Reading Parameters and Construction of Language Proficiency for Second Language Learners-A Study

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Abstract: *The latest Technology has paved way for easy access to become familiar with various trends of resources to explore the wealth of knowledge adapted to suit teaching methods. This enables the academicians to impart quality based education and practice effective pedagogical methods. This paper helps students to implement strategies and techniques to develop their language proficiency at different levels of selected reading materials like books, comics etc graded to facilitate easy understanding and autonomous learning of vocabulary development. The students are exposed to the importance of extensive reading, become fluent readers and to communicate like fluent speakers in English. The research study was conducted on Engineering Graduates who are from vernacular medium background and learn English as a Third Language and students who studied through English as a medium of instruction. The findings of the study revealed that the students with English as a second language faced difficulty to apply relevant strategies to understand the texts. The students are trained to apply cognitive and Meta-cognitive strategies such as a Pre-reading, While-reading and Post reading activities to inculcate the reading habits to become independent readers. The sample of the study was conducted on both levels of students to judge their potency of learning at their level of understanding for effective language proficiency.*

Keywords: Cognitive, Meta-cognitive, Pre-reading, While-reading, Post reading

1. Introduction

English has become an international Language connecting different cultures, carry on international trade, official and semi-official language with an enormous wealth of knowledge stored in print and internet. The adaptability and to use the language effectively has been placed on top priority to attain proficiency especially in the areas of pronunciation, spellings, grammatical constructions to mould the students to utilize their inbuilt strategies to become fluent readers and writers. The role of teachers have a prominent place to educate the students to motivate their individual talents, build confidence and to provide an environment to flood with varied simplified texts of interesting topics to enjoy in a tension free environment. The present study focus on the significance of Extensive Reading where students have a certain goal of reading to extract information from the texts, utilize their cognitive and Meta-cognitive skills to guess the meanings for overall understanding of the reading texts. The main aspect is to create interest and make them read as reading provides the readers to interact with words frequently and automatic retention of vocabulary enhances the students to form innovative ideas and thoughts. Therefore, the reading materials have to be graded to facilitate the students to choose books on varied topics such as magazines, journals, comics, animated short stories etc., to have an easy understanding to capture the reader's attention. Psychologists and researchers have claimed that the students who have regular reading habits, read for enjoyment will automatically develop certain strategies like mapping, Skimming, Scanning and decode the texts using their schematic knowledge to build language proficiency.

"As Grabe describes Goodman's perception of reading which is seen as an … active process of comprehending [where] students need to be taught strategies to read more efficiently (e. g., guess from context, define expectations, make inferences about the text, skim ahead to fill in the context, etc. (1991, p. 377)" [01]. This paper gives an elaborate description on students reading habits, implement the practical and strategical aspects of reading in a anxiety free environment to utilize their relevant skills and strategies to become independent readers.

2. Reading

Reading is a creative art of learning to explore the wealth of knowledge as there is uninterrupted interactive process of linking with the text and the reader. The reader surrounds the information in his own world of learning, utilizing the relevant information to link with his knowledge and the text. The reader responds to the printed texts to guess the meanings using different practical methods to derive through bottom-up and top-down processes. The students skim and scan the information for initial reading, such as blurb on the cover page, diagrams and practical application of story or biography coincides with his real life situations through top down observation. Bottom-up process employs students to select the relevant data to arrange the information through mapping in his mind, spot the graphic signs, symbols etc., note down the information in a systematic way. These strategies implant the students to have a greater scope to facilitate them to automatically filter the materials and be comfortable at his comfort zone of reading.

Extensive reading provides the learners to flood with enormous varieties of simplified versions of texts especially

designed to utilize their inbuilt capacity to recognize their skills, vocabulary, synthesis and evaluate their cognitive and Meta-cognitive skills in a controlled phase to attain proficiency. In contrast, Intensive reading develops language proficiency where students read the texts under the supervision of the teacher and there is no scope to bring out their inner talents. The present study reveals the students to adopt practical methods to understand the overall content of the subject, derive the information through latest technology and to improve their reading and writing skills.

3. Significance of the Study

The research on Extensive reading is a major aspect to motivate the students to develop their reading skills and bring out their hidden talents through practical methods to read books suited to their level of understanding. This will naturally stimulate the students to become independent readers either in class or at home through silent reading to extract the information from the texts or enormous knowledge stored in internet through web pages. Extensive reading promotes the overall exposure to the outside world to adopt ways to enhance intellectual escalation of learning.

4. Findings

The findings of the study was conducted from 200 students of three different colleges of Vidya Jyothi Institute of Technology, Sagar Institute of Technology, Royal Institute of Technology and Science in Moinabad. The sample consists of students mainly from the village level who opt English as a second or Third Language as a medium of Instruction. On the other hand, some of the students have regular reading habits and opt English as the First Language and grasp sentence formation, grammar and a reasonable communicative skills. The workshop was conducted for a week and the students were tested in the relevant areas of spellings, word formation, grammar and reading abilities. They were given tasks to choose books ranging from fiction, Magazines, Biographies, comics etc., graded to their level of understanding. The students tried to browse through a variety of texts that activates their interest in reading. As a Pre-Reading Activity the students were given some training to establish formal vocabulary to learn Pre-fixes and suffixes and to observe whether the language and vocabulary is suited to interact the texts. The materials chosen were mostly simplified versions of the original texts with simple vocabulary with more animated pictures, lively dialogues to capture the attention of the reader. They were asked to maintain a reading log to mention the text is suitable or not and discard the text which cannot motivate them to create interest and pleasure in reading.

Book/Title of Topic	Suitable for reading	Not Suitable for reading	Vocabulary/ Grammar	Remarks.
Comics				
Magazines				
Biographies				
Short Stories				
Novels				

Activity [No.01]. The students were examined to test their knowledge to make them read a Lesson from a

Lesson "Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya" a Biography on the eminent Engineer from the Ist year "Epitome of Wisdom" [P.NO.1-5] about 300 words. As a Pre- reading activity the students were asked to analyze, evaluate and express their own ideas and thoughts and to link with their real life situations. After reading the lesson the students were asked to visualize the scenes, summarize the story and give their opinion of the lesson. They were given a task to pick out the verbs, articles, prepositions etc., and to try to frame sentences on their own. The glossary of unknown words adds a rich flavor of learning to make them engage in reading. Simple Techniques like formation of words from nouns to adjectives like "Doubt as a noun and "Doubtful" as an Adjective, repeated exposure of words in the context has given an ample scope to instigate the student's attention to form constructive ideas and thoughts to improve vocabulary and language proficiency.

Activity [N0.02].

Students were given a task to pick out the grammatical structures, word meanings from the given lesson using clues to motivate their background knowledge to extract the maximum benefit of reading texts.

Example

1) The river <u>Musi</u> <u>divided</u> the city of <u>Hyderabad</u> into two. [Identify the parts of speech of the underlined words]
2) The Government appreciated Visvesvaraya's <u>genius</u> and <u>sincerity</u>. [Write the meanings of the underlined words.
3) Some of the big towns are dreadfully -------------- (crowd) [Supply appropriate form of the word given in the brackets)
4) The rains lashed. The river was in floods [Join the sentences using the conjunction "As"].

The study has clearly illustrated that the students tried to focus on their independent ideas and thoughts to comprehend different shades of words, grammar and to apply their background knowledge to understand the texts. The study showed that the students with English as a Second language tried their level best to fulfill the tasks with a few grammatical mistakes and pronunciation of unknown words. In contrast, the students with English as a first language have a better understanding of the words, pronunciation with a few exemptions in the grammar. At the end of the Programme the study showed that the students have a better response to practical methods of teaching rather than the old conventional methods of translating the sentences and to read teacher selected texts.

5. Literature Review

Hafiz and Tudor state that: the pedagogical value attributed to extensive reading is based on the assumption that exposing learners to large quantities of meaningful and interesting L2 material will, in the long run, produce a beneficial effect on the learners' command of the L2. (1989, p. 5) [01]. The main objective of extensive reading is to flood learners with a broad variety of materials such as Newspapers, comics, Biographies, Fiction etc., to attain

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automaticity to facilitate the reader engrossed into the world of knowledge unconsciously to understand the writer's ideas and thoughts. Therefore, reading is a powerful tool to interact between the reader and the writer to develop different shades of systematic knowledge to activate their cognitive and Meta-cognitive strategies to analyse, evaluate and decode the messages through mapping, graphic signs to attain the intellectual proficiency. The readers use different kinds of strategies such as bottom up process for systematic retention of knowledge and top-down process to use their experience like skimming, scanning and to activate their schematic knowledge to understand the information derived from the printed materials. These strategies may be text related to have a general understanding of the text and learner-related to use their inborn talents such as cognitive, Meta-cognitive and linguistic ability to comprehend the texts.

Gee (1999) argues that the more we read, the more competent language learners we become, and the more we enjoy reading; the more we enjoy it, the more we read, and the more competent language learners we become. [02]. The reading materials have to be graded systematically with minimum two or three difficult words in a page, easy vocabulary with lots of pictures, graphic signs and lively conversations to assist the students to link with the new information using their background knowledge. The more exposure of the printed materials will automatically build their confidence levels to grasp sentence formation, vocabulary, lexical and syntactical structures through browsing various interesting topics of their choice. The role of extensive reading is to make them independent and strategic readers to express their thoughts and ideas, improve their outside knowledge, learn varied shades of words and changes in the Language patterns to improve their reading and writing capabilities. The researchers stated that the students have to encounter the words at least 6-20 times to improve their language and vocabulary retention surrounded by enormous printed materials designed at their level of understanding.

Elley's (1991) survey of "book flood" studies (the essential element of such studies is increasing the availability of books to the students) showed that L2 learners tended to benefit more from an increase in volume of reading than do L1 learners because they encountered unfamiliar words at a greater rate than L1 learners. [03]. The students exposure to vast printed materials surrounded by words, grammar etc., in the texts will automatically develop certain strategies to grasp the word meanings, motivation to produce effective writing skills such as summaries, short stories, essays, reports and letters. The students face difficulty to guess the words in the initial stages because of reader's background knowledge and reading habits to build the necessary strategies to comprehend the texts. Therefore, the texts have to be graded and the glossary of difficult words have to be mentioned at the end of the lessons to facilitate the students to enjoy and read without difficulty. The glossary of words help the students to interact with the texts without the help of the dictionary and to create interest in the minds of the learners with pictures, animations etc. to draw learner's attention and enhance uninterrupted silent reading in a anxiety free environment. The role of Extensive reading is to

inculcate the automatic retention of words, idiomatic phrases and sentence structures in a systematic order to recognize the print media, improve fast eye-movements, decode the written information through mapping the ideas and thoughts.

Williams (1987) gives three phases – which he calls the pre-reading phase, the reading phase, and the post-reading phase - - for teaching reading comprehension. [04]. The Reading materials will not support the necessary information and it is the responsibility of the reader to derive the information from the texts using their background knowledge to understand the texts. A fluent reader improves certain strategies and experience of regular reading habits, identify the usage of language, vocabulary to become self reliant and enjoy the knowledge stored in the books. Teachers play a vital role to motivate the students to give them the tasks such as Pre-reading, Reading and the Post- reading Phases to employ students to check their progress of independent learning. In Pre-reading Phase the teacher assists the students by showing pictures, slides, movies, audios etc., to motivate the students. The students try to understand the subject and write about the summary of the subject, discuss with the other students to express their ideas and thoughts. In the second phase i.e., the Reading Phase the students read the lesson and try to employ their relevant schemata to cope up with the texts. In the Post-reading Phase the students try to link their background knowledge with the texts and their experience in their real life situations. This will naturally build their inner talents to understand the texts in a more logical and practical methods.

"Thus, students' motivation to read for purpose is promoted to enable them to become the independent readers who can enjoy reading autonomously beyond the classroom." (Hedge, 2003 cited in Alyousef, 2005: 147) [05]. This clearly states that the students motivation and confidence to read in a low anxiety environment will assist them to build their background knowledge with profound reading capabilities to become independent readers. Extensive reading assists students to read outside the classroom activity to recognize their talents with minimum teacher supervision to browse through the internet especially e-books (Electronic Books) on varied topics to gain proficiency and control over the language. Even the students have the facility to download speeches of eloquent speakers, watch videos, News channels etc., to check their pronunciation, spellings and grammar to express their ideas and thoughts in a clear way. This will assist the vocabulary and knowledge to use the words in different contexts to bring out their talents as efficient readers, writers to construct meaningful paragraphs, essays, comprehension passages, reports, short stories in a clear expressive manner. Extensive reading promotes the students to decode the meanings, grasp the sentences through automatic retention of analysing, evaluating the syntax, diagrams, graphic signs of the printed matter. Therefore, the students should be flooded with a variety of reading materials to build up their confidence, motivation to choose books suited to their cognitive levels of understanding. The learners develop the relevant strategies like fast reading, vocabulary and rational thinking to understand the texts using their constructive ideas and thoughts as they come across the frequency of

words repeated in various concepts through regular reading habits.

6. Limitations

The findings in this paper was taken in the rural areas of Moinabad where students have poor reading habits and lack proper motivation to enjoy texts at their level of understanding. The workshop conducted for a week to motivate the students to cultivate the reading habits, flood the learners on a broad variety of printed materials graded according to their cognitive levels of understanding. The study clearly showed that the students face difficulty in particular areas such as spellings, Grammar, Pronunciation of words. Teachers play a vital role to motivate the students and recognize their various needs such as designing the curriculum, grading the materials and engage them in practical methods such as debates, group discussions, paper presentations etc., to become independent readers. The students have to be trained to select their own independent materials, download and watch lectures on various topics, animated short stories, vocabulary games etc., to recognize their talents, identify their weakness and apply relevant strategies to solve their problems in the learning process. The main objective of Extensive reading is to improve their reading skills and strategies on a variety of topics graded to their level of understanding to make them independent and life-long readers.

7. Suggestions

The research on Extensive reading has revealed that the students develop their language proficiency, vocabulary, sentence formation and to use their constructive thoughts and ideas in a more expressive way. The findings have clearly stated the students capacities to judge the materials, evaluate, analyse the textual knowledge and proper implementation of strategies and skills to decode the meanings like semantic mapping, graphic signs, diagrams etc., to comprehend the texts. The reader brings the actual information derived from the texts and try to apply the information and knowledge with the outside world. The findings have clearly shown that the students with more exposure to the print media develop their cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies, judge their proficiency levels and create an active learning atmosphere through discussions with their peers. The materials designed for the students of English as a second language should be graded to capture the attention, interest and enjoy the texts at their level of understanding.

8. Conclusion

The study conducted for a week on the Extensive reading programme has revealed that the students have to be motivated to read independently on a wide range of topics to inculcate reading habits. The learners have the tendency to learn new words, construct their ideas and thoughts in a expressive way through automatic retention of vocabulary takes place as the reader comes across words repeated in different contexts such as short stories, comics, Newspapers etc., Therefore, research on Extensive reading has proved

that the longer duration of silent reading in a low anxiety environment improves automatic retention of vocabulary, background knowledge and confidence in every aspect of learning.

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