage. Since a student's knowledge and lived experiences have a significant impact on reading comprehension, it is "important to determine whether the selection read by the student contains familiar or unfamiliar concepts" (Caldwell & Leslie, 2009, p. 48).

After completing this pre-reading assessment about concepts or making predictions, the student is asked to read the selected passage. If the student reads the passage aloud/orally, the examiner/educator/reading specialist records "the student's miscues (substitutions, omissions, and insertions) on the examiner copy of the passage. The examiner… also times the students' oral reading. Once the student completes the passage, the examiner removes [the hard copy] and assesses comprehension by asking the reader to retell what he or she remembers, to answer explicit and implicit questions, or to do both" (Caldwell & Leslie, 2009, p. 56).

The examiner then looks at the total performance on the passage and, like the word lists, determines the independent, instruction, or frustration level for the reader. The total number of oral reading miscues shows the level for word identification in context. The percentage of implicit and explicit comprehension questions answered correctly determines the level for comprehension.   The examiner/educator/reading specialist then compares this with the prior knowledge, word identification in context, and comprehension. Some students utilize "look backs" wherein he or she retrieves the passage and uses it to answer the explicit and implicit

questions. Any students who either didn't have, or utilize, this "look back" option have their comprehension considered as that "without look backs."

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

After working with Sami for more than twenty hours, he could describe his critical thinking and strategies when working to comprehend narrative and expository texts in English. Sami described his critical thinking by using the strategies in Arabic and English with the same passages that he had read. Sami said, "I could understand all words in the English passages when I read it in Arabic first." In fact, Sami could predict the meaning of unknown vocabulary from the context because he understood the story.

Drawing

Sami read the story of "Bird and Fox" in Arabic and drew what he understood in Arabic first (See figure1). He then he read it in English and did the same thing that he did it with the Arabic text (See figure2).
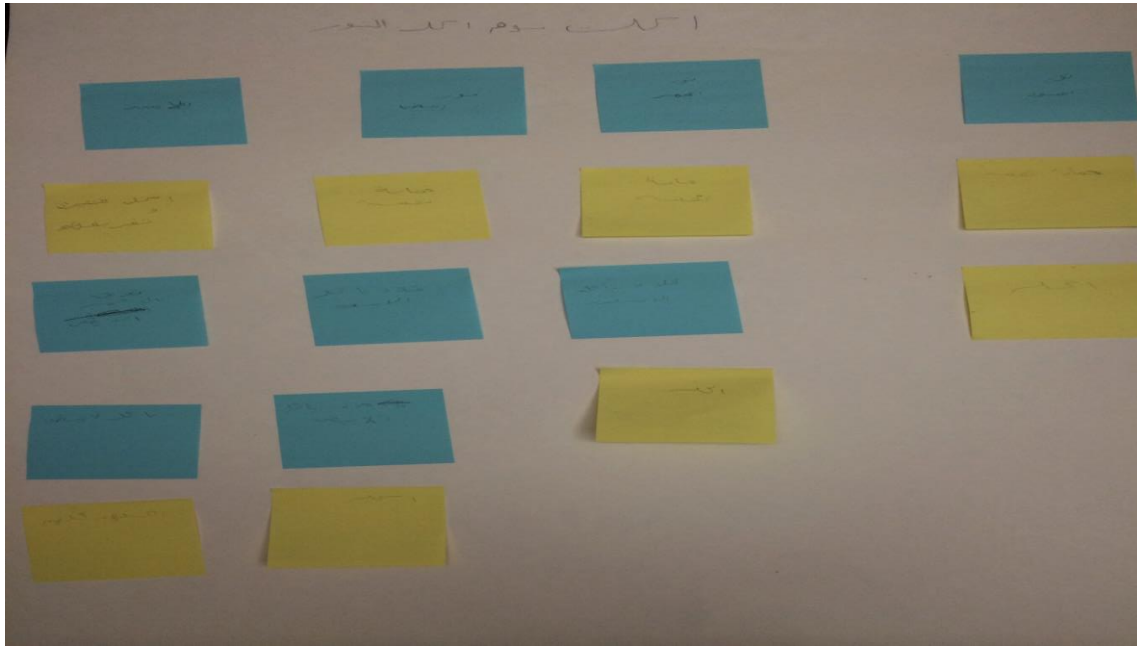

Figure 1:Sami's drawing in After Reading in Arabic

Figure 2: Sami's drawing in After Reading in English

Sami put more details in Arabic piece more than English, which is not surprising because his understanding in Arabic is better than English. When the researcher asked Sami to read and draw, he was happy and said, "I will be drawing and reading all the night if you ask me because I love drawing." I think it was so important to link between Sami's interests and reading.

Story Map

Another strategy that Sami used to understand the passage is story map. Sami was following the procedure for this strategy in Arabic and English texts: "This procedure, mapping stories by identifying important information about the characters and events presented therein" (Gardill & Jitendra, 1999, p. 2). He read the story "I Was Eaten the Day the White Bull Was Eaten." Sami used sticky notes to determine the characters, events, and output.

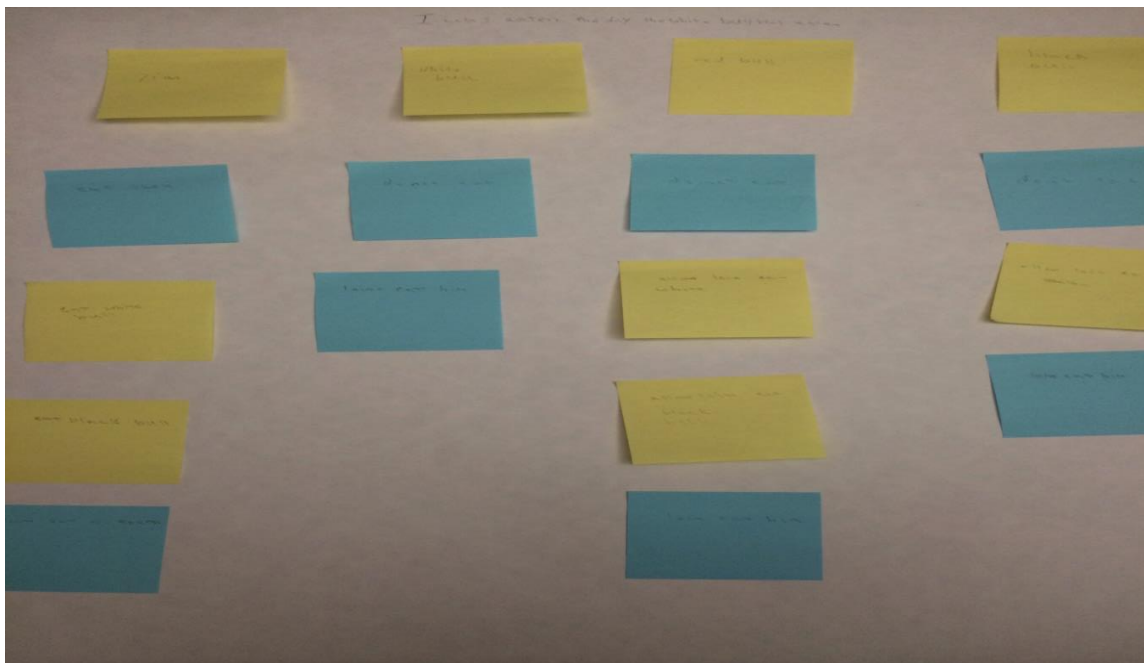**Figure 3Sami's Story Map In Arabic**

Figure 4Sami's Story Map In English

     Sami could explain the main important ideas and the details in the Arabic and English passages (See figure3 &4). According to Baumann and Bergeron (1993), the story map strategy has a positive impact on students on students' comprehension, especially for narrative passages. Sami loves the idea of practicing the strategy in Arabic language and then in English;

he said, "It is so easy for me to do the strategy in English if I know how to do it in Arabic."

Word Map and Memory Table

Sami could use the word map and memory table to grasp and predict the meaning of each unknown word that he confronted in the text (See figure 5). Sami said, "I'm so happy because I can use those strategies inside my reading class." After using the word map, Sami understood that English words might have two types of morphology:

1.　　Bound morphemes (prefixes, suffixes) that cannot stand alone
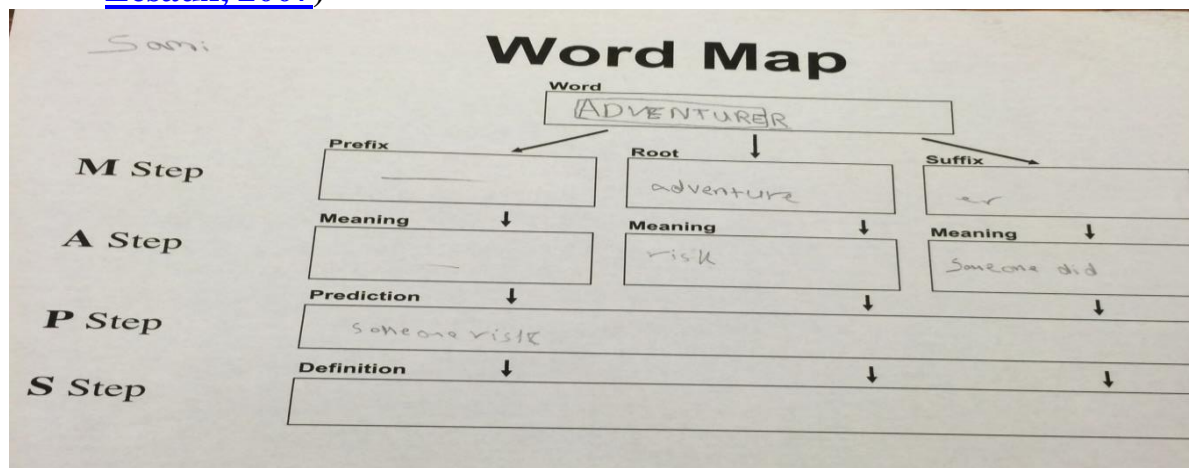2.　　Unbound morphemes, which is the root of the words (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007)

Figure 5Sami's Word Map

Also, after using the memory table, he could relate unknown vocabulary to pictures of objects that he was familiar with (see Figure 6). That helped Sami to memorize any word that he linked; Sami said "It is impossible to forget this word" (he meant memorize).
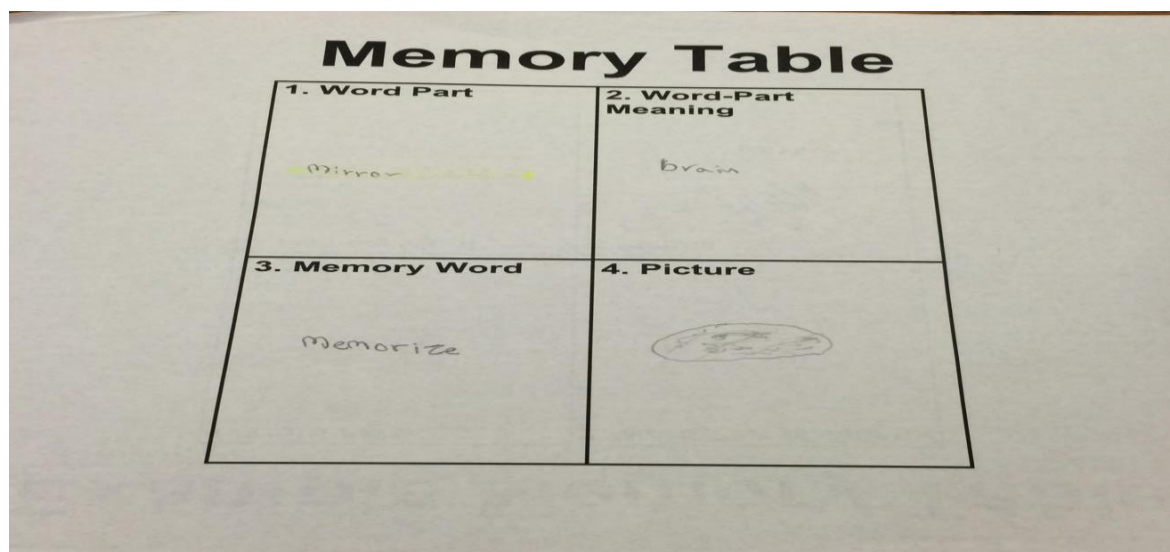

Figure 6: Sami's Memory Table

Table 1: Word list

Time/day	First time			Second time		
January 26 & April 11	**Third grade**	**Fourth grade**	**Fifth grade**	**Third grade**	**Fourth grade**	**Fifth grade**
	16/20 or 80%	14/20 or 60%	11/20 55%	20/20 or 100%	17/20 or 85%	14/20 or 70%

On January 26, Sami was given the pre-test to examine his ability to identify words from a vocabulary list for third, fourth and fifth grade. Table (1) showed the following results:

- **3rd Grade: 16/20 or 80% (70% automatic) Independent Level.**

Sami made basic errors when he read the word list by identifying the first and the second letter and immediately saying the world without focusing on the rest of letters. For example, when he read "rough" he organized the first two letters and mentioned the world that he knew it before "road." The researcher asked Sami to read a word silently and think about it before saying it aloud.

- **4th Grade: 14/20 or 60% (60% automatic) Instruction Level.**

Sami misread some words that were multi-syllabi. It was hard for Sami to decode words such as "environment." Therefore, the researcher divided the word to its prefix, root, and suffix so that he had to read each separately before reading it again as one word.

- **5th Grade: 11/20 or 55% (40% automatic) Frustration Level**

At this level, Sami was struggling to identify several words. He made many mistakes and spent most of his time trying to identify them. For the word "biography," for example, he spent more than 20 seconds trying to organize the word, but he could not read it. Sami had many decoding errors; he could not read short and long vowel sounds. Also, Sami changed the meaning of three words when he read his world list.

After identifying Sami's weaknesses, the researcher planned sessions to address his difficulties. On April 11, when he took the reassessment for the word lists, his ability on the third level was improved to indicate more independence. On the fourth-grade word list, Sami improved from the instruction level to the independent level, and for fifth grade, he improved from the frustration level to the instructional level. I think that the strategies that the researcher used, which were memory table and word map, had a positive impact on Sami's learning, and they helped him to identify unknown words. Knowing the meaning of vocabulary is very important in order to comprehend the text (Richek, 2005). Therefore, it was important to design instructions that would help improve Sami's ability to identify unknown words.

Table (2): The results of Narrative and Expository assessment

Passage name	Accuracy		Comprehension		Reading Rate	
	First	Second	First	Second	First	Second
Father's New game (Narrative 2)	99%	100%	89%	100%	65 cwpm	68 cwpm
A special Birthday for rosa (Narrative 3)	60%	85%	60%	75%	20 cwpm	38 cwpm
Whales and fish (expository 2)	90%	100%	89%	95%	66 cwpm	66 cwpm
Cats: lions and tigers in your house (expository 3)	50%	75%	33%	55%	24 cwpm	35 cwpm

On January 31 and February 2, Sami was assessed to determine his level of comprehension on narrative and expository (see Table 2), and the table show the following results:

"Whales and Fish"
- Independent Level: two- Expository
  Accuracy – 90%
  Comprehension – 89% without look-backs, 100% with look-backs
  Reading rate: 66 cwpm (very good)

"Father's New Game"
- Independent Level: two- Narrative
  Accuracy – 99%
  Comprehension – 89% without look-backs, 100% with look-backs
  Reading rate: 65 cwpm (very good)

"A Special Birthday for Rosa"
- Instructional Level: Three - Narrative
  Accuracy – 60 %
  Comprehension – 58 % without looking back, 83% with look-backs
  Reading rate: 20 cwpm (very low)

"Cats: Lions and Tigers in Your House"
- Frustration Level: Three – Expository
  Accuracy – 50 %

Comprehension – 33 % without looking back, 75% with look-backs

Reading rate: 24 cwpm (very low)

Overall, there was a significant gap between second level and third level in answering comprehension questions, while in the second-grade level he was doing very well without looking back to the passage. He could answer the questions directly which indicated that he understood the passages. However, he was struggling to answer the third level question, as he only could answer 33%-58% without looking back. It is interesting to note that Sami was doing better on narrative reading than on expository reading. Also, after looking back to the passages, his comprehension increased, so he could answer most questions.

After the sessions, Sami was given the same passages. By looking at the previous table, it is apparent that Sami's comprehension, accuracy, and reading rate improved across the second and third levels. It is my belief that when Sami learned how to use strategies in Arabic language, he could use the same strategy when he read in English. Learning how use the strategies in the first language and then the second language helped the Sami to improve his comprehension. ; When looking at Sami's case study, I could see the strong relationship between first and second language and I believe that gave him a learning advantage (Cook, 2003; Yamashita, 2004).

Conclusion and Implications

This case study allowed the researcher to view how immigration or visitor students struggle when they go to their new schools where they face both a different culture and a different language. Those students, such as Sami, are anxious, and their motivation can be impacted because they compare themselves to their classmates who speak English fluently. Second language learners benefit from special services such as tutoring; otherwise, they will struggle and may be left behind. The predominant area these students struggle with is with is reading because it is a complex process that cannot be mastered in a short time. Through working with Sami, the researcher found that it is important to tap into a student's L1, especially with low reader ability in the L2 such as Sami.

In this case study the researcher focused on four strategies: word map, memory table, story map, and drawing. Sami practiced them in his first language and second language, and found them to be effective. I think it is important to examine how those strategies can be used with a large group to generalize the learning for more students.

The future includes setting a plan for Sami to improve his abilities from third grade passage level to the fifth-grade level. In addition, I will search for strategies that can be used for both the Arabic and English languages. In conclusion, I think the relationship between first and second language needs continuing investigations to see how students will be able to benefit from their L1 when learning their L2.

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