

ENGLISH FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE: STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES ON READING IN ONE SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The students have difficulties in identifying 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. Thus, students lack reading skills that function as key barrier to academic achievement, which has resulted to poor performance, and even drop out in their overall academic undertaking. There are many other factors that constitute this causality such as: socio-economic status, teaching methods, parental involvement and lack of exposure to LoLT are probably the most important. The study examined reading strategies and training that are available for students in the university and explored how current teachers' training programmes prepare students for EFAL teaching including reading instructional strategies that are promoted in teacher's training. Using qualitative case study design, this paper explores students' experiences on reading with the use of English first additional language (FAL) in one South African University. It was an interpretive study based on a case study design that took place for the duration of four years. The findings showed that language learning could be easier if it is considered as a social practice with an academic purpose. The study concludes that students prefer to be taught in English although most see it as a barrier to learning.

Keywords: English, Reading, Learning and Teaching, International English, Lingua Franca, Journal, Competency.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a way of recognizing letters and words and being able to get meanings from the text. In this regard, Ezc (2000) argues that when one reads, she/he combines the same letters, which can be used to form different words with different meanings in other languages. This means that the recognition of the actual word is not enough on its own to constitute reading ability. Therefore, the key to reading is for the reader to understand the text and to be able to get relevant meaning out of it even though it might be quite complex to understand without proper exposure to the contextual meaning of that text. This is what triggered the researchers to investigate students' reading and response in English FAL in order to promote the 'reading to learn' concept where possible. In this regard, this study therefore views reading as a social practice.

People read for many reasons. Some read for pleasure whereas others read for a purpose. In view of this, the manner in which a person may attempt and choose a text to read would revolve around the reason he/she is reading for. The researchers' focus was on students' reading and response in English FAL to enable these students to read to learn. Therefore, they explored if reading in a foreign/first additional language is different from their first language or mother tongue.

The only problem of readers in a foreign language is that people are not conscious of or 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, fundamentally, the reading processes have not changed (Satija 2012). Reading is a skill that each individual develops. Based on this, once students see texts that they are unable to decode because they are not able to recognize the words and meaning in a foreign language, they may start to panic and end up finding reading difficult. Therefore, for anyone to become a good reader there is dire need that person to develop literacy skills.

There is evidence of lack of comprehension skills, which forbid students from focusing on, and retrieving explicitly stated information (Banda 2009). It is needful on this account to stress that lack of reading has affected negatively on learner's ability to make straight forward 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 language 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 may result to poor performance in their overall academic undertaking and possible school dropout. This article will therefore explore students' experiences on reading English as first additional language.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

English as a second language (L2) is usually based on the standards of American or British English as well as incorporating foreign terms. This means that English as an international language (EIL) aims to equip students with the linguistic tools to communicate internationally (Nunn 2011). Nunn (2011) further considers different types of competence in relation to the teaching of English as an International Language, arguing that linguistic competence has yet to be adequately addressed in recent considerations of EIL. It is this view that opens the gap for exploration in this research where the researchers are interested to see how reading can lead to competence in an additional language. Nunn (2011) insists more on universality and flexibility. This scholar further indicates that International English sometimes refers to English as it is actually being used and developed in the world; as a language owned not just by native speakers, but also by all those who come to use it. McArthur (2012) maintains that English is commonly used in connection with the acquisition use and study as the world's *lingua franca*. McArthur (2012) further argues that teaching English as an International Language (TEIL) was the most challenging especially when the language is considered as a whole in contrast with British English, American English and South African English.

The importance of non-native English language skills can be recognised behind the long-standing joke that the international language of science and technology is broken English (McArthur 2012). It is noted at this juncture that the context of communication is vital since the main aim is meaning making, which deviates from traditional grammar where the emphasis is on the correctness of the language. This is in view of the notion that language is easily learnt or acquired when it is seen as social practice where fear and anxiety are taken off from the learner. From this perspective, Peters (2014) brings in the concept of neutrality. He argues that International English reaches towards cultural neutrality.

This means that any regional variety of English has a set of political, social and cultural attachments to it. For example, Peters (2014) claims that teachers teach and learners learn in the classroom and communicate in English as a second language throughout the lesson. This motivates and interests them since this idea improves their vocabulary, thereby contributing to their reading skill. According to this viewpoint, International English is a concept of English that minimises the aspects defined by either the colonial imperialism of Victorian Britain or the cultural imperialism of the 20th century United States. This view stresses the learning of English as a social practice.

While British colonialism laid the foundation for English over much of the world, International English is a product of an emerging world culture, very much attributable to the influence of the United States as well, but conceptually based on a far greater degree of cross-talk and linguistic transculturation which tends to mitigate both U.S. influence and British colonial influence (Peters, 2014). In this regard, the development of International English often centres on academic and scientific communities, where formal English usage is prevalent and the creative use of the language is at a minimum. In view of this, formal International English allows entry into Western culture as a whole, and Western cultural values in general, where one affects the other, way or another.

English as international Language

According to Nunn (2011) and Maley (2011), English as an International Language. According to McKay (2012), it is not the number of native speakers of English, but the large number of non-native speakers of English who make it “a language of wider communication” and an international language. McKay further suggests the following reasons why English is an international Language:

- i.** English is used as a communicative language both internationally and globally within multilingual societies;
- ii.** It is no longer connected to cultures;
- iii.** It becomes embedded in the culture of the particular country which it is used; and
- iv.** Its function is to enable speakers to share their ideas and cultures too.

Jenkins (2013) states that English as International Language is a concept of the English language being seen as a global means of communication in numerous dialects, and also the movement towards an international standard for the language. It is also referred to as Global English, World English, Common English, Continental English and general English, which is regarded as an associate language. These terms refer to the array of varieties of English spoken throughout the world (Jenkins 2013). It is worth noting that English plays a role of unifying diversity in South Africa since it is a minority language in terms of the numbers of its native speakers as well as its standardization above all the other languages. In this regard, English is deemed very appropriate for teaching and learning in higher education institutions in South Africa.

It is on the above argumentation that Jenkins (2013) further clarifies that sometimes, "international English" and the related terms above refer to a desired standardisation, that is Standard English; however, there is no consensus on the path to this goal. There have been many proposals for making International English more accessible to people from different nationalities. Basic English is an example, but it failed to make progress. More recently, there have been proposals for English to become a *lingua franca* (ELF). It has also been argued that its traditional spelling holds International English back.

There has been slow progress in adopting alternate spellings. Still on English hegemony, Smith (2013) indicates that the domination of the English language globally is undeniable. English is the language of diplomacy and international communications, business, tourism, education, science, computer technology, media and Internet. Based on the above argument, English is used to develop communication, technology, programming, software, etc. In short, it dominates the web as 70% of all information stored electronically is in English (Smith 2013). This function of the English language in a way acts as instrumental and or integrated motivation for non-native speakers of English to learn the language.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A common use of tables is to present quantitative data or the results of statistical analyses as well as informant demographic (optional). Tables must be mentioned in the text. For the purpose of this study, the researchers employed qualitative phenomenological design, which is described as the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon (Creswell 2009). Abbott (2010) supports the idea by stating that the reality can be explored and constructed through human interactions and meaningful actions to discover how people make sense of their social worlds in their natural setting by means of daily routines, conversations and writings while interacting with others around them by relating to the texts they have been exposed to. For this article, the researchers asked the nine students to write journals expressing specifically their experiences on reading. The students were asked to keep such journals for their daily entries which were collected from time to time and feedback was given in order to ascertain their progress and also for them to improve in their writing since reading cannot be divorced from writing. They entered their daily events on their reading experiences, hence the focus of analysis and discussion in this article. The journal entries acted as a motivation for the students and therefore brought out their own subjective views from the text, which is also seen as meaning making from the text. All the students signed informed consent forms to demonstrate their willingness to participate in the study.

DISCUSSION

Discussion The data from this study is presented and analysed according to students' performance reflected in their journal entries; this was categorised according to the following: High; which indicates students who are the top performers, Average; indicates moderate performers and then Low; indicates the least performers. This means that the researchers checked the students' journals during their different entries. The researchers read and marked these and then evaluated the

students' strengths and weaknesses before allocating scores accordingly. Only nine students' journals' entries were presented and analysed for the purpose of this article. These students were purposively selected based on their academic performance, as indicated above for three years starting from their second year English Teaching Methods right through to the fourth year level (EDL 212 and 222, EDL 312 and 322 and MEN 411 and MEN 412).

Journal entries were divided into different stages, stage 1 journal entries focused on one of the themes, which were the students' feelings of insecurity and frustrations of not being able to carry out journal activity the way they believed they should. The following data indicate their feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. Each category is presented by three strands of data. The following extracts are from the journals written by the students concerning their feelings of inadequacy and insecurity.

Stage 1

High 1: *'English on its own is very difficult since it is our second language. It's a bit challenging to read and respond appropriately in writing without changing the text's meaning'.*

High 2: *'My vocabulary is very poor in English. I can't read and understand the text properly and then respond by writing without having so many grammatical errors and the spelling'.*

High 3: *'When I read any reading materials alone at home or listening to anything in English it is not clear. I need someone to explain more before responding by writing'.*

The three responses seem to echo that the difficulty in writing is because of the use of FAL. The excerpts below are from journals presented by students from the average performance, but with the same theme of feelings of inadequacy and insecurity.

Average 1: *'Many texts are very difficult because we are expected to read the ones written in English and then respond in English too'.*

Average 2: *'I wish our lecturer can give grammar exercises in each text and explain before we are expected to respond'.*

Average 3: *'We were told to choose any reading materials or watch any programme of our interest, read or listen and then write our views. I do not know many difficult words and ideas. How can I read all of them and respond in English properly?'*

The three responses above seem to tally with those of the High above where FAL appears to be their main concern. The following data are from the journals written by the students from the low performance on the same theme as indicated by both categories presented above.

Low 1: *'We are expected to reflect on readings, class discussions, our own ideas/interpretations and reactions to what we have read or watched or listened to. In my case I don't do it correctly though I always try because it is not that easy since I am not confident enough with my English. It is terribly poor'. read more and more and then discuss'.*

Low 3: *'The lecturer wants me to read and apply mind, but I don't do it as expected. I always get it wrong''.*

At stage 1, all the students' responses indicate the challenges that they encounter when dealing with the journaling since they had to read listen and watch everything before responding in the form of writing in English as their FAL.

Stage 2

At this stage, most of the journal entries revealed references to people and places featured from different stories taken from different media attempted by students. Other journal entries focused on different challenges some of the students encountered in their families, people's behaviour, habits, and attitudes. It was both interesting and motivating to realise that most of the students had begun to view their lecturer as an amiable facilitator rather than a traditional pedagogue. The following data support this observation and the researchers would present and analyse data according to the students different performances from their journals as indicated earlier. The researchers therefore, categorised them according to the following performance and strands: High, Average and Low. Students' journal entry responses below depict their growing awareness, which encouraged them to think about aspects of human existence that they shared with their equals in other cultures.

High 1: *'My lecturer advised me not to be afraid even if the story or any reading I have chosen is difficult. He/she advised me to continue reading and try to vary them by choosing some simple and interesting ones and it will be easy after sometimes. So I do not panic anymore'.*

High 2: *'If I don't understand I must wait and try another time and the other ones'.*

High3: *'I failed to get the message properly from what I have read. But no problem I will read it again'.*

The above responses seem to bring out the difficulties in understanding and responding in FAL although the students would not want to give up as they were encouraged by their lecturer to keep trying. The responses below are from journals presented by students from the average performance group on the theme of their awareness, which encouraged them to think about aspects of human existence that they shared with their equals in other cultures.

Average1: *'If I get a problem my lecturer always tells me not stop but keep on trying. This really encouraged and motivated me very much since I have discovered that the more I keep on reading and writing in English, the more I have managed to understand things better and be able to respond as expected'. This gradually boosted my self-esteem since my English is improving gradually'.*

Average 2: *'I have taken my lecturer's advice from the comments on stage 1 entries. I am not afraid to make mistakes when writing my view in my journal since that is the learning curve'.*

Average 3: *'My lecturer gave me confidence to make mistakes since I am learning from them. I always re-read my views and edit them before submission'.*

The responses above seem to portray students' courage and confidence towards FAL due to their lecturer's positive attitude. Their lecturer always encouraged and motivated them to carry on with their work and not to be discouraged by the minor mistake they made when writing up since that is a learning curve. In view of this, the lecturer made reading and writing to be seen as a social practice where meaning is contextual as there cannot be any meaning to any reading without a context. The data below are from the journals written by the students from the low performance group on the same theme as indicated on both categories presented above. These categories and strands are presented below.

Low 1: *'She/he told us to look for the difficult words we come across while reading in the dictionary since this improves our vocabulary in English. She/he advised us that more words mean more knowledge'.*

Low 2: *'I am now able to write stories about my life and challenges I am facing with confidence through the journal experience'.*

Low 3: *'I can feel that my reading and writing skills have improved a bit. But I still make grammatical mistakes when trying to review my reading in writing'.*

The journal entries presented above indicate that the students have made a definite attempt to live with their social anxieties and to find out ways to resolve them.

Stage 3

At this stage, the students had enough exposure to media journal, which developed their reading skills and improved their interest towards a reading culture since they have managed to understand and respond properly in their writings from the lecturer's relevant comments towards different stories they have read, listened to and watched. This extended their repertoire and they were therefore progressively able to enjoy a wider range and variety of texts. Such texts made different demands on them such as reading, analysing and then responding appropriately to such texts. At this stage, students showed their proficiency in reading and writing fluency in English as their first Additional Language. Below is the evidence of stage 3 according to different levels: High, Average and Low.

High 1: *'I read the story from one of the magazines. The writer was trying to expose the readers to transformation of nature and time. He described the different perceptions in different time at the same place by using very powerful words to show his feeling. I now understand the implied meanings largely'.*

High 2: *'I read the story from the internet source which was about a youth couple. For my opinion, I think their love was on the wrong way. They were not ready to marry each other. This resulted to conflicts almost every day. The couple was not happy at all. This is very sad situation and not healthily for any human being at all'.*

High 3: *'I listened and watched the programme from TV on how to encourage children to obey and follow their culture. This showed the importance of being obedient and the consequences of disobedient children. I see the dilemma in the in the programme, if you obey and respect your culture, you will always be safe'.*

and get support from the elders. However, if you do not obey and respect the culture, you will end up lost and become a wonderer with no belongings. To me I have learned how influential and powerful cultures could be to people's life. It is good for one to know and follow his/her culture'.

The above data appear to have gradually led students to understanding FAL since they were now able to analyse the texts that they read and the programmes that they watched on television and being able to come up with the relevant meanings. The responses below are from journals presented by students from the average performance on the theme of proficiency in reading and fluency in writing English FAL. The following data would be presented by the following category under Average students:

Average 1: *'I listened to a very story from the radio about one family. The story was about the mother and the daughter who loved and trusted each other. However, when time goes by, the daughter betrayed her mother's love and trust and she completely lost it. The daughter tired and worked hard to win her mother's love and trust back again but that was late because the mother died because of heart attached. She was left alone and helpless. I learned that in life, children should respect and acknowledge the love and trust from their parents and learn that they always want what is best for them'.*

Average 2: *'I have listened to a sad song about family. The father did not have a communication skill at all. This created a huge gap and mistrust between the family.*

I thought this is one of the sad songs since this destroyed the family relationship because the father spend more time at work thinking about money an aware that he was neglecting his family'.

Average 3: *'I read the text Sons and Lovers. There is an angry father. Children fear him. I feel pity for Paul. He doesn't want to tell his father about his prize because he is so afraid'.*

The responses from the average performers above appear to portray a gradual understanding of FAL since they have managed to understand the meaning of the text they read and got the meaning of the sad song they listened to. In the same light, the excerpts below are from journals presented by students from the low performance on the following theme: The proficiency in reading and fluent in writing in English as FAL. The following category and strands would be presented below.

Low 1: *'I have realised that my English is highly improved since I can be able to read any text or book in English and be able to analyse it accordingly with confidence compare to the previous years'.*

Low 2: *'At this level, we are in the position to get the meaning properly from the figurative language of any sort of literature and this has encouraged us to attempt 'image-evoking conceptualizations' in order to experience our personal constructs at a subjective and emotional level'.*

Low 3: *'We have drastically changed our negative attitude we had towards reading before we were exposed to journal's activity since this really improved our reading skill in English'.*

CONCLUSION

Conclusion section is mandatory and contains advantages, disadvantages, review the main part of research paper and use of research work. The students who featured in this study not only displayed a sense of community but also an increasing capacity for responses and expressiveness. As the data illustrates, the students have used the non-threatening atmosphere of the classroom to convert it into a response-based classroom to strengthen their engagement with the different reading materials. The data indicates a deepening of response, in other words, maturity in terms of reading performance as the ability groups moved along the continuum of increased responsiveness. It is apparent from the data that the students have spoken at many points along the continuum about the possibilities of living other lives, of being in places that they have never been, and of going through experiences unthinkable to them by virtue of the access that the texts has provided them. The findings replicate the studies of other scholars (Maho 1998; Homarsdottir 2000; Pütz 1991 and Cluver 2000) who maintain that blacks developed negative attitudes towards their own languages mainly for social, political and economic reasons. Concerning language proficiency in English, we conclude based on data that the majority of the students were gradually showing improvement. Taking into consideration that it was the first time that students were fully exposed to English and that they were compelled by to communicate in English whether during or after lectures. As a results, the levels of proficiency in English improved with the exception identifiable common grammatical errors. Student's attitudes changed towards English changed

RECOMMENDATION

All acknowledgments (if any) should be included at the very end of the manuscript before the references. Anyone who made a contribution to the research or manuscript, but who is not a listed author, should be acknowledged (with their permission). There should be language effective models in higher institutions in South Africa, which would cater for all students of diverse background especially where English is FAL and LoLT. The researchers suggest the longitudinal study to be launched in order to explore how important EFAL is to students' career in a way they use English to achieve their career goals. The researchers further propose that schools should be assisted to formulate their own language policies based on the LiEP. The researchers also suggest the use of postgraduate students to assist undergraduate students in reading and response in the form of tutorship. Parents should also be involved in their children's education by working closely with the teachers in order to support their children so that they can realise the importance of reading and take it seriously.

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