



Action Research: Developing Reading Skills At Undergraduate Level.

KEYWORDS

Reading comprehension, Pre-test, Post-test , classroom observation

Dr.V.Vennila

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRM University Kattankulathur – 603203.

ABSTRACT *The present study attempts to examine the existing problem faced by the undergraduate students in reading comprehension. The aim of this action research is to develop the learner's ability in reading comprehension and to identify the existing ability in reading comprehension. The study consists of 30 learners in arts and science college in deemed university at Chennai. The study materials where such as; passages from authentic reading materials were used to enhance learning experience of the subjects for the real time situations. The result shows that there is a difference in pre-test and post-test after the classroom observation and analysis on test score. The data collected from the learners illustrates the reliability of learning and the study reveals, it is optimistic that the test is serving its purpose.*

Introduction

In university, General English is one of the subjects for two semesters, one to secure a graduation degree. According to the latest regulation of university grant commission (UGC) 2015, English language is a part of curriculum for the learners of arts and science graduation program. Learning English as a second language is not new to be incorporated into learners learning system. Learners of English experience various challenges in learning. Perhaps at college echelon the second language learners encounter problems in developing reading skills. The under graduate learner, develop their reading skill for various purposes; higher education, employability, informational purpose and literary purposes. In higher education, reading comprehension is a skill that is critical in the educational success of all individuals.

To increase the ability of reading, there are various components such as; understanding text in context, automatic reading of text, reading fluency, phonics, letter knowledge, print knowledge, vocabulary and etc. However, learners at under graduate level are not familiar in developing reading comprehension skills. Hence, it is merely important to teach the components involved in learning reading skill; comparing, contrasting, summarizing, problem solving, identifying the facts, acceptance of the main idea and so on. Reading comprehension has been defined in many ways over the years. According to Webster's Dictionary, comprehension is "the capacity for understanding fully; the act or action of grasping with the intellect." Webster also tells us that reading is "to receive or take in the sense of (as letters or symbols) by scanning; to understand the meaning of written or printed matter; to learn from what one has seen or found in writing or printing. Reading comprehension teaching aims at; to let better grasping of the context, sequence and the characters narrated in text, certain part of the text can confuse readers. Reading comprehension skills works on this aspect to get the clear meaning of the text. Inadequate knowledge in vocabulary, speed of reading and ineffective teaching methods may lead to fossilisation of learning English as a second language. It is also identified that learners reading strategies to generate inferences that aid in the understanding of science texts is limited (Ozura and McNamara, 2005).

Aims and Objective

- To identify learners understanding in narrated text that consists of sequencing and meaning for the vocabulary
- To enquire the reading ability of learners and develop reading comprehension
- To enquire a model to develop the reading strategy among the learners

Methodology

To develop the reading comprehension among the learners the researcher involves the two different models for the study; bottom-up model and top-down model. In bottom-up model the learning of decoding skills helps to recognise, to read and to understand (LaBerge and Samuels, 1974). The focus on the reading process brought by the reader to develop reading skills is practised as top-down model in the field of education (Goodman, 1967 & Smith, 1971, 1982).

The study was conducted in a Deemed University at Chennai, India. There were thirty students of under graduation course from the department of commerce as a participant of the study. This action research was conducted to develop the learners reading comprehension skill. Nunan, (2003), "action research is aimed at changing things, and leads to improvement". Action research consists of three steps; to identify, to solve and to find a solution.

Any type of research problem requires a series of rigorous steps to arrive at accurate results. As far as this study is concerned, the researcher has selected the descriptive method of analysis. The researcher explained each exercise to the learners and made them to read the exercise and they were asked to give answer in the form of words, fill up or choose the correct answer, rewrite the sentences and write the appropriate answers according to the given instruction. The test consists of reading passage, approximately of 400 words extracted from the magazines and web posts. The choice of material was based on the learners needs.

Pre-Test

The pre-test administered among the learners identifies that there is an inadequate knowledge in skimming and scanning, word-filling, reading in depth. The learners were evaluated with well defined rubrics to find difficulties in the items and proceed further to classify the materials liked by

the learners to read.

From this analysis it is well known that, the students are failed to distinguish the main ideas from the form of the supporting details. The test takers responded to the common well-known items, and felt difficult in answering the other items. This clearly shows that learners are with poor knowledge in reading comprehension, vocabulary and its meaning.

Classroom Observation

During the study students were trained to learn the reading comprehension skill using bottom-up and top-down models. To stimulate the learning, authentic materials such as newspaper, magazine articles, and articles from web pages were used as a teaching aid to enhance learning processes. The researcher also made journal entry on classroom observation. The reading materials were identified according to the clues that are present in a sentence will lead or mislead the reader. The reader has to carefully penetrate the structure and elements with a view to making meaning referring to the previous and forthcoming contexts within the passage, reads in order to maximize his understanding.

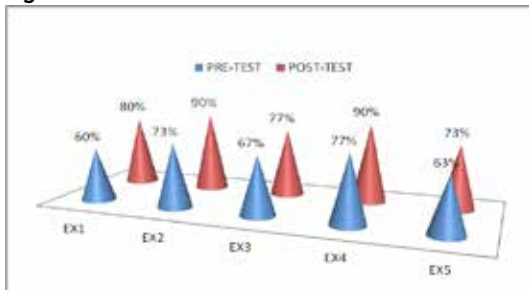
Post-test

A test was administered among the thirty respondents to find the objectives and the effectiveness of the action research study. The learners were given stipulated time to reveal the performance of learning the components in reading comprehension skill. A prior notification was provided to the test takers on assessment guidelines and rubrics. The post-test results are a way to reflect upon the teaching methods and materials. Poor results may also help the teacher to reflect and explore various factors influencing the teaching and learning processes.

Table 1

Test Analysis							
Number of Right answers	Pre-test	Ex 1	Ex 2	Ex 3	Ex 4	Ex 5	Total
	Post-test	24	27	20	23	19	22
Number of wrong answers	Pre-test	12	08	10	07	11	48
	Post-test	06	03	07	03	08	27
Percentage of Right answers	Pre-test	60%	73%	67%	77%	63%	68%
	Post-test	80%	90%	77%	90%	73%	82%

Figure 1



The figure 1. shows the pre and post-test results of participants of the study. The overall rates of post-test are much higher than the pre-test scores. The exercises are given to check the ability of the learners in reading comprehension skills and vocabulary .Among the 30 learners from the department of commerce, 68% of learners wrote right answers in pre-test. The post-test administered report that 82% of learners wrote right answers . These results could either be due to the differences in the ability levels of the

students in learning.

Findings

In order to gain communicative competence, one has to give importance to the four linguistic skills namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. These can be mastered only by applying the skills in actual communicative situation. The first finding of the study on reading exercise were also sougheed and analysed. The pre-test findings of the study were summarized as follows.

There is a need to improve learners reading skills in English, exposure to pronunciation is necessary, as it would help them to distinguish "good English from poor English." Giving training in pronunciation would make them aware of the speech of Indian speakers in relation to native English speakers

Adequate exercise on reading skill should be taught with the use of proper stress and intonation to increase the reading and pronunciation ability of the learners

The second set of finding reports that the action research conducted gained the adequate knowledge in learning reading comprehension skills. The data collected through the pre-test and post- test reveals that there are problems for learners in reading comprehension skills. The exercises and task carried during the study for the learners has developed their reading comprehension skills. The post test scores are the amount of knowledge acquired. The outcome of the post-test shows, there are improvement in reading skills, vocabulary and pronunciation. It is also observed that learners gained confidence and became enthusiastic in taking the test. The study thus validates the use of action research in developing reading skills with appropriate model of learning.

Conclusion

The existing ability of the learners in reading helps to upgrade their skills from one level to the other. The analysis and the significant models adopted for the study to teach readings skills are attempted in terms of providing various exercises. Through the analysis the main aim was to find out how far bottom up and top down model determines their role in textual reading. To improve the reading skills of the learners, modern methods should be adopted. In the failure of adaptation students may not understand the message given in the passage for reading. So they fail to comprehend. Practice is needed to overcome the issues with a holistic approach.

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