

STUDENTS' DEVELOPMENT IN READING AND RESPONSE: A WAY OF FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: *The aim of the study was to investigate reading with the use of English First Additional Language (FAL) in South African Universities. The objectives included enabling students to learn reading in order to promote their' reading to such a level that they can continue reading to learn and not learning to read-only. The researcher was interested in exploring broader trends in reading strategies, instructions and training for students with the intention of contributing possible strategies to address the training of students for their role as literacy instructors in English as well as in multilingual education in South Africa. It was an interpretive study based on a case study design that covered the duration of four years. The findings showed that language learning could be easier if it is considered as a social practice with academic purpose. The study concluded that students prefer to be taught in English although most see it as a barrier to learning.*

Keywords: Affordance, Constructivism, Language Learning, Reading and Response, Social Practice

Research Area: Social Science

Paper Type: Research Paper

1. INTRODUCTION

People read for so many reasons. Some read for pleasure whereas others read for a purpose. In view of this, the manner a person may attempt and chose a text to read would revolve around the reason he/she is reading for. The researcher's focus was on students reading and response in English FAL to enable these students to learn to read in order to read to learn. In this view, the researcher tried to find out whether reading in a foreign/first additional language is different from their first language or mother tongue. The only problem of readers in a first additional language is that, people are not conscious of or are aware that even if a text might be written using a different alphabet or characters, it might be written from right to left, or bottom to top, but fundamentally the same processes are going on (Satija, 2002). Otherwise, reading is a skill that each individual develops. In this regards, for anyone to become a good reader there is a dire need for that person to develop literacy skills.

Thus, literacy is seen as students' key to master education curriculum as well as for their own personal development. Students can become literate in terms of proficiency and competence only if their teachers are willing to initiate their growth in reading and writing. This can only be possible if teachers can get enough support from higher education in South Africa by being exposed to the reading strategies, programmes, instructions and frequent training. In view of this, Dyers (2003) states that there are numerous challenges in South Africa as a developing country which affect and delay the development of learner's literacy due to specific challenges.

1.1 Issues and Insights

1.1.1 English as an International Language

English as an international language plays a significant role in learners' literacy. This language is used for communication in order to accommodate different people from different

countries who speak different native languages. It brings togetherness among different nations as it allows accessibility and gives people a chance to share their ideas and learn other cultures in order to promote unity in the rainbow nation. McKay (2002) agrees with the above argument by stating that English is considered as a language of wider communication because a large number of non-native speakers speaks it as it is used as a medium of instructions in most countries in the world hence it is regarded as an international language. To concur with McKay 's statement, English is deemed to be very appropriate for teaching and learning in higher institutions in South Africa because it is the language of diplomacy and international communications, business, tourism, education, science, computer technology, media and Internet.

1.1.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was adopted in this study in order to guide learners on how to analyse and analyse the tests during teaching and learning in English as their First Additional Language. This was done to encourage and promote reading and response to the students in South African's Universities. CDA was defined as the use of an ensemble of techniques for the study of textual practice and language use as social and cultural practices (Fairclough, 2000). This means that CDA was seen as a contemporary approach to the study of language and discourses in social institutions. It focuses mostly on written and spoken texts in communities, schools and classroom in relation to social lives, identity, knowledge and power. Wodak (2002) highlighted some of the human behaviour's factors that could critically affect students' reading and response in English as a language of teaching and learning such as Self- esteem, Inhibition, Risk-taking and Anxiety.

1.1.3 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is one of the factors highlighted above which could affect or improve students' performance in the classroom. This means that students or learners with low self-esteem could be negatively affected, as they do not believe that they could have high performance in their class, especially where English First Additional language is involved. They start by judging themselves, become negative, and end up believing in everything bad that people say about them. Brown (2009) sees self-esteem as an individual's acceptance

1.1.4 Inhibition

Likewise, inhibition is more or less the same as low self-esteem. This is also dangerous to students' performance if it is not taken care of. This is not acceptable in the teaching and learning process because students decide to switch off their mind completely from the lesson due to a lack of confidence in them. If the lecturer involved is not aware of this type of behaviour, inhibited students would always be left behind and this would affect their performance completely whereas confident students do not hold back in the same way as inhibited students do. Dulay (2009) strengthens the above argument by postulating that lecturers are advised to try to accommodate this personality by creating conducive teaching and learning conditions where different strategies and approaches together with relevant and various resources are used.

1.1.5 Risk-taking

Risk-taking is one of the above-discussed human personalities that could affect an individual's performance either negatively or positively. Risk-taking differs from self-esteem and inhibition personalities in the sense that at risk-taking level, an individual has an ability to venture into the unknown or less unknown world without the fear of being humiliated by the consequences of such acts unlike. Dulay (2009) agrees with the above discussion where

he asserts that both the teacher and the students should take risk taking into account in second language learning and teaching.

1.1.5 Anxiety

Anxiety is the concern an individual expresses in his/her mind about imminent danger, difficulty or complex task on the way. In the same way as self-esteem, inhibition and risk-taking, anxiety is also connected to and plays an important role in second language acquisition (Brown, 2009). On the one hand, there are students who are anxious and always worry and are doubtful of themselves and their abilities to succeed in any situation of learning. These students do not feel free and comfortable to read aloud in the classroom among their colleagues and the teacher. Anxiety can be both negative and positive equally in one's general life, and in second language learning.

2. READING CULTURE

As noted earlier on in discourse analysis, reading culture can be regarded as the process that contributes and increases learners' positive attitude towards reading over a period of time (Nssien, 2008). This means that for the students to be successful academically, they need a proper exposure and appropriate strategies in reading to build and enhance their foundation that can assist them to acquire other academic skills easily because they can contextualise the concepts from different fields of their studies. There is no doubt that learners can develop a positive attitude towards reading only if they could get full. This is evidenced by Nwabueze (2011) who argues that an environment plays a significant role in the development of reading the culture of the learners.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study might help to address the challenges faced by students in reading by improving students' programmes and providing the most effective strategies and methods which could be followed in all other South African Universities. Secondly, it might help to improve and broaden students' knowledge in general (reading to learn). It is further anticipated that the findings of the research can assist universities/colleges into adopting a language policy that can be well developed and implemented properly where English as a medium of instruction is concerned and as the first additional language to students in order to cater for all students as a way of applying diversity and inclusivity. This can increase student's interest and help them to change their attitude towards English FAL as part of the language, which is academically needed.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Nunn (2011) and Mete's (2011) English as International Language (EIL) has been adopted in this study to form the theoretical framework. According to McKay (2002), it is not the number of native speakers of English, but a large number of non-native speakers of English who make it "a language of wider communication", thus, an international language. McKay further suggests the four following reasons why English is an International Language: English is used as a communicative language both internationally and globally within multilingual societies; it is no longer connected to cultures; it becomes embedded in the culture of the particular country which it is used, and its function is to enable speakers to share their ideas and cultures too.

5. RESEARCH PROBLEM

It is needful on this account to stress that the lack of reading has affected negatively on learner's ability to make straightforward inferences, interpret and integrate ideas and

information as well as to examine and evaluate content using the language of learning and teaching (LoLT). In addition, the students also have difficulties in identifying the language and textual elements and the purposes for reading, which include the examination of literary experience and the ability to acquire and use information appropriately. They also face difficulties with reading which has resulted in poor performance and even drop out in their overall academic undertaking.

6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What needs to be done for the students to become competent readers in English FAL in South African Universities?
- What provisions are provided to enable reading in English FAL?
- What reading strategies and training is available for students in the university?
- How do current teachers' training programmes prepare students for EFAL teaching?
- Which reading instructional strategies are promoted in teacher's training?

7. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This is a qualitative study that is located within an interpretive paradigm. Case study design and qualitative data collection methods such as interviews; focus groups and journaling were used for the entire study. However, data was from the students' interviews in the form of focus group only for the sake of this paper. The learners were categorised into three groups based on their performance in class to ascertain a full representation of the whole class. The three groups were named as the high rollers, the go-getters and the achievers.

8. TRUSTWORTHINESS

Guba and Lincoln (2005) emerged with four measures to ensure research data trustworthiness. These are: **Credibility** - refers to the confidence in the truth of the findings. To ensure credibility the researcher will make sure there are prolonged engagement, triangulation and member checking. **Transferability** – This is the showing that findings have applicability in other contexts. In this case, the researcher will engage the use of thick descriptions. **Dependability** – This involves showing that findings are consistent and could be repeated in qualitative research. The researcher made use of audit inquiry to achieve trustworthiness. **Confirmability** refers to the degree of neutrality or to the extent to which the findings of the study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher's bias, motivated or interest. Techniques for establishing this, which the researcher made use of, are confirmability audit, triangulation, audit trail and reflexivity.

9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study made use of the following ethical considerations to ensure standard ethical principles of conducting research are adhered to. All necessary processes were followed and primarily they included the right to protect the physical and mental integrity of the participants respecting their moral and cultural values as well as their religious and philosophical convictions. The study made note of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, avoiding harms to participants and permission.

10. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This paper presents and analyses the data of the research conducted at one of the Universities in South Africa. The major investigation was on students' reading and response in English as their First Additional Language. In view of this, the process of teaching the

development of detailed subjective response is simultaneously researched into the nature of the response processes (Sivasubramaniam, 2004). The data analysed and presented in this version focused only on students' interviews in the form of focus group although different instruments were used to collect data for the entire thesis. The presented and analysed data was collected from the students' interview as indicated earlier on in order to get a deep sense of involvement and engagement with their programme along with a deep sense of personal enrichment accruing from it.

11. FINDINGS

The responses showed a positive attitude and confidence in the skills and knowledge acquired by the students from the entire programme. The students highlighted that they learn a lot about procedures to be followed before an attempt to reading such as pre-reading activities, during and the post-reading activities in order to develop the interest in reading. They further argued about exposure to different approaches, strategies as well as relevant teaching activities and resources to make a lesson active not passive so that it could be exciting and interesting though the beginning, it was very challenging since there was too much to do during the classroom. However, they got the ideas and managed to carry on as expected. This shows that they have managed to grasp all the opportunities that came along their way. The finding further showed that the students seem to have experienced tough times during their programme even though they eventually enjoyed the presentation because their lecturer protected and guided during the challenging times whereby other students would start making silly comments and laugh at them once they made mistakes but the support from their lecturer encouraged them and improved their reading skill in English as our FAL. Thus, students seem satisfied and motivated by the environment of the classroom, which acted as a motivating force to their learning. In doing this, they found it motivating, non-threatening, rewarding and educating to engage with the 'ideational content' (Byrnes, 2006) of a foreign language text to reconstruct their world and their 'selves'. This helped them to develop an interest in participating. In addition; all the responses indicated that even though they have experienced some challenges here and there in EFAL but this did not in any way hinder them from benefitting from involvement and participation during the lectures. In a surprise, the study showed that the majority of the students has a strong preference for English because they feel that English offers more opportunities compared with their home language. Sivasubramaniam, (2004) concurs with this by highlighting that these helped students to appreciate and believe the immediacy and primacy of the meanings and the knowledge that they created with their English.

12. CONCLUSION

Overall, the data analysed in this piece of version supports the conceptualization of learning in EFAL and is regarded as an 'open dialogue' in which the students attempted to learn English as a lived-through experience. Based on this argument, their endeavour conferred agency and subjecthood on them. The study further identified various factors that need to be taken into consideration in the usage of English as LoLT in order to reach out and prepare all the learners from different geographical to be ready for tertiary level. All the students under investigation speak their own mother tongue and were taught in it throughout all the grades regardless of what the LiEP said.

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