



USE OF EXTENSIVE READING FOR ENHANCING READABILITY: A STUDY OF MEASURING READABILITY OF L2 UG STUDENTS OF ODISHA

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ABSTRACT



Extensive Reading (ER) is an interesting and a useful way of enhancing reading fluency of L2 students. The paper deals with the functionalities of ER in UG curriculum. The focus is on reading as a L2/FL and ER are effective ways of fluent reading. A brief outline on ER and its major characteristics and benefits are discussed. In the case study part, the analysis is based on the responses of students of L2 English users in UG level and the recommendations are the requirements of the students for developing communicative skills and reading competency acquisition.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is usually thought of a vocal process. In learning English as a second (L2) and foreign language, the pedagogical focus is on writing and speaking. But reading is an important part in L2 learning, especially in academics. Reading fluency is also an essential component in achieving language learners' goals. In Indian context readability assumes a greater significance as it is related to career and for the job market. However, still in our curriculum,

especially in the college level, reading skill has been a neglecting skill. Extensive Reading (ER) as a strategy for enhancing readability of learners posits a greater heyday in today's teaching-learning spectrum.

EXTENSIVE READING (ER): A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

A large amount of research has been carried out on reading and learning to read. Regarding readability, reading fluency, and reading a lot is suggested as one of the good practices for learning



English as a second language (ESL) and foreign language (EFL) as well as in first language (L1) learning. ER is growing in popularity in reading classes for non-native English students. In addition, ER joined with writing activities is an effective component for language learning and competency acquisition.

The purpose of ER in curriculum is “to improve reading skills by processing a quantity of materials that can be comprehended and pleasurable” (Gebhard 203). Marusic advocates the use of ER by stating that it “can help improve reading skills in native and foreign languages and can also have a beneficial effect on the development of other language skills” (88). Combining reading-writing can help students foster their language ability, especially as reading is input and writing is output. This connectivity leads to effective language acquisition as it offers students the opportunities to think critically, organize their thoughts, and share their knowledge. Grabe and Stoller state that “In academic settings, reading is assumed to be the central means for learning new information and gaining access to alternative explanations and interpretations” (187). In addition, Grabe says that the purpose of reading is to learn, integrate, evaluate, critique, and use general information (Reading in a Second Language 8-10). Though there are many forms of reading and purposes for reading, this paper will focus on reading for academic purposes.

READING: A COGNITIVE PHENOMENON

In L2 reading issues of English, these are related to students' abilities and perceptions such as “word recognition skills, vocabulary knowledge, reading rates, syntactic knowledge, and L2 world knowledge and cultural knowledge” (Grabe, “Reading-to-Write Relations” 29). Students are effectively bridging the level of speed and accuracy, comprehensibility and understanding ability of English with native-level reading materials. To comprehend written language, we rely on our ability to recognize words, phrases, and sentences (bottom-up or text-driven processing), as well as on our background knowledge related to the content of what we are reading (top-down or conceptually-driven processing). These two processes interact as we read, resulting in a degree of comprehension

(Gebhard 195). Day and Bamford give the following simple definition of reading with regard to the cognitive point of view: “the construction of meaning from a printed or written message” (Extensive Reading 12). This issue of how readers develop meaning from texts has drawn cognitive psychologists' attention for a long time (12). In the construction of meaning, one reading idea is that the readers obtain information from the texts using the knowledge that they already have. Day and Bamford point out that comprehension is related to readers' background knowledge of their first languages, the world, and their cultures, etc. A key factor for comprehension is the ability of readers to apply their knowledge to the text. Regarding this ability, Day and Bamford refer to ‘schema theory’. They assert that schemata are effective during the comprehending process, and it helps readers organize new information with previous knowledge. They mention that “schema theory provides one way of understanding how this organization of knowledge might be achieved” (Extensive Reading 15). Ajideh explains further that schema is “a hypothetical mental structure for representing generic concepts stored in memory and can be seen as the organized background knowledge, which leads us to expect or predict aspects in our interpretation of discourse” (4). Ajideh clarifies this view in the following two ways:

1. New information from the outside world can be cognitively received and related to already known information stored in memory through retrieval or remembering. In this case, new concepts are assimilated into existing schemata which can be altered or expanded;
2. New information can be represented by new mental structures. In this case, in the absence of already existing schemata, new knowledge builds up new schemata (5).

According to Carrell and Eisterhold, Bartlett defines schema theory as the role of background knowledge, which is called previous knowledge, in language comprehension. They point out that learners can get meaning from their background



knowledge when they read a text, and the background knowledge which they already have are schemata (556). In this way, the reading process is a link between background knowledge and meaningful context.

ER AND FLUENCY ACQUISITION: AT A GLANCE

There is a difference between reading to learn (Intensive Reading) and learning to read (ER). The former is for enhancing critical judgement; and guessing skills of the students and the later is for building reading fluency. ERF provides measuring levels of reading:

Reading Pain	Intensive Reading		Extensive Reading		Speed Reading	
Too hard, poor comprehension, high effort and de-motivating	90%	Instructional level, can learn new word and grammar	98%	Fast, fluent, adequate comprehension and enjoyable	100%	Very fast, fluent, high comprehension, natural reading and enjoyable

Low ----->

% of known vocabulary

Slow -----> High

Reading Speed

Low -----> High

Comprehension

(Guide to Extensive Reading p-4) www.erfoundation.org

“With strengthened reading skills, ESL/EFL readers will make greater progress and attain greater development in all academic areas (Anderson 1).”

The ability to read fluently in a second or foreign language is a very important issue. Reading fluency is the ability to read quickly, easily, and smoothly. A fluent reader reads and understands books with minimum effort and at a fast speed. Basically, a fluent reader has the capacity to decode automatically, build up sight vocabulary, and comprehend in context. According to Nation, reading speed and comprehension are very important for ESL/EFL students to proceed through their academic courses successfully. Until recently, many ESL/EFL learners have faced a problem with slow reading. A number of experts in the linguistic field have expressed their concern about this issue. For example, Bell defines slow reading as a problem of “a ‘weakness independent of the purpose of reading’, involving the processing of information at such a slow rate that the reader is unable to hold enough detail in

short-term memory to permit decoding of the overall message of the text” (“Extensive Reading: Speed and Comprehension”). When comparing native speakers to non-native speakers, there is a significant gap in their reading times. Grabe compares reading rates between L1 students and L2 students in academic settings. L2 students can only read at a rate of 80-120 words per minute. On the other hand, L1 students can read two or three times faster than L2 students (Reading in a Second Language 291). This indicates that slow reading might influence the scores of academic courses negatively for ESL/EFL students in comparison to the native students in the same academic courses. According to Anderson, this is a common situation in ESL/EFL reading classrooms. Although students are able to read in their second language, they are not fluent in reading. As a result, they cannot enjoy their reading activities. As a non-fluent reader reads word by word, he or she cannot understand the meaning enough to enjoy the book (1). The problem is that, if the students read word by word, not only does it take a long time, but also it



influences the students' comprehension of the text. Nation suggests a reasonable reading speed for second language learners as about 250 words per minute. He mentions that reading speed is influenced by several factors such as the purpose of reading and difficulty of the text. The difficulty of the text is also dependent on the vocabulary level, grammar structure, discourse, and background knowledge (61). With further reading experience, reading speed becomes faster and faster. Day and Bamford declare that extensive reading can improve the components of fluent second language reading such as "sight vocabulary," "general vocabulary knowledge," and "different knowledge types." Sight vocabulary means the number of different words known without word analysis, and these words are understood quickly and easily. First, sight vocabulary can be developed when beginners repeatedly meet vocabulary in a variety of contexts, and then they automatically understand the meaning of vocabulary in other contexts.

A great deal of reading is helpful in developing sight vocabulary. Second, when students know a lot of general vocabulary, they can comprehend texts more easily (Extensive Reading 16). Nagy and Herman argue that, "Incidental learning of words during reading may be the easiest and single most powerful means of promoting large-scale vocabulary growth" (qtd. In Day and Bamford, Extensive Reading 18). They add information about learning incidental vocabulary which states that it is more effective for L2 learners to obtain some foundational vocabulary first. The learners can then apply their vocabulary knowledge to learn other vocabulary. During massive amounts of reading, they can improve their general vocabulary knowledge. Third, extensive reading also expands learners' knowledge of the target language and other types of text. They suggest that L2 learners need to acquire these kinds of knowledge by reading large amounts of second language texts (16-19).

Renandya also refers to Davis' definition of extensive reading, which is taken from a classroom instruction view:

An extensive reading programme is a supplementary class library scheme, attached to an English course, in which pupils are given the time, encouragement, and materials to read pleurably, at

their own level, as many books as they can, without the pressures of testing or marks. Thus, pupils are competing only against themselves, and it is up to the teacher to provide the motivation and monitoring to ensure that the maximum number of books is being read in the time available. The watchwords are quantity and variety, rather than quality, so that books are selected for their attractiveness and relevance to the pupils' lives, rather than for literary merit (134).

Children acquire their first language not learn it. Krashen divides second language performance into two independent systems by stating the following: 'Acquired system' or 'acquisition' is the product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language [...] The 'learned system' or 'learning' is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge 'about' the language, for example knowledge of grammar rules (qtd. in Schutz, "Stephen Krashen's Theory"). Nowadays, people focus on language acquisition as the development of language fluency (Lindsay 339). Lindsay also states that "extensive reading aims at acquisition rather than conscious learning, at fluency rather than accuracy (168)."

A CASE STUDY OF MEASURING READING COMPETENCY OF UG STUDENTS

The study was conducted focusing on studying the responses of students on reading competency at undergraduate level in Sambalpur University, Odisha.

NEED FOR THE STUDY:

There is a gap between students' knowledge and high range syllabus. To abrogate the abnormalities of the syllabus, necessary measures to be adopted to facilitate the above aspects.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To measure the speaking competency of students and also identify the errors in General English syllabus at undergraduate level in Sambalpur University, Odisha.
2. To denote the inappropriate contents of the undergraduate General English syllabus.



3. To contemplate over the imbalance between students ability to perceive and the prescribed study material.
4. To design on apt syllabus to meet the perception and orientation ability of the students.
5. To suggest for proper syllabus to improve students reading and communicative skills.

METHODOLOGY

The study was descriptive in nature. After going through the relevant literature, a standard questionnaire was developed for the students of undergraduate level Sambalpur University, Odisha. In order to check the reliability and validity of research five items in section-B and five items in section-C in the questionnaire were developed.

SAMPLE

A random sample 150 students from the degree colleges Sambalpur University, Odisha were collected. There are 50 students from B.A. group, 50 from B.Com group, and 50 B.Sc, 189 were selected for this study.

PROCEDURE

The respondents were called in their respective classrooms and informed about the reason of study. As soon as getting their consent, the research questionnaire was given to them with request to complete it.

RESULT

The collected data was analyzed and interpreted with the help of percentages. The data along with its analysis presented in the form of graphs. Every item of the questionnaire was presented separately and sample percentage was used to analyze it.

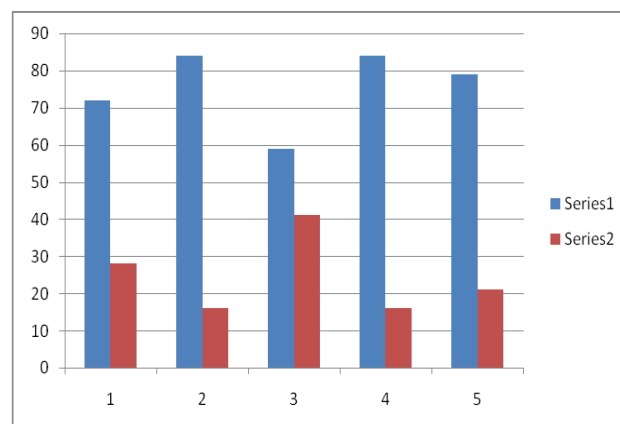
DATA COLLECTION

The students are asked to fill up the questionnaires without interrupting by their English lecturers and their co-classmates. Although their lecturers were present at that time and they were requested not to give any answers for them. The students were asked not to talk about their answers with each other so that they are capable to give personal and aimed responses to questions. The procedure allowed for 60 minutes and sometimes more than 60 minutes of completing the questionnaire in each college. Indeed, it could be

completed within 20 to 30 minutes but students had done it very slowly since most of them come from rural and regional medium background. Most of them understood the questionnaires as they are very simple and easy. It is obviously explained that students who are unwilling to answer can withdraw without hesitation. As soon as the students answered the questionnaires, questionnaires were collected from all the students. Most of them were happy to be part of the research. Questionnaire consists three sections—A, B, and C. The first part—section 'A' asks about the personal information of the students such as name, course and address. The researcher has discussed the answers that have given by the students to the questionnaires through charts and seriously analyzed with the statistical data.

FINDINGS OF QUESTIONNAIRE B

In order to study reading competency in English we had prepared the questions keeping in rhythm with the factors that were contributed the efficiency level of the students and also wanted to study the problem from the views of the students.



(Comparison is based on %)

Out of 150 students, 72 % of the students answered medium of instruction surely influence English language learning whereas 28 % of the students told that it does not influence ELL. 84 % of the students replied that mother tongue plays a very important role in learning English language and 16 % of the students said they do not think it plays an important role. 59 % of the students announced that they think regional language take effect on learning English whereas 41 % of the students finalized the answer 'no.' 84 % of the students mentioned that



they strongly believed the place of residence play a role in learning English language but the least number of students i.e., 16 % of them uttered it does not play any role in learning English language. 79 % of them told that the background of their parents play a role in learning English language and the rest of the students 21 % of them rejected it.

Findings of Questionnaire C

Section-C part deals with the syllabus of undergraduate level at Sambalpur University. There are five questions with multiple choices as options so that most of the students had done it with curiosity. The researcher has analyzed all the responses of the students.

Out of 150 students, 43% students answered 'yes' to 'Do you think the prescribed English text books are helpful in developing reading competency of English language?' whereas the rest of the students majority of the students 57 % the textbooks are not helpful to them. From the group who said the books are helpful to them 48 % of the students said the syllabus is so simple and easy, 23 % said it is relevant, 21 % said it is interesting and 8 % said it is satisfactory. Among the students who answered the prescribed textbooks do not help them have given astonishing answers that 22 % said the textbooks are very difficult to understand, 26 % of the students mentioned that they are irrelevant, 21 % said that they are disinteresting and 31 % responded that they are not satisfactory. 56 % of the students answered said prose lessons are useful whereas the rest of the students said 'no.' Out of 56 %, 36 % mentioned the prose lessons are very interesting, 25 % uttered they are very useful in everyday life, 42 % said that they are inspiring and motivating and the balanced students some other reasons. Among the students who said the prose lesson are not helpful to them in learning English, 19% said they are too literary, 21 % gave their opinion they are too expensive, 60 % said they are not dealt with local culture only and the rest of the students said some other reasons.

The third question whether the students enjoy reading poetry, 55 % of said 'yes,' 45 % of said 'no.' 44 % of the students gave their opinions that the poetry part is so melodious, 11 % mentioned the poetry is useful in everyday life, 16 % said they are inspiring and the balanced students 29 % of the

students uttered there are simple reasons. From the group who said 'no,' 23 % answered the poetry is not interesting, 14 % of students announced that the poetry they are outdated poems, 45 % of the students had responded outstanding and wonderful answer that they poems are too short and the last one 18 % of the students told some other answers. 64 % of the students answered that it is better if non-detailed text is incorporated in the curriculum and the balanced stabilized students said 'no.' For the last question, 85 % of the students answered that the exercises and activities on grammar part given in the textbooks are useful and the balanced said 'no.' Among the 'yes' group, 52 % of the students answered that the part help them forming sentences, 35 % of them uttered that they are useful to them in communication, 5 and 8 % of the students said they provide good vocabulary and other reasons respectively. The group who responded as 'no' gave their opinions as majority 55 % for the grammar part ignores practical usage, 27 % of them utter that they give grammar rules more than necessary, 9 % of the students told that they provide insufficient glossary and the rest of them mentioned some minor reasons.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Tasks on reading skills must be practical oriented.
2. The syllabus should be revised as per the needs of the present day society and keeping an eye to enhance readability of the students.
3. The syllabus should avoid stereotyped process of teaching, learning and evaluation and the syllabus must not be writing oriented.
4. It should make students involve in practical tasks and they enhance understanding and presentability quality.
5. It must provide adequate exercises for developing communication skills for the students and make them ready to face the competition in the job market.
6. It must ensure personality development and develop self-confidence among the students.



7. It must work to reduce the fearful psychology of the students to speak and present themselves before the public.

CONCLUSION

To make the students job fready the General English for UG level students, English should not be treated as a subject. It must be treated as a skill. The traditional Exercises and drilling of grammar must be avaided and communicative enhancing practical tasks and projects should be incorporated. Let the gigantic gap between expected levels of procicinecy and achieved level of efficeincy be minimized and the students should be developed into productive human resources.

CLOSE ENDED QUESTIONS

Questionnaire to the Students at Undergraduate Level

Section-A

1. Name of the Student: _____
2. Course of Study: I / II Year
3. Medium of Instruction: Telugu/ Urdu/ English
4. Address of the College: _____

5. Native Place: Rural/ Urban
6. Profession of Parents: _____
7. Educational Qualifications of Family Members:
 - a. Father: _____
 - b. Mother: _____
 - C. Any other Family Member:
 1. _____
 2. _____
8. Community: (Put the right Mark) OC / SC / ST / BC (A/B/C/D) (This statistical data is highly confidential and will not be used for any other purpose)

Section-B

1. Does medium of instruction influence English reading ability? Yes/ No

2. Do you think your mother tongue plays a role in the acquisition of reading competency? Yes/ No
3. Does any other regional language take effect on reading competency in English? Yes/ No
4. Do you believe the place of residence play a role in pronunciation of English words? Yes/ No
5. Does the background of your parents play a role in reading and pronouncing of English words? Yes/ No

Section-C

1. Do you think the prescribed English text books are helpful in developing speaking competency in English language? Yes/ No
 - A.If 'Yes' please specify the reason/s:

(Put the right Mark/s)

 - a. They are very easy
 - b. They are relevant
(in case of grammar/prose/ poetry)
 - c. They are interesting
 - d. They are satisfactory
 - B. If 'No' please indicates the reason/s:

(Put the right Mark/s)

 - a. They are very difficult to understand
 - b. They are irrelevant
(in case of grammar/prose/ poetry)
 - c. They are disinteresting
 - d. They are not satisfactory
2. Are the 'prose' lessons useful? Yes/ No
 - A. If the answer is 'Yes', please mark the reason/s:
 - a. They are interesting
 - b. They are useful in everyday life
 - c. They are inspiring / motivating
 - d. Any other reasons
 - B. If the answer is 'No', please state the reason/s:
 - a. They are too literary
 - b. They are too expensive
 - c. They deal with local culture only
 - d. Any other reasons
3. Do you enjoy 'poetry'? Yes/ No
 - A. If the answer is 'Yes', please mark the reason/s:



- a. They are melodious
 - b. They are useful in everyday life
 - c. They are inspiring / motivating
 - d. Any other reasons
- B. If the answer is 'No', indicate the answer:
- a. They are not interesting
 - b. They are out dated poems
 - c. They are too short
 - d. Any other reasons
4. Is non-detailed text necessary to incorporate in curriculum? Yes/ No
5. Are the exercises or activities or grammar given at the end of each 'prose' or 'poetry' lessons useful? Yes/ No
- A. If the answer is 'Yes', please specify the reason/s:
- a. They help us forming sentences
 - b. They are useful in correct pronunciation of words.
 - c. They provide good vocabulary
 - d. Any other reasons
- B. If the answer is 'No', please spot the reason/s:
- a. They ignore practical usage
 - b. They give grammar rules more than necessary
 - c. They provide insufficient glossary
 - d. Any other reasons

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