

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



Volume 7, Issue 1, January 2019

www.ijellh.com

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A Critical Analysis of Reading Comprehension and its impact on the undergraduate students:

With reference to Engineering and Pharmacy students of Telangana state

Abstract: This study was conducted to investigate L2 reading strategies of undergraduate students in relation to their comprehension and to gain insight into the role of schema playing a significant role in L2 reading process. The focus was on first year Pharmacy and first year Bachelor of Technology in an engineering college. Strategies were employed to collect data to evaluate the reading processes while reading non-subject related passages. Reading strategy repository was administered to evaluate the reading strategies of students while reading a passage. Questionnaires were used to extract students' views on the challenges faced by them. In the following sections, the major findings of the research questions are summarised.

Introduction:

Reading has always been part and parcel of human civilization. The ability to read is one of the bare necessities of modern-day life. In everyday life, people encounter material for reading either in their first language or a foreign language. In such a scenario, knowledge of the language in which the written material is written is imperative. Hence the ability to read for various purposes at different times in one's life is crucial for every person.

The purposes of reading as talked about by Rivers and Temperley not only demand the capacity to decode printed or written letters but also understand the meaning of words in the given context, Thus reading assumes much significance in day-to-day life.

The main aim of teaching a language is to develop the LSRW skills. But most of the students are unable to communicate in English because of lack of exposure, lack of usage and the unfamiliarity of grammatical components. The four language skills viz, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are very fundamental and paramount in second language learning. These skills of individual can be divided into receptive skills -- listening and reading, and productive skills -- speaking and writing. It is through receptive skills that knowledge of the target language is acquired and that in turn is reinforced through the practice of individual productive skills. These skills of individual are meant to be developed among the students by the teacher with the help of the lessons in the prescribed textbook. But classroom teaching alone cannot develop the language skills of the students. Over and above in the classroom teaching a student should supplement what he/she learns in the classroom with his/her own reading outside the classroom. Since in the Indian context as the individual have not found many people speaking English around and since cannot provide an 'English environment' for the students to learn English naturally, reading in the language assumes great significance for learning the language. To the individual who learns the language for use in real-life situations, it has to be practiced in such situations. Since for most Indian pupils the opportunity for using English in everyday social intercourse is not available, it has been justifiably argued that they can never acquire native-like competence in spoken English.

Literature Review

Cognitively based views of reading comprehension emphasize the interactive nature of reading and the constructive nature of comprehension. Dole et al. (1991) have stated that,

besides knowledge brought to bear on the reading process; a set of flexible, adaptable strategies is used to make sense of a text and to monitor ongoing understanding. Reading is not simply a behaviour of reading aloud or reading silently, but a cognitive process in which readers receive information from the text then criticize that information with negative or positive attitudes. This is important for a reader to express himself and judge whether the text gives valid information on any given subject. Rumelhart (1977) has described schemata as "building blocks of cognition" which are used in the process of interpreting sensory data, in retrieving information from memory, in organising goals and sub-goals, in allocating resources, and in guiding the flow of the processing system. Rumelhart (1977) has also stated that if our schemata are incomplete and do not provide an understanding of the incoming data from the text we will have problems processing and understanding the text.

The challenge of teaching reading comprehension is complex in the current era because all students are expected to read more text and more complex texts. Schools can no longer track students so that only those with highly developed reading skills take the most reading-intensive courses. All students now need to read high-level texts with comprehension to pass high stake examinations and to make themselves employable.

L2 learners, lacking in the schemata, will encounter problems in understanding the content of a text that they are unfamiliar with. The scenario among undergraduate level students lack in content schemata which resulted in the failure to comprehend a reading text, which prompted the researcher to conduct a study on the role of content schemata in second language reading. From the researcher's experience teaching a group of Engineering and Pharmacy students, she discovered that many of them were having difficulties to understand a text. For this purpose, the students were given a passage on a topic "ocean resources". In order to complete the reading comprehension questions, the students were required to identify the writer's purpose or intention in identifying bias and connotations in the reading text.

During a reading process, the readers' schemata act as a bridge, connecting their prior knowledge on a particular subject matter and the content of the reading passage. Lacking in schemata or "schema unavailability" (Nuttall, 1982; Carrell, 1988), in this case about the history of How Ocean offers a wealth of natural resources, was found to be a huge stumbling block for those students to comprehend the text. The students were unable to discover the appropriate slots from their schemata to relate to the context of ocean resources in the reading text. It was presumed that since their background knowledge on the study of the oceans was lacking, they could not activate their schemata which was essential to interpret the context of a given topic, where the slots should be instantiated with particular information (Anderson & Pearson, 1988). Therefore, the students faced problems in comprehending the text. The learners lack the necessary schema or their schema is different from the writer's in the passage. Therefore, prior knowledge of the text content which involves origin, resources and geography are prerequisites in understanding the text.

The target group did not have sufficient background knowledge of the content area with regard to the history of ocean resources and this 'schema unavailability' became a hindrance to a smooth understanding of the reading text. Carrell (1988) states that a reader will have to acquire prior knowledge of the text's content area in order to understand a reading text. Referring to the scenario above, it is crucial in conducting a study on the influence of content schemata on comprehending a text based on background knowledge.

Materials and Methods Adopted:

The primary focus of the study is to probe into cognitive and metacognitive processes of the professional course students while reading academic as well as non-academic related English texts. This study intends to find out the role of content schemata while reading an English

text. The study also focuses on the students' responses to the teaching-learning process and their attitudes towards the English language.

The research progressed with a series of transitions or stages. The three stages of transition were the pilot study I, pilot study II and the main study. The pilot study I was an extensive study on comprehension level of all undergraduate students in general in the state of the then Andhra Pradesh. The pilot study I elicited the views of undergraduate students on Teaching-learning of English language. This study was followed by pilot study II and the focus was on the reading strategy inventory. Pilot study II was necessary to find out that whether the items given in the reading strategy inventory were virtually understood by the learners or not. Pilot study II was followed by the main study and the details of all the stages are discussed. In the section that follows, the details of the questionnaire on teaching-learning process that was used to elicit information in the pilot study I and in the main study is depicted.

For this study both primary and secondary data has been collected.

For secondary data collection, the researcher has collected the data from various sources like; the libraries of Osmania University, English and Foreign Language University, Berhampur University, Acharya Nagarjuna University and the college library.

For primary data collection, the researcher has developed questionnaires and used interviewing method.

Issues related to the learning process

Sl. No	Issues
1	Necessity of English
2	Reading in mother language
3	Reading in the English language
4	Learning English for success

5	Use of English
6	Ways to learn English
7	Attitude towards English classes
8	Evaluating one's overall ability in LSRW
9	Importance of language skills in the prescribed course books
10	Using library
11	Reading types of literature
12	Reading newspapers
13	Using internet
14	Problems while listening to English lectures
15	Awareness about techniques and strategy

Conclusion:

The findings from the analysis reports of most of the successful readers and some average readers indicate that they related the given information of the reading passage to already known information. The slow readers were also found to have some background knowledge of certain words. The slow readers also could identify certain English words though they could not understand the meaning of the text. The analysis reports of average readers and most of the slow readers suggest that their schema is incomplete or probably not activated as they failed to understand the incoming data from the text. These students had obstacles while processing and understanding academic and non academic related texts. The reports of successful readers reveal that skills in reading depend on the amount of information, ideas, attitudes and beliefs that a reader brings to the task. Since the amount of information and the ideas of successful readers are adequate for text comprehension, they were successful in

understanding the reading passage. However, the reports of average readers and slow readers indicate that their approach towards the reading materials has to undergo a rapid change for better comprehension.

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