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Redefining the Practice of Teaching and Learning

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From Reading Difficulty to Interactive-Compensatory Reading

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Abstract

Students leaving secondary schools may need more time to adjust to the changing demand of reading activities. This is because, the types of reading in higher institutions require more effort and commitment from the readers. Readers often practice compensation strategies to aid understanding. This study was carried out to investigate the perception of learners towards academic writing by looking at what readers consider as reading difficulty. This study also attempted to look at readers' perception and the different types of strategies in academic reading. 106 participants were randomly chosen to respond to a 5-part questionnaire and SPSS analysis is done to record the frequency of responses and presented in the form of mean scores. Findings reveal interesting implications for the teaching and learning of academic reading as readers combine the use of compensatory approaches to aid their understanding when reading academic texts.
Keyword: Readers, Compensation, Strategies

Introduction

Students who enter institution of higher learning may become overwhelmed by the academic reading. They may take some time to get used to depend on reading in order to get information for their day-to-day academic activities in the institution. According to Abdullah and Mahfoodh (2016), readers face difficulties when they 'graduate' from reading for pleasure to academic reading in institutions of higher learning. According to Saengpakdeejit & Intaraprasert (2014), the difficulty that academic readers face may include difficulty with the language, structure and the content of the text. As such, academic reading courses in institutions of higher learning focus on the teaching of reading strategies so learners are taught to strategize their reading to get the most of the text. However, Aykal & Boyaci-Altina (2019) felt that some strategies taught in reading may not carefully address the background knowledge of the learners as even the cultural backgrounds of the learners are needed to better enhance their understanding of the text.

This study is done to investigate the perception of learners towards academic reading specifically on how learners perceive reading difficulties and how do they apply compensatory technique during their academic reading session. This study examined the following questions (1) In what ways do learners find reading difficult? and (2) How do learners use compensatory skills in their academic reading?

Literature Review

Reading in the Second Language

Abdullah & Mahfoodh (2016) reported that second language learners may bring in their background, cultural issues into their reading text. Most of the time, their background information is useful for them, but some information may sometimes impede comprehension when their schemata did not support the information in the text. Instead of using their schemata to help in understanding the reading text, the limited knowledge may in turn hinder their understanding.

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The study by Tommaso (2015) reported that second language learners are able to interact with the text actively through paraphrasing, summarizing and relating materials to personal experience. They use previous knowledge of concepts and experiences to make sense of the content of what they are reading. Their vast experience may provide scaffolding towards the understanding of new information. In addition to that second language learners are capable of making use of their learnt knowledge into their future learning.

Reading Skills and levels of Comprehension

Learners are said to use different levels of reading skills (figure 1) in the process of understanding the comprehension text. According to Basaraba et al (2013), the three-level model of reading comprehension assists teachers in the classroom. Figure 1 shows the three levels of reading comprehension among learners. Literal comprehension involves the learners to identify specific events from the text. Next, inferential comprehension requires the reader to infer implicit meaning from the text. Finally, evaluative comprehension demands that the reader evaluate situations and make judgements.

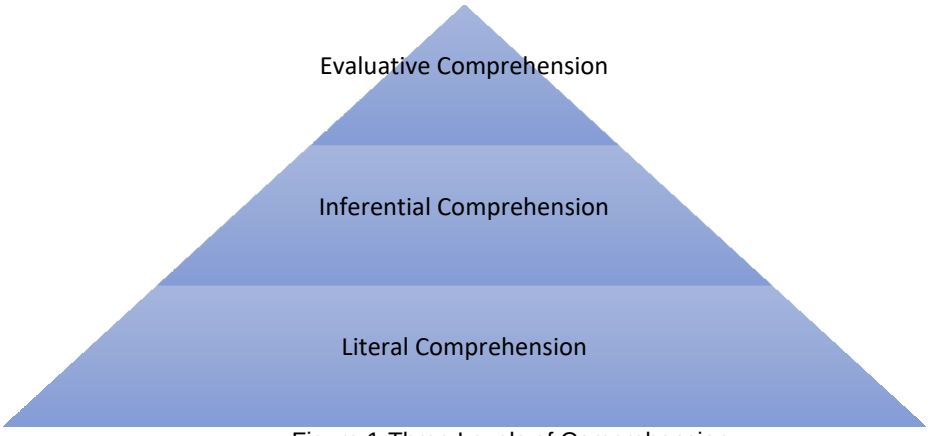

Figure 1-Three Levels of Comprehension

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to investigate what readers perceive as reading difficulty. 106 respondents were randomly chosen to participate in the study with questionnaire as the instrument used in this study. A reliability test showed that the instrument showed a Cronbach alpha of 0.833, thus revealing its reliability (table 1). Data is analyzed using SPSS version 26 and is presented in based on the frequency using mean scores.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.833	33

Table 1- Reliability Statistics of Instrument

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Findings

Reading Difficulty

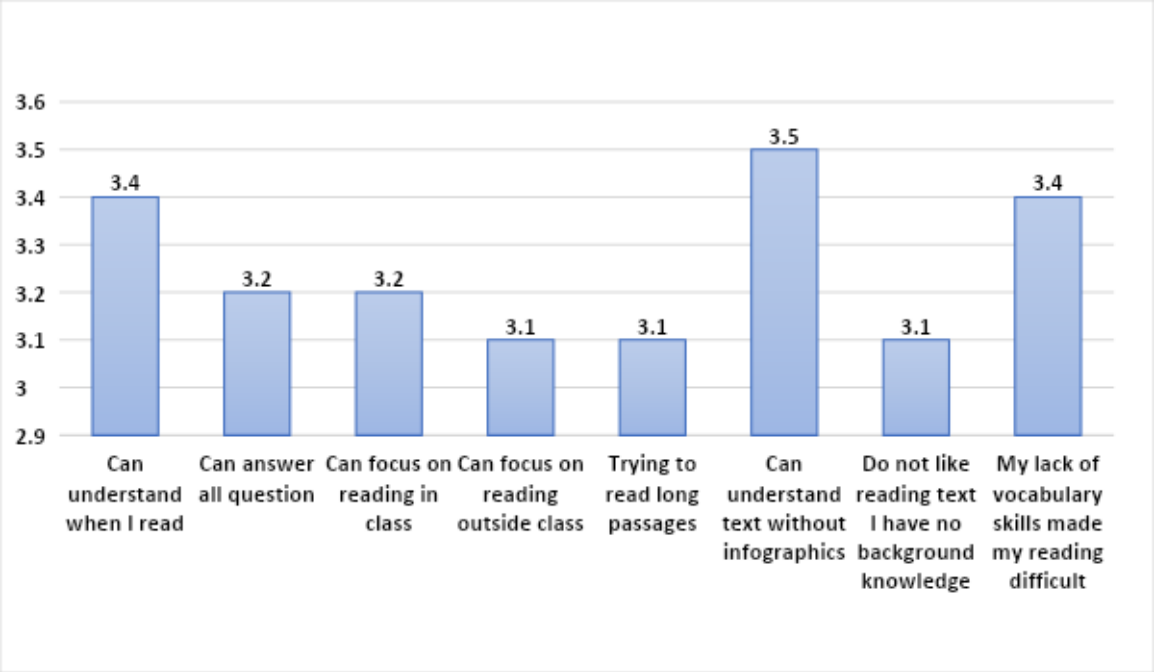

Figure 2- Mean Score for Reading Difficulty

Figure 2 shows the mean score for reading difficulty. Readers found it difficult if academic reading is to be done outside of the class setting (3.1) and if the text is considered long (3.1). Reading text which are alien to their schemata or background knowledge is also perceived as troublesome for the readers (3.1).

Compensatory Skills

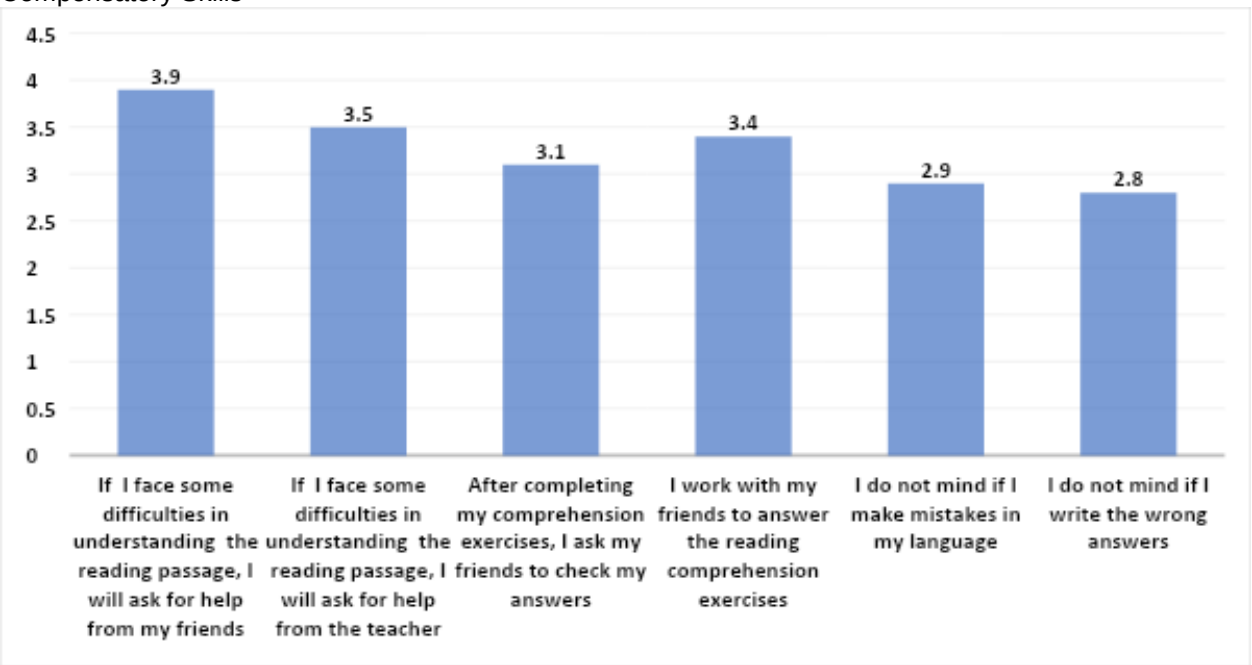

Figure 3-Mean for compensatory skills.

Figure 3 presents the mean score for readers' use of compensatory skills. When readers face difficulty during the reading process, they compensate their inadequacy by getting help. They usually

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ask help from friends (3.9), or from the teacher (3.5). They also sometimes choose to work with their friends (3.4).

Conclusion

The findings in this current study revealed how readers combine the use of compensatory approaches to aid their understanding when reading academic texts**.** Readers found it difficult if the text is considered long. Reading text which are alien to their schemata or background knowledge is also perceived as troublesome for the readers. This is also agreed by Abdullah and Mahfoodh (2016) who also reported that reading difficulties may stem not only from learners' language ability, but also their lack of content knowledge.

According to Ngabut (2015), teachers teaching academic reading should adopt the concept of behaviorism in the teaching. It is believable that extra effort to choose the correct stimulus (reading passages) can aid the teachers in getting the best response (from learners). Readers should also be taught to predict their expectations of the text before and as they read. Therefore, it is recommended for future researchers to focus on the behavior of readers in the thinking -reading process to get maximum benefit from reading.

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