

Improving Reading Ability in ESP Learners

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0. Introduction

During my teaching of English as a foreign language for first year non-specialist students at the Faculty of Physical Education, Assiut University, Egypt, I noticed that most of the students were slow readers. Moreover, their reading comprehension of the text was inadequate. Roth (1996) commented on this situation that “the teacher notices that the slower readers are starting to fidget or show strain in their face and feels sympathy for them...the students who finish first perhaps chatting, and the small readers may be showing annoyance”.

Those students learn English as a second language (ESL). This surprised me and I tried to investigate the matter further. So, I decided to make the present research.

1. Sample of the research

The sample of the research included 10 students. This sample has been chosen randomly.

2. Method of the research

First, I will apply pre-tests to diagnose their reading speed and reading

comprehension. Second, I will post-tests to evaluate their progress. The research includes six pre-tests and five post-tests that will be conducted and compared. There are teaching sessions between the pre-tests and the post-tests. Finally, the results are analyzed. Also illustrative tables will be used to facilitate the comparison of the students' scores.

3. Procedures of the research

3.1 Pre-test 1: Evaluating students' reading ability

The research began with evaluation of students' reading ability. I evaluated the students' reading speed and reading comprehension ability through using pre-test 1.

This evaluation will include two procedures. First, I will evaluate their reading speed through giving them a paragraph to read silently in pre-test 1. The paragraph was composed of seventy two words. The students are asked to read quickly. I found that 4 students finished their reading after 4 minutes, 4 students finished after 2 minutes and 2 students

finished after 1 minute. This is considered to be a dangerously low reading speed. The scores are shown in table (1):

Number of students	Time in minutes
4	4
4	2
2	1

Second, I will try to test their reading comprehension (understanding) in pre-test 2. I will give the students questions to answer about the same paragraph. Tables will be used to show the scores of the students. 1 student gave correct answer and 3 students gave the some correct answers. The other 6 answers were blank because the students gave me no answers. See the following table:

Number of students	Correct answers	Some correct answers	Blank answers
1	1	-	-
3	-	3	-
6	-	-	6

According to the samples of the students, I found that the students were slow readers and their reading comprehension was also low. I tried to investigate the causes.

3.2 Investigating the causes of students' low reading and comprehension ability.

There are three reading pre-requisites that help you to improve both reading speed and reading comprehension. They are realizing references, realizing and connectives in different paragraph patterns and realizing grammatical units (Yorkey 1982). I tried to test the students about their awareness of these tree pre-requisites using three pre-tests 2, 3 and 4.

Pre-test 2 tested the students in the first reading pre-requisite which is references and connectives. I gave them a paragraph and asked them two identify the references and connectives. The samples showed that 2 students gave correct answers, 2 students gave some correct answers and 6 students gave no answers. The following table is illustrative:

Number of students	Correct answers	Some correct answers	Blank answers
2	2	-	-
2	-	2	-
6	-	-	6

Pre-test 3 tested the students in the second reading pre-requisite which is paragraph patterns. I gave the students five paragraphs and asked them to identify the pattern of each one. The sample showed that there were 2 students gave correct answers, 2 students gave some correct

answers, 1 student gave wrong answers and 5 students left the sheet blank. The sample showed that most of the students could not recognize the paragraph pattern.

Number of Students	Correct answers	Some correct answers	Wrong answers	Blank answers
2	2	-	-	-
2	-	2	-	-
1	-	-	1	-
5	-	-	-	5

Per-test 4 tested the students in the third pre-reading requisite which is the grammatical units. The sample showed 2 correct answers and 5 students gave no answer. Table (5) explains the scores:

Number of students	Correct answers	Some correct answers	Blank answers
3	3	-	-
2	-	3	-
5	-	-	5

According to the previous data (in Tables 3, 4, 5), I discovered that the students were lacking in reading pre-requisites. This lack in these pre-requisites impeded students' both reading speed and reading comprehension.

Moreover, I tried to investigate the students' knowledge about reading strategies which means knowledge about

skimming and scanning strategies: what they mean, how, and when they are used.

I gave students Pre-test 5 which included a text to skim. The samples showed that 2 students gave correct answers, 1 student gave wrong answer and 7 students gave no answers. See the following table:

Number of students	Correct answers	Wrong answers	Blank answers
2	2	-	-
7	-	-	7

The data shows that the students had no experience in the reading skill of skimming.

In addition, I gave the students Pre-test 6 which included a text to scan a specific date. The samples showed that 2 students gave correct answer, and 8 students gave some correct answers.

Number of students	Correct answers	Some correct answers
4	2	-
6	-	8

Based on the above data, I discovered that the students

Because of two previous finding on students' lack of reading pre-requisites and

also their lack of some reading skills, I decided to teach them reading pre-requisites and some reading skills to improve both their reading speed and reading comprehension.

3.3 Teaching students' reading pre-requisites

To teach the students reading pre-requisites, I decided to give them three sessions each session took t spent in teaching them these three reading pre-requisites.

3.3.1 Session 1: Teaching them references and connectives

In session 1, I told my students that realizing references and connectives while reading improves their reading speed and reading comprehension.

Then, I gave students post test 1 to identify different references and connectives. 8 students gave complete answers and 2 students gave some correct answers, as shown in Table (8):

Number of students	Correct answers	Some correct answers
8	8	-
2	-	2

3.3.2 Session 2: Teaching them paragraph patterns

In session 2, I will explain to the students the different paragraph patterns

such as paragraph of analysis, paragraph of description, paragraph of comparison, paragraph of analogy and paragraph of definition. I will give them post-test 2 paragraphs to identify their patterns. 7 students gave correct answers and 3 students gave some correct answers, as shown in table (9):

Number of students	Correct answers	Some correct answers
7	7	-
3	-	3

3.3.3 Session 3: Teaching them grammatical units

In session 3, I will explain to them the meaning of the grammatical units such as the phrases and clauses. After that I will give them post-test 3 to identify the grammatical units. 9 students gave correct answers and 1 student gave answer:

Number of students	Correct answers	Wrong answers
9	9	-
1	-	1

3.3.4 Session 4: Teaching them skimming

In session 4, I will teach students the meaning of the reading strategy of

skimming. To Baudoin et. al (1975: 312), skimming "is used to find out what something is about or to obtain general impressions". This teaching session will be followed by post-test 4 in which they will be asked to skim a text and tell what the text is about. It has been found that 7 students gave correct answers, 2 students gave wrong answers and 1 student gave blank answer. The following table shows the results:

Number of students	Correct answers	Wrong answers	Blank answers
7	7	-	-
2	-	2	-
1	-	-	1

3.3.5 Session 5: Teaching them scanning

In session 5, I will teach the students about scanning as a quick reading over the text. Karlin (1975) stated that "pupils can be taught to find answers to specific question ... the technique to employ is scanning". Moreover, Wegmann and Knezevic (2002: 20) says:

To scan, move your eyes quickly over the reading until you come to the specific piece of information that you want. If you know that it is in the middle or toward

the end of the reading, start there. Do not be distracted by other items. Concentrate. When you find what you want, use it. Then go to the next point.

Then, the students were given a post-test which includes a text and they will be asked to locate the main idea. All of the students succeeded in scanning skill. The scores of the students are shown in the following table:

Number of students	Correct answers
10	10

4. Post Test: Reading speed and reading comprehension

At the end of the week, I gave the students post-test to evaluate their reading speed and their reading comprehension.

First, I tested their reading speed by giving them a paragraph to read. The paragraph was composed of 100 words. The table shows that 8 students finished their reading in 1 minute and 2 students finished after 2 minutes.

Number of students	Time in minutes
8	1
2	2

Second, I tested the students in their reading comprehension about the same paragraph. The table shows that 6 students gave correct answers, 3 students gave some correct answers and 1 student gave blank answers.

Number of students	Correct answers	Some correct answers	Blank answers
6	6	-	-
3	-	3	-
1	-	-	1

5. Interpreting the results

By comparing the scores of the pre-tests and the post-tests, it has been discovered that:

1. The reading speed of the students has been greatly improved.
2. The reading comprehension was very high in the post-tests.
3. The students were able to identify the references and the connectives.
4. The students could differentiate between different paragraph patterns.
5. There is an improvement in their level in recognizing grammatical units.

6. There is an improvement in their skimming skills.

7. The students became skilled in scanning.

6. Conclusion

This research showed a very important fact about ESP students which is that they are taught little about reading as a skill in their secondary school education. Hence, they join the university with very little information about reading skill.

The scores of the students in the pre-tests and post-tests showed that there was an improvement in their reading ability. Though I gave them only five sessions (each one took two hours), their reading speed and reading comprehension had been greatly developed. Accordingly, I came to the conclusion that:

Teaching ESP students reading pre-requisites and some reading skills help them greatly to overcome their difficulties and become good readers when they join the university.

Works Cited

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