

**The Status of Supplementary Readers in Nile Course for the Sudan Syllabus: is it the Emperor in New Clothes?"**  
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**Abstract**

This study aims at identifying the implied pedagogical philosophy of incorporating Supplementary Readers (SRs) in the 'Nile Course' as the core English syllabus of the Sudanese schools during the 1980s and mid 1990s. The study tried to present a critical reading of the significance of teachers' role and discretion in handling the SRs as prescribed in the curriculum design. And because little is written or known about these SRs, the content analysis approach was adopted to collect the required data from the core texts of Nile Course and the insights elicited from related literature. Findings revealed that the author (Mr. Corbluth: 1979, 1981 & 1982) had designed a general framework of teaching these SRs fitting the Sudanese context; but the principles of his vision had not been adequately outlined in a clear frame regarding the role of teachers and the extent of their discretion which in turn affected the classroom implementation of these SRs. In addition, Corbluth was found to be fully aware of the importance of SRs in fighting the linguistic deterioration at Sudanese schools but had intentionally avoided spelling out the required details for their integration; this was found to be justifiable and was ascribed to many variables. Accordingly, the study's suggestions were geared to help in revitalizing the role of SRs in teacher training programs and in raising learners' awareness of the values of extensive/intensive reading as it has a positive effect in eradicating the current English language deterioration within Sudanese schools.

**Key words:** Supplementary Readers, integration, methodology, discretion

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**المستخلص:**

مكانة كتب القراءة الإضافية بمنهج اللغة الإنجليزية للمدارس السودانية "نايل كورس": هل تشبه قصة ارتداء الإمبراطور لثوبه الجديد؟

هدفت الدراسة لمعرفة الفلسفة التعليمية المقصودة لتضمين كتب القراءة الإضافية بمنهج اللغة الإنجليزية للمدارس السودانية "نايل كورس" الذي تم تدريسه كمقرر أساسي في ثمانينيات ومنتصف تسعينيات القرن الماضي. وقد حاولت الدراسة تقديم قراءة نقدية لأهمية دور المعلم وحرية تصرفه عند تدريس هذه الكتب وفق التصميم المنهجي للمقرر. ونسبة لشح الدراسات المكتوبة أو التعريفية عن هذه الكتب إتمدت الدراسة علي منهجية تحليل المحتوى لجمع البيانات الضرورية من كتب هذا المنهج للمرحلة الثانوية إضافة لما تحويه أدبيات البحث الأخرى ذات الصلة. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن كاتب المنهج (السيد كوريلث 1979-1981-1982) قد قام بتصميم إطاراً عاماً لتدريس هذه الكتب بطريقة تتناسب وحالة مدارس السودان إلا أن منطلقات رؤيته لم تتضمن إطاراً مرجعياً واضحاً يحدد دور المعلم وحرية تصرفه عند تدريس هذه الكتب مما تسبب في تعثر تطبيقها داخل قاعات الدرس. كما أظهرت الدراسة أن عدم توصيف طريقة تضمين هذه الكتب الإضافية كان مقصوداً من قبل المؤلف رغم علمه بأهمية ذلك في معالجة تدهور اللغة الإنجليزية بالسودان وكان لذلك ما يبرره من أسباب تم تفسيرها. وعليه تقدمت الدراسة بعدد من التوصيات أهمها تفعيل دور هذه الكتب الإضافية من خلال برامج تدريب المعلمين و زيادة وعي الطلاب وإدراكهم لأهمية القراءة الإضافية لما لها من تأثير إيجابي في محاربة تدهور مستويات اللغة الإنجليزية حالياً بمدارس السودان .

## Introduction

If one curricula component is to be spotted as *universallytaught* or *independently read* in any school where English is learnt, it will be *SupplementaryReaders* (SRs). As literature texts, SRs occupy a subordinate position within curricula and have often been neglected in terms of research. Brumfit and Carter (1986: ix) state “Literature is not regularly discussed as a coherent branch of the curriculum in relation to language development in either mother-tongue or foreign language teaching”. In contrast, the core curricula books used in any school are well-studied, revised and implemented according to clear principles. As a result, the complementary nature of SRs has always been implicitly stated, revealing in the process, their checkered existence; let alone the problems of their selection and pedagogical implementation. Thus, the presence of SRs, in most curricula worldwide, vary markedly midway between full classroom integration and out-of-class reading despite the fact that they are, by design, simplified, graded and annotated to be used in specific language classrooms as *supplementary texts*. More still, “... students of a foreign language cannot handle that language in the same way as a native speaker. Authentic text is beyond them and this naturally invites the use of simplified books aimed at their stage of learning” states Colbourn (2005:2). Arguably, this lukewarm application of SRs in most countries is justified, but their presence in the Sudan is the exception for an obvious reason: English is deteriorating in the Sudan. In most curricula, since the introduction of English in the Sudan and the successive reforms, a range of readers were identified and taught with varying degrees of success. However, in the many curricula reforms no *coherent discussion* about their proper integration to core curricula was held. This paper therefore is conducted to account for this peripheral status in Sudanese English Curricula, particularly as perceived by Corbluth who singly authored the three books of the Nile Course Syllabus (NCS) taught for the secondary schools during the 1980s and mid 1990s.

### Statement of the Problem

Mr. Corbluth had designed a remarkable reading component in his three books of NCS to stimulate students to read English in a form of campaign with two sides: one for students and the other for teachers. However before starting his reading campaign, Corbluth, like a captain of a team in a football match, tossed a coin with a 'head' and 'tail'. Students were given a series of advice representing the head of the coin and their teachers the tail of the outlined reading campaign- but without choices or details. As for students, in one hand, he advised them like a mentor to read simple English texts plentifully and habitually during their secondary schools years. Additionally, what they should eventually achieve by the end of each year was also revealed to them explicitly. Corbluth (1982: v) directly addresses them like this:

“Some people say that the best way to learn a language is to live in a country where the language is spoken. You cannot do that this year. But you can do the next best thing: you can live there in *imagination*, through the books you read. Never forget that reading lots of books is the best way to improve your English. Increase your reading speed this year at least 250 words a minute. And read plenty of simple or simplified books at least one every two weeks as well as your class readers. The student who does not read does not progress- he stops at a certain point in his language ability and even starts to go backwards”.

However, little details were given to students on how to do the readings themselves. Teachers, on the other hand, were given the absolute *discretion* to handle SRs in their classes. Corbluth (1979:16-17) explains in the teachers' books that: “No English course is self-sufficient. It must be supplemented with wide reading at appropriate linguistic levels. We assume as an *absolute minimum* that six class readers and six out-of-class readers will be

read by any pupil every year”. Still much less was revealed to teachers about how to handle these SRs within their classes except a small outline and some speed reading checks to be taken as guidelines. As a consequence, the status of SRs as class readers and the out-of-class readers in the NCS was not clearly understood, particularly by average teachers of NCS in the later years of the 1990s. The researcher believes that the validity of Corbluth’s vision or philosophy for integrating SRs in the NCS was clear, in theory, for the first teachers of the NCS, but *flawed in the details of its teaching methodology and classroom implementation*. Not all teachers of the later period of the NCS were equally trained and it was predictable that some students would be victims to so many cases of teaching mediocrities. Moreover, it is unfortunate that there are neither published studies directly related to the long term usage of these SRs nor any researches about their complementary nature within the NCS (even in the current Spine Series). The problem is thus clear: teachers were left to their own *discretion* without established parameters that stipulate the use of SRs. At the same time those teachers of NCS were *told* to mount a campaign for sensitizing their students to read ‘*simply and plentifully*’.

The researcher would like to argue that Corbluth was a paragon of a systematic integration of SRs into the Sudanese Secondary Schools’ context despite the dysfunctional strategy he designed to spell out the details of teaching and integrating these readers within his set-books. The major objective of this paper, therefore, is to reveal this dysfunction and prudence that Corbluth had demonstrated regarding the integration of SRs. Accordingly, the salutary story of *the Emperor in New Clothes* was employed as a backdrop to explore the pedagogical philosophy and status of SRs in the NCS, particularly as stipulated by Corbluth in fighting English deterioration in Sudan. Besides, the variable of teachers’ discretion in handling SRs will also be assessed and evaluated as it is part and parcel of Corbluth’s pedagogic strategy.

### **Significance of the Study**

The paper documents the (neglected) experience of Corbluth's vision and offers critical understanding of how SRs were planned in the design of the Nile Course books. Most importantly, teachers and researchers will particularly welcome this paper as a useful inquiry since it can boost the teaching of English literacy in the basic and secondary school. Hopefully, the paper can act as a springboard for more informed research and discussion regarding any future integration of SRs within Sudanese English language curricula.

### **Methodology**

The paper is build on a number of assumptions and analyses formed a priori by the researcher's close reading of the status of SRs and the issue of deterioration as highlighted in the former NCS. However, due to scarcity of literature on the topic data was mainly collected and analyzed by an eclectic content analysis technique of Corbluth's instructions for teachers, hints and advice for students within the texts of NCS with particular emphasis on the books: 4, 5 and 6 for both teachers and students. Besides, the Emperor story in the paper was arrived at in three different stages: firstly, a rough analysis was made of the aspect of teacher discretion as projected in NCS and its successor (the Spine Series) to probe into the method of integrating SRs; secondly, a module for training teachers on "Oliver Twist", prepared in 1990 by Gareth Griffiths of the In-Service Educational Teacher Training Institute (ISETI), was also analyzed as the closest approximate of integrating SRs in the NCS and; thirdly, data was also collected from other relevant literature, especially the document of the Proceedings of the 1966 Conference "English in the Sudan.

### **Literature Review**

Throughout its history, the status of English language in Sudan has experienced great ups and downs due to particular political and educational changes. For example, its status was drastically reduced from "the language of earning a living" (Tigani, 1966;

Abdul Rasoul, 1971) to a mere school subject and a subsidiary medium of instruction at the university level. Sandell (1982's) book documents, diachronically, the whole gamut of the complex interplay between politics and education in Sudan. She pointed to an important dimension pertaining to the present study, namely to the role of qualified teachers in implementing the NCS. In fact, she oftentimes made prudent remarks about teachers and their pedagogical competence during the hey-days of the NCS. She states: "... it is noticeable by book 5 that most of the work is not explicitly designed for group or pair work. Comprehension passages, dialogues and exercises dominate. Although an imaginative teacher could use them orally one very much doubts if the untrained teachers in the Sudan can or will" (ibid: 123). Despite the fact that this statement is unobtrusively made by Sandell, in 1980s, it is considered as an important comment. It points to certain insufficient details in the description of how to teach NCS materials through pair/group techniques let alone their imbedded 12 SRs. In fact, these readers themselves represent another *not explicitly designed* category in the teaching directives of the NCS. Therefore, the point to be made now is that, as Colbourn (2005) states, "... there has always been a conflict over whether it is more important that students should want to read the texts or whether it is sufficient to ensure that they are only exposed to texts that they are certain to be able to read in terms of course prescription" (ibid: 2). So, Corbluth had designed a reading campaign for students to understand consciously how language can best be mastered in practical ways. However, the way he prescribed the 12 SRs in the NCS is itself ambiguous and needs to be cautiously studied theoretically and practically first before any judgement is made on their misapplication or their prudent integration.

### **Supplementary Readers: Nature and Pedagogic Function**

Mostly, SRs are used because of the opportunity they provide in helping learners to acquire autonomous reading habits for pleasure and are not designed to be, according to Harmer's words

(2007:182), “as a manual to be slavishly followed”. In addition to that, many curricula designers give special attention to learners’ age, cognitive level, linguistic competence and allotted time before readers or other supplementary texts are prescribed so that both language improvement and enjoyment can be practically guaranteed (Hill, 2008; Tomlinson, 2011). In other words, SRs seem to be integrated in English syllabuses because they can act as ‘springboards’ to create real language use and an enriching environment for linguistic reinforcement. However, the nature and pedagogic function of their peripheral position as *supplementary texts* can be better assessed if the methods of teaching them are explicitly stated with reference to learners’ needs and actual context. McKay (1986:194) states: “selecting the text is only the first step. An equally important issue is how to deal with such texts in the classroom”. This is truly obvious in some countries, like Kenya and Tanzania for example, where curriculum planners and teachers have debated the selection, teaching and other aspects related to SRs’ in schools (Thiong’o, 1976; Brumfit, 1986; Pettit 1986; to mention only a few). Undoubtedly, the design of SRs as ready-made materials for global learners of English have resulted in obvious variations and disagreements amongst the concerned policy makers and syllabus designers as regards the language learning goals and the linguistic realities in the specific country. Sudan is a textbook example for such a country. Unlike its neighbouring contexts, the status of SRs in the Sudan can best be described as a real educational debacle for three reasons. Firstly, it is not easy to explain why educationists and syllabus writers of English curricula in the Sudan have not been *explicitly vocal enough* about the specific status of these readers within curricula, particularly after the implementation of Arabicisation in education. Secondly, very few, sporadic and inaccessible (unpublished) researches were written on SRs pertaining to schools syllabi (e.g., Farah 2011; and Abdul Rasoul, 1971). Thus, their educational value has long been neglected by published educational research and even in times of



curricula reforms. Thirdly and as a result, teachers were left to their own *devices* and have continued to use them idiosyncratically at *discretion*; this therefore constitutes the heart of the problem. As a consequence, SRs have continually been changed according to no known explicit criteria either in language or in content. For example, a number of favourite readers such as “Jane Eyre”, “Treasure Island” and “Cry the Beloved Country” which were adapted by Longman and Oxford have been replaced with simpler or diluted versions of the same titles from Macmillan publishers after the transformational change from the NCS to Spine Series. In view of these facts, it can be safely stated that SRs have a tested educational worth; they are designed and graded to give easy and enjoyable reading chosen from literary classics. Therefore, the ubiquity of SRs, according to Macmillan publishers (2008: 4), emanates from that fact that these books “are deliberately designed to look like real popular paperbacks, rather than school books, motivating students and building their confidence to read further both in and outside the classroom”. And possibly the clearest correlation between their educational significance and popularity, according to Vincent (1986: 210), is that “the traditional assumption in English Language teaching, especially in situations where English was the medium of education, was to offer the same literary diet overseas as in Britain, and to attempt to make the route to it easier by extensive use of graded Readers”.

### **Nile Course for the Sudan Syllabus: Context, Writers and Teachers**

“Africans display to the expatriate who comes to serve them an urbane courtesy and a thoughtful hospitality; they openly seek his advice; they are receptive even to his adverse criticism. Quite properly, they want to reserve to themselves responsibility for policy-making in their own country. For this reason they want to have Africans in posts where important policy decisions have to be

made; but even in many of these posts, they do not want to exclude expatriates at the expense of quality and efficiency” (Ashby 1964: 52).

It is customary in the Sudan, when any educational change or reform is planned British experts are being asked to participate in various forms, such as consultancy reports, teacher training posts, and even the writing of a whole curriculum. Perhaps because of the fact that formal education in the Sudan was initiated by the British and has adapted their very English norms (Oliver and Atmore, 1996) that such a tradition of foreign expatriates have gained ground. This was at least true before independence (and is likely to happen regularly). For example, “in 1934 the Sudan Government decided to improve rudimentary education, and asked V. L. Griffith to take over a training college for teachers who would be needed” states (Taylor, 1975: iv). Prior to that was the opportunity given to James Currie to engineer the Educational policy for the Sudan at that time (Ashby 1964). However, the 1966 conference held at the University of Khartoum witnessed the participation of distinguished Sudanese specialists beside their British counterpart expatriates in its sessions. And more importantly, the product of this conference and its following years was the birth of NCS. This was a prodigious project initiated in 1976 which, according to Sandell (1982: 123), was “... a vast improvement on the previous situation and answers the pleas for a coherent syllabus which English teachers have been making for so many years. It is also a realistic course based on the current school situation of the Northern Sudan”. Thus the expatriates like Martin Bates, Jonathan Higgens, Michael Palmer and Julian Corbluth were not only asked to help in training teachers but were allowed to exclusively write, teach and monitor the implementation of the NCS’ six ‘fully integrated’ books. The then Ministry of Education was aware of the problem of English language deterioration and the need to maintain good standards,

therefore, the following information revealed by Mr. Griffiths can not be underrated.

“There is more money around now, but on the other hand there are proportionately far more children wanting education and to a higher level. There are more highly educated and trained men and women around now but there are still too few with necessary local experience and status to fill the posts which require qualities of initiative and leadership and wisdom.” (Griffiths, 1975: 3)

Corbluth, who singly wrote the three books of the NCS for the higher secondary schools, can be categorized as one of those implied by Griffith. Moreover, the aforementioned facts by Mr. Griffiths about the Sudan are also far-sighted and might possibly have had their effects on the scheme of teaching the NCS for many reasons. Firstly, there were indigenous and experienced Sudanese teachers galore in that period. Crobluth, accordingly, had planned his teaching details in line with the competence of these experienced teachers who lacked only the *status* to plan, write, and execute the future English syllabus for the Sudan. Evidence of this is clear in the acknowledgement pages of the six books of the NCS. For example, Bates (1979: 19) in Book 1 (for teachers’) states:

“I should like to express my gratitude to the many Sudanese teachers and educationalists who helped in the development of the course and made its successful completion possible, for their invaluable advice, encouragement, and constructive criticism, and for testing and observing the use of the draft materials in the classroom”.

These words of gratitude and acknowledgement for a rare Sudanese *educationalmeritocracy* are repeated in the teacher’s book 2 in page 39, and on page 30 in book 3 with some

modifications to add a new list of Sudanese experienced teachers who represented 98% of the total number of listed names of real contributors compared to a list of few expatriates. Furthermore, the same names plus others, at the secondary level, were given their due credit in both the students' books and the teachers'. Secondly, the materials of the NCS were tried by teaching; then were tested, revised, retested over a period of time with analysis and criticism by this handful of Sudanese experts jointly with Longman Group (Corbluth 1982). This also reflects the fact that the Sudanese teachers were marvellously well-trained and can carry out their teaching tasks reflectively well. Thirdly and most important inference, Corbluth had built his scheme for incorporating SRs to the core texts of NCS with these experienced teachers in mind. Thus, the intentional location of a series of advice given to students at the beginnings of book four, five and six of the secondary schools reveal his awareness of the problem of deterioration and the significance of teacher's role in the campaign to persuade students to read. Unfortunately, the paucity of information about how to implement the reading campaign in the teacher's books, the researcher believes was the heel of Achilles. Not all the teachers were similarly competent in comparison to the first pioneers who taught the NCS and (perhaps) the majority did not receive special courses or tips on how to implement the implied reading component. And more poignantly a lot of the remaining experienced teachers when hit by the economic hardships immigrated to the Gulf region by a rate of 150 qualified teachers per year, particularly in the year 1976 and onwards (Sandell 1982).

### **An Analysis of the Outline of SRs in Nile Course Syllabus**

In formal teaching methodology, Harmer (2007:83) states, "Using course-books appropriately is an art which becomes clearer with experience". So, teachers of English can adapt or adopt the course-book materials assigned for their students *at will or as dictated by students' needs or environment*. Corbluth (1979), accordingly, in the NCS had only given a *suggested*

teaching plan for his SRs in terms of teaching weeks (see: Table 1).

**Table (1): The Assigned Supplementary Readers in the Nile Course for the Sudan Syllabus**

Year	Category of Reader according to linguistic level	Number of Readers		Teaching Weeks in a year (20-25)	
		In class	Out of class	Number of Periods per week	
First	Early Longman Structural Readers Stage 5 Heinemann Guided Readers Intermediate	6	6	3 Or 2/3 2	5 Or 5/4 4
	Late Longman Structural Readers Stage 6 Oxford Progressive English Readers Grade 1				
Second	Longman Simplified English Series Heinemann Guided Readers Upper New Method Supplementary Readers Stage 6 New Method Supplementary Readers Stage 7 Oxford Progressive English Readers Grade 2	6	6	3	5
Third	Longman Bridge Series Oxford Progressive English Readers Grade 3	6	6	3	5
Total		18	18	225 Periods	375 Periods

However, no additional information on the specifics of integrating SRs readers was given for teachers. Therefore, the teaching model for the SRs in the NCS had become difficult to perceive in its practical bottom-up form for the average Sudanese teacher. In fact, the status of SRs according to this table represents a perfect balance between any core materials and their supplementary texts. Deplorably, the excellent complementary distribution of core texts and their SRs, as suggested by Corbluth, had not been properly implemented. What was taught in the researcher's school years were: two SRs in the Intermediate (namely, "Treasure Island" and "Jane Eyre") and two in the

Secondary (i.e., “Arms and the Man” and “Cry the Beloved Country”)- taught only at the final year at both school levels. It is also deplorable that the separate subject “English Literature” has disappeared and does not have any added value at the matriculation Examinations. More still, in the new Spine Series, the current successor of NCS, SRs are also reduced to a corner without details. They are mentioned in a paragraph about ‘reading’ at the introductory section of “Aims of Teaching English” scheme for the Basic Level and Secondary Level in the Spine Series. Siddig Abdel Monim Ismail (1992) the writer of book 1 explains that the reading section of Spine aims:

“to develop the reading skills and strategies in the learner so that he can interact as a good reader with simple texts such as essays, stories and selected supplementary readers. This will enable the learner to move to the horizons of “free reading” which help the learner pursue (follow) self-learning and hence benefit from other sources of culture” (ibid: 2).

Interestingly, Mr. Siddig Abdel Monim (1992) as a contemporary of the NCS trialing period has indirectly provided another evidence of the lukewarm status of SRs in Sudanese English Syllabi. Abel Monim (ibid), who was assigned the task of authoring the first book of Spine, must have been aware of the significance of SRs and the effect of insufficient description of them in the NCS. Despite that, he had repeated the same problem of the NCS in his Spine Series. Accordingly, another Pandora’s Box has been opened for the new generation of language teachers. This case is a typical reminiscent of the two stories of ‘the Emperor in New Clothes’ and Achebe’s “District Commissioner” in the final chapter of the novel “Things Fall Apart”. As two renowned stories, the researcher will employ them to reveal the iceberg of SRs as two sides of a coin. After the tragic death of Okonkwo, the district commissioner had learned a lot of lessons from the protagonist’s suicide. He planned to write

an account of “Okonkwo’s” story in a book, where special emphasis will be given to the poignant feeling he experienced and the poor image of himself- like Orwell’s feeling in Shooting of an Elephant account. However,

“as he walked back to the court he thought about that book. Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*” (Achebe 1958: 147-8).

In analogy, the details of teaching these SRs in the syllabus were scarce; they were given a cursory touch in two Sudanese national syllabuses for general education despite cognizance of their significance. There seems to be a reason behind that. Therefore, identification of the evidence of the Emperor’s story is needed, particularly because Corbluth had been ‘firm in cutting out the essential details’ of SRs.

#### **Analysis of Corbluth’s Philosophy and Principles**

To start with, Harmer’s (2007: 284) statement that “most students will not do a lot of extensive reading by themselves unless they are encouraged to do so by their teachers” constitutes a good rule of thumb in language teaching. Actually, it is the researcher’s conviction that Corbluth’s indefatigable judicious campaigns to alert all teachers to involve their students in the process of reading *simply and plentifully* must have been supported by an embedded philosophy and a particular teaching paradigm. However, this paradigm, to use a metaphorical wording, must have been written in invisible ink that needs to be deciphered. So, a basic premise must be settled concerning his probable theory

about teacher training. In this regard, Richards (2008) points to two main approaches in teacher training practices: those from theory to practice and vice-versa; He states:

“While traditional views of teacher-learning often viewed teachers’ task as the application of theory to practice, more recent views see teacher-learning as the theorisation of practice – in other words, making visible the nature of practitioner knowledge and providing the means by which such knowledge can be elaborated, understood and reviewed” (ibid: 164-5).

It is obvious that Corbluth used a traditionalist theory in his philosophy of SRs but did not spell it out. It is also not a coincidence that Corbluth had extracted the essential detail of his advice for students and the teachers’ campaign. Perhaps, the experienced teachers contemporaneous to the trialling period of NCS were miraculously talented; he wanted to allow them a degree of discretion in handling a controversial component in English Curricula worldwide. No matter what reason behind his reticence, He showed a tremendous sense of responsibility as a mentor, particularly in his advice for 3<sup>rd</sup> year students who were approaching their final school examination. At the same time in the teacher’s book 6, and as a matter of conscience, he appealed to his colleagues concerning their responsibility towards their students in the following way:

“We have to prepare for the examination. But the examination itself is not an end but a beginning, a preparation for higher education or a career. And for higher education the students desperately need reading skills and study skills. They should be reading not only the usual simplified readers in English ... but also material related to the fields of their future higher studies or possible occupation. We would be betraying our students if we prepare



them *only* for examination and ignored the much important longer terms of education” Corbluth (1982: 9-10).

He seemed to be very aware of his address to teachers, especially the wonderful style of persuasion and identifying with them. He shared with them his very special experiences and established a sense of rapport by his style of talking to them- just like an anthropologist in an area of his preference or new home. For example, about the timetable arrangement and teaching load, in book 6, he said “if the number of English periods per week is increased, then I would suggest that each teacher teaches two and a half classes, sharing class with another teacher – this is exactly what I used to do myself in Port Sudan back in the sixties” (ibid: 31). Contrasted to other books for guiding teachers in any subject this is a perfect method to win their hearts and minds and urge teachers to be self reliant and confident. Therefore, Corbluth was an expert and had not been taken unawares by the lack of details and the problem of bestowing more discretion to teachers in his times. There are more of these examples in the body of NCS; however, an additional example of a missing link provided by Sertima (1976) will clarify this crucial argument. Sertima (ibid), who meticulously tried to document the circumstantial evidence that he found about *The African Presence in Ancient America* before Columbus, states:

“I was intrigued and impressed but very sceptical. I felt like a man who had come upon a dozen clues to a sensational murder but did not feel too confident about the evidence. The smell of blood, even the marks of the bullet, were there, but far more important things- the body and the gun- were missing” (ibid: xiii).

For this paper, all clues to Corbluth’s assumed philosophy can be identified in the syllabus’ map: firstly, the rough outline of SRs in the six books of NCS; secondly, the recurrent series of advice for

students; thirdly, the speed reading tests and; fourthly, the hidden mobilization campaign for teachers- all are visible. However, the most essential likely evidence that inhibited Corbluth from spelling out the details was the presence of qualified teachers during the earlier years of the implementation of the NCS, thus a greater degree of discretion was bestowed upon them - whether inadvertently or intentionally it is a puzzle that experienced teachers need to account for.

Despite this, the story of the Emperor in New Clothes seems to be a perfect choice to discuss and interpret the findings. As a story, the Emperor appears in titles of books, essays and children's picture books; however, it has a latent power of offering its user an obvious route and clarity of interpretation. Namely, it works as an effective instrument for identifying the error, analyzing its elements and giving interpretation in a visible manner that everyone will understand. Corbluth devised numerous strategies to achieve the goals of his reading campaign under the 'slogan' of *reading simply quickly and plentifully*; this has been the controlling theme in his campaign. So, the question is: was the status of SRs in the NCS adequately perceived by all related stakeholders; starting from Corbluth and his entourage to students and their respective teachers throughout the period of a decade and a half? In this paper, the sub-story of the District Commissioner in Achebe's famous novel has initially paved the ground for the Emperor's story. So, like the District Commissioner, Corbluth was aware of the significance of SRs in the treatment of deterioration of English linguistic standards in Sudan due to a variety of causes beyond control. However, he broached the topic of SRs with an engineered plan, similar to what the reader will perceive after much thinking about Achebe's revelations and philosophy when he voiced his real message at the end of his novel. The District Commissioner knew that if he writes in his planned book any account of 'Okonkwo's' story it will cause a real and immediate sensationalism amongst his people with whom he has vested interests that could be in

jeopardy. He was actually aware of the problem and brooded over it until at last he decided to give a synoptic account or a bare skeletal anecdote so that the story should not spoil his scheme. Should “Okonkwo” feature prominently in his book, “people will not see the woods for the trees” in Lower Niger. In analogy to this analysis, and what the researcher believes in the case of SRs, Corbluth had designed an ambitious project for revolutionising a radical change in teaching English as a foreign language in Sudan. He put all his long experience at stake to make the NCS’ project a success. As if he was an anthropologist who studies a (weird) society, Corbluth knew all Bakh al Ruda traditions and the teaching atmosphere in Sudan since the early sixties a time that can be termed the ‘the prime years of his life’. His deep knowledge of Sudanese teachers, his sense of rapport and keenness to improve the linguistic standards in schools, will possibly qualify him to be an educational icon if he returns to Sudan again. Perhaps, if that happens, Corbluth and his co-writers of NCS will be talking about their previous life in Sudan in the following way:

“What were the results? We asked ourselves this question many times during these years, anxious to detect some progress, but knowing full well that it would be a generation before judgement could be delivered. Yet people would judge and comment all too soon, and find it difficult to separate in their judgement the influences of home, of society, of economic changes, the war, travel and newspapers from that education. Perhaps we were lucky in one thing. The limelight in these years was not on elementary education, but on the secondary schools and the growth of a university. Remembering their own days in an elementary school, most educated Sudanese were inclined to look on elementary education as rather a waste of time, to be telescoped as far as possible. .... The people who should have been in the best position

to judge our work were the parents. But very often they were looking for results which we were not aiming at. For instance, to take a small example, they would expect improvement in a boy's ability to read Arabic aloud with the classical pronunciation, while we were concentrating in his comprehension." (Griffith, 1975: 81)

Moreover, with reference to the 1966's conference a lot of evidences to Corbluth's hidden principles and philosophy for integrating SRs were also identified. In that conference, Mr. Mohamed Hassan Abdalla (1966), who was the then Under-Secretary of Education, presented the closing address and in the process heralded the new regulations for curricula changes. He stated that Sudanese experienced teachers and senior inspectors of English had "... made great efforts in teaching English and of course they did not have time to indulge in revising syllabuses. Syllabuses should be made in one stage, i.e. from intermediate to secondary" (ibid: 88). It seems that Corbluth (and his co-writers), according to his scientific method in book 4 (pages 133-34), had carefully planned his principles accordingly. More importantly, three items were identified in the recommendations of the conference that are important to account for Corbluth's reduction of details on SRs; these were: item no. 2. (c-ii and iii), item no. 4 and item no. 5. These items are essential as they guide the researcher to avoid the idiosyncrasy of interpretation. The related items to NCS, given to the Ministry of Education, were meant:

- (ii) to prepare an integrated syllabus, covering both Intermediate and secondary levels, and
  - (iii) to produce, after due experimentation, suitable textbooks to enable such a syllabus to be fully effective.
4. That a group should be set up to produce a teacher's handbook of methods for 1<sup>st</sup> year and later 2<sup>nd</sup> year, providing specimen lessons from commonly used

textbooks (the role of such group might later be widened) and that the group should meet under the auspices of the H.T.T.I. and the Chief Inspector of English.

5. That new books be written to be used as class-readers and textbooks taking into account the immediate environment and the variety of types of writing (descriptive, narrative, factual, etc.) and that books from other countries be consulted. (In the Sudan, Conference 1966: 92)

One statement is: that Corbluth had read the document of this conference and after much thinking decided that the task of writing details for SRs should be left to the group of experienced teachers as item 4 stipulates. Another of Corbluth's problem is that he was surrounded by a meritocracy of educationalist who marvellously spoke their minds regarding the true issues of concern that Sudanese teachers need to erect. These teachers were his colleagues and assistants and the probable teachers who would execute his books in the classroom in different parts of the Sudan. The greater amount of discretion to such reflective teachers who were of a high calibre of training and experience deserve to be granted such an honour. They could experiment and produce their own teaching modules in due time. Therefore, the SRs' scheme was only highlighted and outlined in the final edition of the NCS books. Furthermore, the core texts of the NCS and their complementary readers were not tried out and experimented in tandem with each other in one crucible, namely in the 1976/77/78 trialling classes. Thus, SRs received their first setback from the very start; or in other words they were still born. But unfortunately, the procession of the emperor kept going despite the awareness of all that the number of qualified teachers was declining rapidly and many schools were being established. The module produced by Gareth Griffiths in 1990 on "Oliver Twist" was too late. The boundless zest for teaching the NCS in the Sudan as in its prime years was waning due to lack of

rigorous training for the new generated teachers by the colleges of education that replaced the ISETI and Bakht al Ruda. Item 6 in the recommendation of the 1966 conference states: “All practicing teachers should attend In-Service Training Course as soon as practical. Heads of Departments should be included in this programme, including expatriates” (1966 Conference Recommendations: 92). The researcher believes that the ISETI had tried its best to solve the problem of bad teaching performance due to lack of training. However, the rising numbers of teachers with poor linguistic competence has necessitated the ISETI to initiate Gareth’s teacher training module on “Oliver Twist”, where teachers were judiciously subjected to training as teachers and to improve their English competency as well. In a nutshell, availability of good numbers of trained teachers who actually participated either in direct teaching or consultation during the trialling periods of NCS was the biggest reason for Corbluth to abstain from detailing his methodology of SRs. However, Corbluth might possibly had refrained from the practical integration and experimentation of SRs for fear that they might sabotage the efficacy of the core materials of his Books. Therefore his series of advice for the teachers he knew best could finish the job by experimentation in real classroom and create an eventual feedback loop in the process.

### **Gareth Griffiths Model of Teaching SRs in the 1990s**

The module written by Gareth Griffiths (1990) for the In-Service Training Institutes (ISETI) can be identified as the key to the missing details of teaching SRs in the NCS. It was designed for teacher training on the class reader “Oliver Twist” in the Bridge Series. This module is really a treasure trove of information; it reveals rare details that are difficult to find anywhere. To attempt to spin a web between the frame-work of teaching “Oliver Twist” as designed for teacher-learning and the key statements and advice made by Corbluth within his NCS core texts seems to yield significant amounts of information about SRs. Ten years

after 1979, Corbluth's theory on SRs started to be practically stipulated by the experienced expatriate Gareth Griffith in 1989-1990s and assisted by other senior staff of ISETI including Mr. Siddig Abdelmonim, the then head of ISETI's Technical section. Interestingly, the latter is the writer of the first book of the Spine Series. A cursory look at the module revealed that there is a clear method for training teachers first so that they can transfer their experience of reading this class reader to their students. Gareth originally designed his booklet to train intermediate school teachers (and has introduced for the first time after 10 years of teaching NCS) specific aims pertaining to the neglected class readers. Its aims were outlined on its back cover as follows:

- (a) to help participants read "Oliver Twist" with enjoyment;
- (b) to introduce the idea that different materials should be read in different ways;
- (c) to give participants an opportunity to use and develop their ability in English language;
- (d) for participants to use in their own learning, teaching techniques and classroom strategies that they will subsequently use in teaching their own pupils.

Gareth's teacher training module, from its very beginning, stipulates the directives for reading the book of "Oliver Twist" and even before that it reveals its broad aims at the back cover as a blurb. He addresses teachers in a firm style, directly and in simple language, in one page and a half; and due to its importance for this inquiry, it will be cited verbatim then will be highlighted for analysis and drawing lessons. The module starts like this:

(i)

TO THE PARTICIPANT:

Dear Participant,

This book\* is the first of six literature books that you will read in your ISETI English Course.

This module, which is intended to help you with your work on “Oliver Twist”, is divided into seven sections. After the introductory seminar, each section will take two weeks to cover and will give you work that you must prepare for the seminar that comes at the end of the section. It is very important that you do the reading and the exercises before the seminar. The activities that you will carry out in the seminar depend on this. If you come to the seminar without having done the reading and exercises, you will not only waste your own time, you will also waste the time of one of your colleague who will be unable to do pair work with you as you do not have the knowledge of the story to enable you to work in a pair. You must prepare for the seminars.

If you can work through the exercises together with another participant or participants, you will probably find this more interesting, and will help you to talk about the book with others. It is also useful to get another participant to read through your work and see if he can find errors in language. (You can be reading through his work as he is reading through yours!) Again, talking about whether something is an error or not is a productive way for both of you to improve your English language.

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\*Dickens, Charles, Oliver Twist, Edited and abridged by Latif Doss, Longman, The Bridge Series, 1962, New Impression 1986.

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(ii)

You will need an exercise book just for work on “Oliver Twist” so that all the work you do is together and ready for revision for the examination. Make sure that the work you do in this book is clearly headed and shows which



exercises from the module are being answered. Your field tutor will not mark everything that you write in your exercise book but s/he will certainly mark some of it.

Good luck with this module. We hope you enjoy reading “Oliver Twist”.

(Griffiths, 1990: i-ii)

Within all its pages, Griffiths’ module elaborates the training plan, in perfect aptness as if inspired by Corbluth’s style typical to “We hope you will enjoy your new school and your new English book” (Corbluth 1979: vii). The module perfectly stipulates all the directives needed in a typical NCS classroom provided that the necessary changes were made from a teacher-training/learning oriented approach to student learning practical directives for a class reader. In fact, it starts with an orientation session about how to read “Oliver Twist”, its main characters, minor characters, a character matrix (at the appendix) and responses to the story either orally or in writing. Then it elaborately works practically with (participants) through a method of reading intensively and extensively supplemented with exercises and feedback both in theory and practice. In other words, all the three Ps known in teaching theories are applied as well as a detailed chapter by chapter analysis followed by an appendix for a real examination for the participants and its marking scheme. Thus, this module decodes key questions that the researcher has been trying to answer; it only needs to be re-written for students and be experimented. It wonderfully gives any one who attends such a seminar, even today, a real sense of rigorous input and a method. However, some more questions are left unsolved like how to teach these 6 class readers and what about the extensive readers out of class? But, by all accounts this module is a breakthrough in the right direction despite that fact that it was written after a long time. This approach of teacher-learning, developed by Griffith in the ISETI, more or less is appropriate for the classroom and suits the current situation of

teacher Education. This is because the adoption of an approach like the *theorisation of practice* model is likely to fail due to lack of truly qualified teachers who can teach reflectively. Prove of that lies in the design of the ISETI “Oliver Twist” model where everything was stipulated for teachers to improve themselves first then to adapt its techniques verbatim in their classes. Interestingly, the ISETI teaching expertise has predicted the likely problems that might happen to these teachers inside their classrooms, and thereby, has answered a very important question: what do teachers really want to know from the NCS designers and trainers? And by definition, has answered other questions such as: what happens to these (partially-trained) teachers then when they face the inquisitive faces of their reluctant pupils/students about the what, why, and how aspects of reading SRs. More importantly: “The teacher who is caught up in so limited a view of the nature of teaching may find it hard to bear the uncertainties associated with having students in his classroom. The autonomy of the teacher in the classroom is rightly valued, but there is a price to be paid” state Hannam, Smyth and Stephenson, (1971: 16-17). Therefore, it is quite clear to claim that the teaching model produced by Gareth Griffith in 1990 in ISETI is the perfect epitome of the hypothetical methodology of implementing the minimum of 12 SRs per year in the NCS. In short, this available copy of the module “Oliver Twist” by Gareth Griffiths’ and Corbluth’s philosophy can be married together to reconstruct the right module that suits the Sudanese classroom-even for the tertiary level.

Interestingly, a crucial point now is: if all the writers of NCS books were to be asked the questions, why there are not any details about your grafted SRs which you deliberately extracted till now? Could you please give us a written document? Besides, your integration of SRs in NCS has been identified as a typical story of an Emperor in his New Clothes. The writers would probably state that, actually, the Sudan, with hundreds of experienced teachers, abreast with the newest developments in

the Sudan, can do more to improve the situation of SRs themselves. In addition, it would be a good idea to provide a comment, but that is for the Sudanese themselves to do; they do have the time, resources, and interest. Most importantly, the former colleagues who carried out the trialing versions would be able to give plenty of documents, orientation and personal experiences too.

Nonetheless, a concrete comment, on the latter point, must be made here by an example that happened to Brumfit (2001). Brumfit (ibid) had been inspired to write an account of his lifelong experience from a little remark made by some of his students. They gave him an impetus to write a whole book telling his remarkable researching, teaching and academic ideas and reflections. He stated his reasons for documenting his prolific academic life in the preface of his book which he titled: "Individual Freedom in Language Teaching". He said:

"Two of my research students, both practising teachers, are apparently responsible for the shape and form of this book. They both remarked on the consistency of my ideas over the years, and I felt slightly hurt, as if I had been accused of failing to learn from my experience. But when I read papers I had written over the past 20 years, and when I examined the theses written by my students, I realized that there is a pretty consistent view of language in the world struggling to emerge. Articulating this in full theoretical detail is a task which will require substantial leisure and some years of further work" (ibid: xi).

So, there are always coincidences like this where a whole project starts with a remark like the case of Brumfit; a visit like the one made by the renowned Mr. Griffiths, V.L. (1975) who was much cited in this paper and; perhaps there are many others beyond the researcher's cognizance. However, be that as it may, the story of NCS requires those of experience to take their pens and commit

them to paper, especially regarding issues vital for the education of the current Sudanese literati and those in schools. The best thing that this study can offer is to point to what constitutes the Emperor story in the English curriculum at schools so that a healthy environment for further research and documentations will follow.

### **Conclusion**

It could be argued that the paper used a hermeneutic content analysis approach for interpreting the status of SRs in NCS. This is true and has its justifications. The hermeneutic method is the most appropriate in comparison with the cause-effect approach for achieving the set objective of the paper. In addition, the whole philosophy and plan of teaching the 12 SRs of the NCS were distilled into few hints, observations and suggestions (for both teachers and students) by Corbluth and that the published literature on them is still scarce. It is also possible to state that the many experienced teachers contemporaneous to Corbluth were not taken unawares by the dysfunctional strategy designed for the 12 SRs. After all, they were bestowed with much discretion to handle and reflect on teaching the prescribed 12 SRs. But more importantly, these venerable teachers can be regarded as authorities now; they, can be requested to take the initiative to write back about their previous experience of NCS- like Mr. Griffiths (1975), Brumfit (2000) and even to be skeptical like the above mentioned Sertima (1976). Novice teachers, policy-makers, curricula designers and researchers will highly appreciate any memoirs written by these teachers whether they are Sudanese nationals or their expatriate contemporaries living in Diaspora. Accordingly, it is essential to give some recommendation regarding the status of SRs in Sudan.

1. A symposium can be organized for developing English literacy in General Education to set parameters for raising students' linguistic competence in reading English.
2. Experienced teachers and specialists of credible expertise can be requested to continue the prodigious work of the

ISETI modules initiated in 1990s on “Oliver Twist”, particularly in reference to Spine Series (and SMILE).

3. Training courses should be regularly offered to teachers in practical methods appropriate to teaching SRs for large classes.
4. Re-introduction of “Additional English” materials in the school timetable as a credit subject in the matriculation examination as soon as practicable for both science and arts students.
5. Further studies and experiments should be conducted on the teaching SRs, especially on speed reading to pave the way for informed curricula reforms.
6. The method of integrating SRs in the NCS can be articulated and experimented to assess its validity, particularly in pre-university intensive English language classes.

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