

Reading as an interactive process: issues in teaching and learning

Nguyen Thi Huong

University: Posts and Telecommunications Institute of Technology

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Abstract : *With the need to provide an overview understanding of reading as a fundamental for second language learners, this article emphasizes the definition of ‘reading’ as an interactive process. The study then addresses key challenges in teaching and learning reading. Drawing on various research, it is highlighted that there is a dynamic relationship between readers and texts, which are mainly influenced by linguistic knowledge and psychological influences. As a result, the findings underscore the need for tailored strategies to improve students’ reading proficiency, particularly in the Vietnamese context.*

Keywords: *reading, interactive process, second language learners*

1. Introduction

Reading, by far is considered one of the most important skills for second language learners, especially in the academic context (Hudson, 2009). Reading displays the process of how a learner develops when learning a foreign language and opens up tremendous opportunities for learners to get access to “comprehensive education” or to achieve targeted reading proficiency (Brusch, 1991: 156). It, thereby, suggests a close connection between readers and written texts in the interactive process.

Due to the growing demands of using English in numerous areas, teaching English as a Second/ Foreign Language has been prompted to receive rapt attention since 1971 in the Vietnamese context (Nguyen, 2015). In Particular, the goal of teaching students to read is among the most vital educational objectives in educational institutions and universities. Theoretically, reading itself is a complex cognitive activity, resulting in considerable hurdles that occur during the teaching process; therefore, the idea of students’ achievement in reading sometimes fails from what is expected (Sari & Atmanegara, 2018).

2. Reading as an Interactive Process

From an early research stage, Pretorius (1995) argued that reading is the transition from decoding to comprehension. As defined, reading is an activity of extracting or interpreting meaning from texts. This is the correlative process of learners deciphering what is written within a printed text and attempting to understand given information based on their decoding knowledge. The text structure and organization demonstrate how information in a text

is tied together, affecting the readers’ ability to read, understand, and memorize the meaning. The result of Pretorius’s research (1995) gives more insight into the role of the interactive model of reading compared to the definition of Goodman (1998). The author stated that reading is a psycholinguistic process in which their L1 influences primarily the effectiveness of readers. In further studies, many other researchers also emphasize reading as an interactive process (Grabe, 2009; LIU, 2015; Kibui, 2019), showing the dynamic relationship between a reader (as a language user) and a text (as an instance of language in use). The interaction reveals an exchange of knowledge and ideas between readers and the author’s representation within the text, where readers engage in the process of ascribing the meaning and responding to the socio-cultural context. In addition, readers coming from different societies can have different approaches and interpretations of what is being mentioned in the text.

3. Issues in learning and teaching reading

According to Clerk et al., (2013), the inability to understand messages through written text causes far-reaching consequences for learners. Reasons that cause reading difficulties may vary; for example, Wiley and Sons (2013: 81) mentioned three factors that characterize learners’ poor reading ability, including lexical items, reading skills, and text types. However, I would draw attention to two popular reciprocal contributions to students’ reading weaknesses, which are linguistic knowledge and psychological domain respectively.

The initially influential factor in students’

readability is linguistic knowledge, a combination of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. According to studies by Van Gelderen et al., (2020), students who exhibit a limited range of word recognition and syntactic structures will have trouble interpreting the ideas in the text, thus causing a stage of “break-down” in the comprehension process. This reflects the fact that L2 linguistic knowledge and successful reading completion have a close relationship. The research by Ha (2021) suggests that vocabulary and grammar are the two key factors that obstruct students from comprehending a reading text. Especially when it comes to ESP complicated reading texts, most of them are claimed to show unsatisfying performance in classroom work and homework. Less-skilled readers with a low level of L2 linguistics knowledge experience obstacles in identifying specific information and addressing various types of question items (Kim, 2022). Besides, non-English major students reported that the density of unfamiliar words and grammatical structures affects learners’ reading ability (Duong, 2013). As a result, pre-intermediate level students are seen to read at a slow speed and tend to use reading strategies to fulfill the reading task rather than decoding and understanding the entire content and authors’ implications in the reading passages (Joshi & Aaron, 2000).

In terms of the psychological domain, it is by far investigated that factors including motivation, interest, teacher expectation, learning attitude, and expectancy exert substantial impacts on one’s reading achievement (Sparks, 2019). These factors are correlated, apparently. Readers’ motivation is classified into intrinsic (individual self-interest) and extrinsic (outside influences, e.g., teachers, the text itself, and grades) (McGeow et al., 2014); thus, different motivation results in different reading outcomes (Wigfield, Gladstone & Turci, 2016). Due to the influence of these factors on students’ reading skill development, many researchers conducted imperial studies in the Vietnamese context to support their findings. Dinh’s research (2011) found that students tend to have a negative attitude toward learning contributing to their reading difficulties. Since students cannot figure out their purposes and personal goals for reading, they may be resistant to unfamiliar and complicated reading texts. Petscher (2009) indicated that different components shape

the relationship between attitude and academic success, but overall, learners’ attitude can impact their motivation and attention in learning. The more students are not good at reading, the more their attitude toward academic reading declines (Ho, Pham & Dam, 2021). Additionally, high-level students are self-aware of their interests. Therefore, they can regard the reading process as a way of absorbing new knowledge while dealing with reading comprehension activities; in contrast, low-level students tend to withdraw from those reading tasks due to their lack of enjoyment.

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