Approaching Reading Course at Tertiary Level in a Strategic Manner

Puteri Rohani Megat Abdul Rahim, Akmar Mohamadm, Sheema Liza Idris

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
http://hrmars.com/index.php/pages/detail/publication-ethics

Approaching Reading Course at Tertiary Level in a Strategic Manner

[1]Puteri Rohani Megat Abdul Rahim, [2]Akmar Mohamadm, [3]Sheema Liza Idris

[1,3]Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus, 32610 Bandar Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia, [2]School of Languages, Literacies and Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Minden, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

Abstract

Reading is a very important skill for any university students to acquire in order to gain access to knowledge in the academic books. Nonetheless, a considerable number of university students commence their studies with less adequate reading strategies. These students enter university with limited understanding how to approach academic reading text strategically. They face difficulties in comprehending their academic reading materials. Consequently they are unable to perform beyond a basic literacy skill as a university student. Currently, reading is taught in a receptive and static manner where emphasis is on students retrieving information from the reading text and to answer the set of questions at the end of the text. The process does not allow the students to engage with the reading materials. They read at surface level. Therefore, lecturers and instructors of reading need to approach the teaching of reading strategically. Thus, this paper proposes approaching reading course strategically to enable reading instructors to scaffold and assist university students to engage with the reading materials better.

Keywords: Second Language Reading, Tertiary Level, Reading Strategies, Reading Course

Introduction

Effective readers enable students to progress well in their academic pursuit (Grabe, 2010). Similar statement is echoed by Romero-Ghiretti, White, Berg, Quintana, Grayson, and Weng (2007). They asserted that university students need to acquire effective reading skill in order to be successful in their academic quest. Sweet and Snow (2003) are of the opinion that when university students are effective readers, they are able to progress well because being an effective reader the ability provides them the basis for a substantial amount of learning at all stages during their university years. However, in reality a considerable number of students face challenges dealing with academic reading materials especially when the reading materials are not written in their own mother tongue. A report by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (2004) showed that the current average reading levels of high school leavers are insufficient to meet academic literacy

demands at university. A similar situation is experienced at local context. In Malaysia, several studies conducted showed that the students do face difficulties in comprehending academic reading materials (Muhammad, 2007). The findings of these studies show university students struggle in comprehending reading materials and there was no focus on how to assist the students to develop as effective readers.

In addition, how reading is taught and evaluated in schools and universities which are in receptive manner (Allen & Hancock, 2008; Sidek, 2010) has also hindered the students to become effective readers. The normal practice in a reading classroom is the students are required to answer the questions which follow suit the reading article. This act of retrieval of information does not foster students to engage as effective readers. The intended process of making reading meaningful and engaging is hindered when the students are only required to locate information containing in the text rather permitting them to find ways to discover the possible meaning of the text. This act of reading does not only inhibit students in making their own transactions with the text, it also deters them in having critical understanding of the text.

Furthermore, this ritualized approach employed by the students has also influenced the students' perceptions of reading. The students view the process of reading as a chore to answer the questions which are in the text. When they are able to answer the questions in the text, they believe they have understood the reading material well. They are unable to see reading beyond the surface level. Reading instructors need to understand that university students require a different teaching approach. According to Keeling (2006) and Mezirow (1997), in order to sustain the interest and motivation in learning among university students reading instructors need to select a suitable pedagogical approach in tackling them. Levin and Calgano (2008) have pointed out on the importance of the pedagogical approach and instruction in helping students better comprehend, critically examine, and respond thoughtfully to the plethora of reading materials found in the content areas and beyond (Alvermann, 2002; Bernhardt, 2011; Grabe, 2010; Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004). This is because pedagogy is at the heart of literacy instruction (Levin & Calgano, 2008). Therefore, there is a need for lecturers or instructors of reading to provide avenues for students to develop reading skills effectively and strategically. This exemplifies there is a need to do further research in this area.

What is Reading?
There are various definitions of reading. It is an indescribable concept that resists efforts in providing a simple definition because the meaning depends on the context. As aptly put by Grabe and Stoller (2002) that reading is a complex process that involves many processing skills. Grabe (1991) asserts that in the process, readers used the knowledge they brought to the reading and then the reader would predict information in the text, later confirmed their prediction. In other words, a reader will undergo several steps before constructing their understanding of a given reading material. As asserted by Nassaji (2011, p. 173) that reading is "a complex cognitive skill, involving many sub-skills, processes, and knowledge sources ranging from the basic lower level visual processes involved in decoding the print to higher level skills involving syntax, semantics, and discourse". Thus, the challenges even to define reading in a simple term illustrates the complexity involves in the reading process.

Models of Reading

A considerable number of researchers and scholars in reading have come out with specific models to create a general understanding of the reading comprehension process. These general models serve useful purposes such as providing the metaphorical interpretation of the many processes involved in reading (Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

Bottom-up Processing Model

The earlier approach to the reading process is the bottom-up processing which has existed long before reading research began to be recognized as an independent scholastic field. Through this process a reader creates his or her understanding mentally part by part without resorting to his or her own schemata (Carrell, 1988). Carrell (1988) asserted that this processing involves going from the units of text to the larger units of the text. The emphasis here is on the linguistic knowledge which implies that for a reader to succeed to be a proficient reader he or she needs to have extensive vocabulary so that they are able to comprehend or digest the words in the text efficiently. However, several academic scholars on reading (e.g. Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Stanovich & Stanovich, 1999) argue that linguistic knowledge is insufficient to assist reader especially second language readers to progress in their reading skill. These academic scholars insisted that reading is a more active process than the bottom-up model suggests.

Top-down Processing Model

The top-down processing model focuses on reader's goals and expectations. Through this process it characterizes the reader as someone who has set of expectations about text information and illustrates sufficient information from the text as the reader confirm or reject the expectations (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). The difference between this model and the bottom-up model is readers do not use every piece of information from the text. The reader would choose and select some information from the text according to the current purpose and try to predict the meaning based on their previous knowledge or schemata. Nevertheless, this model too received negative feedback. Several researchers view this process as giving limitation to readers particularly to those who do not have prior knowledge to the text he or she is going to read (Eskey, 2005; Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

Interactive Model

The interactive model is currently more accepted by teachers and educators of reading (Anderson, 1999). Through this model both the bottom-up and top-down models of processing are employed simultaneously to complement one another. Reading comprehension from the perspective of the interactive model illustrates that proficient readers are characterized by more than just decoding whereby through this model the reader is allowed to take control of their own learning. The readers are encouraged to discover the process of meaning-making on their own (Pressley, 2002). The reading instructor will encourage students to activate their schemata during the pre-reading phase by activating their background knowledge through discussions, previewing, prediction and inference. By engaging students in the process of meaning-making with the text they will be able to explore their own interpretation as well as activate their own background knowledge to enhance their understanding. Without engagement, learners will shun

opportunities to read (Belzer, 2002). Enthusiasm and engagement are vital in developing reading proficiency (Verhoeven & Snow, 2001) because these two elements provide the zest to continue reading despite the challenges they might face during the process of reading.

Reading Course: A New Direction
The nature of reading involves more than just decoding from the text because the reader is required to engage strategically in the construction of meaning. Smith and Goodman (2008) explain that reading is not only a process of lifting up information from the page; reading is a selective process. This illustrates that reading process is never a passive one because the reader needs to be actively engaged regardless of the topic of the text the reader is reading. Thus, instructors of reading need to develop appropriate and suitable classroom dynamics. The classroom dynamics should include avenues and opportunities for students to make connection with the reading material. (Klinger, Vaughn, Vaughn & Klinger, 2004) assert that teachers or instructors of reading must be aware of the challenges the students face and the suitable methods of teaching them to be effective readers in content-area classrooms. Furthermore, students at higher institutions require a different approach. According to Mezirow (1997), when the students enter a university they have already acquired the basic foundation of the concepts of learning that they obtained in their formative years of schooling. Thus, the new information presented at the university is only a resource in the student's learning process (Mezirow, 1997). In order for the new information to become meaningful, it needed to be merged by the student. Thus, this paper proposes a model that can be employed for instructors of reading to map the terrain of reading at the university level.

There are several ways of doing it such as explicit reading instruction, exposure to reading strategies, integrate reading and writing as well as provide avenues for students to dialogue with the text that they are reading. All of the above mentioned facilitate students to engage with the reading material (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004; Lawrence, Rabinowitz & Pena, 2009; Shanahan, 2006) is shown in a form of a model. The model is depicted in Figure 1 below.

Firstly, the reading instructor may employ explicit reading instruction. As aptly put by Lawrence, Rabinowitz and Perna (2009) that comprehension strategies that are taught explicitly have a significant impact on student learning outcomes. This is because the selection of the instructional strategies may provide opportunities for students to interact with diverse texts, to be able to critically examine texts as well as to make connections to the word usage in the text (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004).

Secondly, the instructors of reading should expose students the appropriate reading strategies when approaching reading. The success in undergraduate work is highly dependent on the students' ability to read appropriate literature in English. Thus, it is necessary for them to cultivate strategies when approaching reading which can be developed through intervention of task in the reading classroom. Anderson (1999) and Pressley (2002) point out on the importance of students to acquire reading strategies. In addition, the instructors need to teach students how to successfully orchestrate the use of strategies and how to monitor their own improvement in reading (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004; Pressley, 2002). The strategies may include

generating questions, monitoring comprehension during reading, summarizing text, organizing information graphically, and so forth (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004). However, the selection of the reading strategies should also be based on the skills that students can use overtime and are relevant to them.

Thirdly, interaction with the reading text. Students need to interact with the text they are reading. This can be achieved when students given the avenues to write their understanding of the text through letter writing, summarizing the text, and using graphic organizers (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004). As students interact with the text they are encouraged to process their understanding better. By integrating writing into reading classroom students are given the opportunity to interact with the text itself not only through the act reading but also through writing.
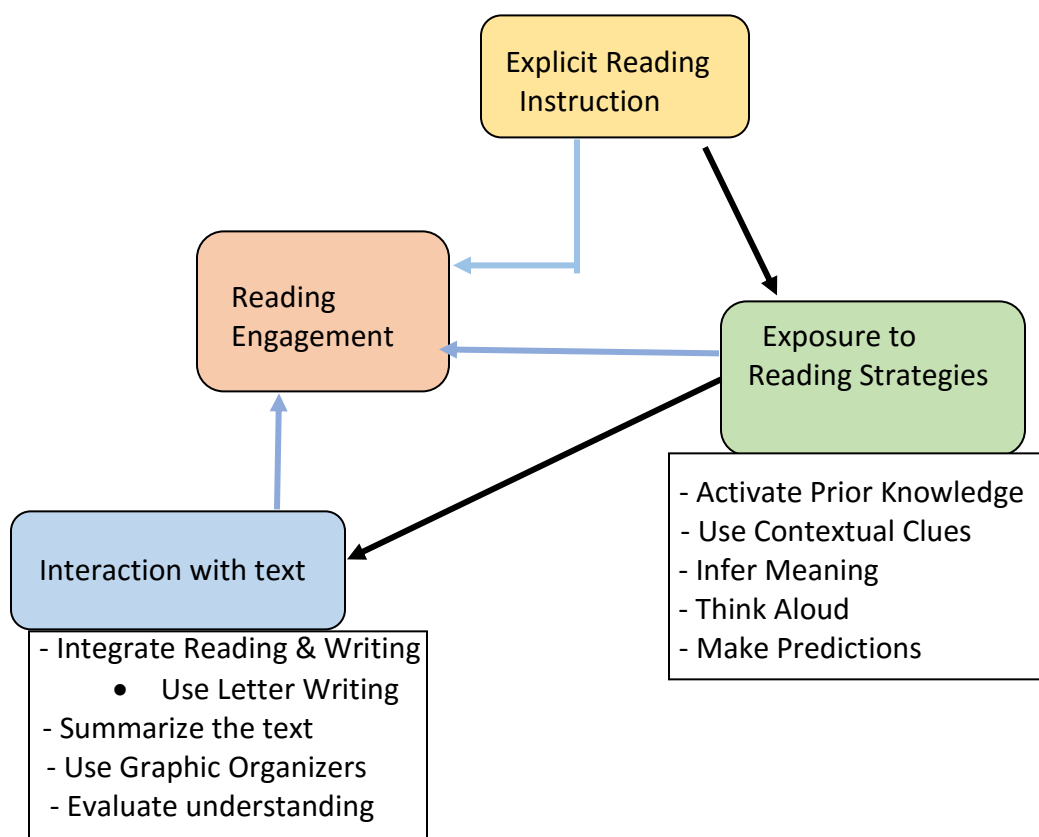

Figure 1: Model on Approaching Reading Strategically

The act of writing creates a space for students to reinterpret the text after their initial reading. Moreover, as aptly put by Shanahan (2006), the activity provides students a means to record their own experiences and to come to term with their own realities. As a result, the process enable the students to discover their own understanding of the text.

Conclusion

Students who are proficient readers are able to attain greater advancement and development in other academic settings. This signifies the importance of providing a reading course in a strategic manner. It is crucial for instructors of reading to be able to see the development of reading among university students as integral in the educational process, since reading does not come naturally. In addition, as educators, the instructor should understand that reading process should never be reduced as an act of retrieval of information. As Pearson and Leys (1985) say that the role of a teacher is not only to disseminate knowledge from his or her own fount of knowledge but the more vital role is to arrange conditions to enable learning to occur among the students as well as to assist students to be aware the goals and functions that reading can serve. In short, by approaching and mapping the terrain of reading at tertiary level as well as shifting the current approach of teaching reading as merely an act of retrieval of information to reading in a more meaningful process, students may see the purpose of reading and gradually develop as life-long readers.

Corresponding Author

Puteri Rohani Megat Abdul Rahim, Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus, 32610 Bandar Seri Iskandar, Perak, Malaysia.
Email: proha572@perak.uitm.edu.my

References

Mazli, A. M. (2007). *The effectiveness of an academic reading course in facilitating tertiary students' comprehension of academic texts.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia.

Alvermann, D. E. (2002). Effective literacy instruction for adolescents. *Journal of Literacy Research, 34*, 189-208.

Allen, K. D., & Hancock, T. E. (2008). Reading comprehension improvement with individualized cognitive profiles and metacognition. *Literacy Research and Instruction, 47*(2), 124-139.

Anderson, N. (1999). *Exploring second language reading: Issues and strategies.* Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

Belzer, A. (2002). "I don't crave to read": School reading and adulthood. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 46*(2), 104-113.

Bernhardt, E. B. (2011). *Understanding advanced second language reading*. Madison Avenue, NY: Routledge.

Biancarosa, G., & Snow, C. (2004). *Reading next- A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy: A report from Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Retrieved from http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/subjects/elarts/reading/.../readingnext.pdf

Carrell, P. L. (1988). Introduction: Interactive approaches to second language reading. In P. L. Carrell, J. Devine, & D. E. Eskey (Eds.), *Interactive approaches to second language reading* (pp. 1-7). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Carrell, P. L., & Elsterhold, J. C. (1983). Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly, 17*, 553-573.

Eskey, D. E. (2005). Reading in a second language. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 563-580). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Grabe, W. (1991). Current developments in second language reading research. *TESOL Quarterly, 25*, 375-406.

Grabe, W. (2010). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. L. (2002). *Teaching and researching reading*. Essex, England: Pearson Education.

Goh, H. S. (2004). *The use of think-aloud in a collaborative environment to enhance the reading comprehension abilities of ESL students at tertiary level*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Guthrie, J. T., Wigfield, A., & Perencevich, K. C. (2004). *Motivating reading comprehension: Concept-oriented reading instruction.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Sidek, H. M. (2010). A*n analysis of the EFL secondary reading curriculum in Malaysia: Approaches to reading and preparation for higher education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, PA.

Isarji, S., & Zubairi, A. M. (2008). *Assessment of language proficiency of university students*. Retrieved from http://www.iaea2008.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/ca/digitalAssets/180473_Sarudin.pdf

Keeling, R. P. (Ed.). (2006). *Learning reconsidered 2: A practical guide to implementing a campus-wide focus on the student experience*. Washington, DC: The American College Personnel Association.

Klinger, J. K., & Vaughn, S. (2004). Strategies for second-language readers. In T. L. Jetton & J. A. Dole (Eds.), *Adolescent literacy research and practice* (pp. 183-209). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Lawrence, S. A., Rabinowitz, R., & Perna, H. (2009). Reading instruction in secondary English language Arts classroom. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, *48* (1), 39-64.

Levin, H. M., & Calcagno, J. C. (2008). Remediation in the community college: An evaluator's perspective. *Community College Review, 35*, 181-207.

Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 74*, 5-12.

Nassaji, H. (2011). *Issues in second language reading: Implications for acquisition and instruction*. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *46*, 173-184.

Pearson, P. D., & Leys, M. (1985). Teaching Comprehension. In T. Harris & E. Cooper (Eds.). *Reading, thinking and Concept Development*, (p. 2-20). New York: The College Entrance Examination Board.

Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2004). *Pennsylvania reading requirements for school, the workplace, and society: Executive summary of findings*. Retrieved from http://www.pde.beta.state.pa.us/career_edu/lib/career_edu/pennsylvania_reading_requirements_for_school_summary_repora.pdf

Pressley, M. (2002). Comprehension strategies instruction: A turn-of-the century status report. In M. Pressley & C. C. Block (Eds.), *Comprehension instruction* (pp. 11-27). New York, NY: Guilford.

Rahim, P. R. M. A. (2014). *Priming interaction to foster reading engagement among tertiary level ESL students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Universiti Malaya, Malaysia.

Rahim, P. R. M. A., & Hashim, F. (2015). Facilitating reading engagement by foregrounding students' voices through epistolary writing: A case study. *GEMA online Journal of Language Studies*, *15*(1), 57-75. http://dx.doi.org/10.17576/GEMA-2015-1501-04).

Romero-Ghiretti, G., White, V., Berg, B., Quintana, R. D., Grayson, B. L., Weng, M. (2007). Research and thory driven insights: Ten suggestions for L2 reading instruction. *The Reading Matrix*, *7*(3), 44-54.

Shanahan, T. (2006). Where does writing fit in Reading First? In C. Cummins (Ed.), *Understanding and implementing Reading First initiatives: The changing role of administrators* (pp. 106-115). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Smith, F., & Goodman, K. S. (2008). "On the psycholinguistic method of teaching reading" revisited. *Language Arts*, *86*(1), 61-65.

Stanovich, K. E., & Stanovic, P. (1999). How research might inform the debate about early reading acquisition. In J. Oakhill and R. Beard (eds.), *Reading development and the teaching of reading*, (pp. 12-41). Oxford: Blackwell.

Sweet, A. P., & Snow, C. E. (2003). *Reading in a second language: Process, product and practice*. New York: Longman.

Verhoeven, L., & Snow, C. (2001). *Literacy and motivation*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.