

An Investigation into Slow ESL Reading Speed in Pakistani Students

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Abstract : This study investigated the different strategies used by Pakistani students learning English as a second language at secondary level school. The basic premise of the study is that ESL students face tremendous difficulty while they are reading a text in English. It also purports to dig into the different causes of their slow reading. They might range from word reading accuracy, mental translation, lexical density, cultural gaps, complex syntactic constructions, and back skipping. Sixty Grade 7 students from two secondary mainstream schools in Lahore were selected for the study, thirty being boys and thirty girls. They were administered reading-related and reading speed pre and post-tests. The purpose of the tests was to gauge their performance on different reading tasks so as to be able to see how they used strategies, if any, and also to ascertain the causes hampering their performance on those tests. In the pretests, they were given simple texts with considerable lexical density and moderately complex sentential layout. In the post-tests, the reading tasks contained comic strips, texts with visuals, texts with controlled vocabulary, and an evenly distributed varied range of simple, compound, and complex sentences. Both the tests were timed. The results gleaned through the data gathered corroborated the researchers' basic hunch that they performed significantly better than pretests. The findings suggest that the morphological structure of words and lexical density are the main sources of reading comprehension difficulties in poor ESL readers. It is also confirmed that if the texts are accompanied by pictorial visuals, it greatly facilitates students' reading speed and comprehension. There is no substantial evidence that ESL readers adopt any specific strategy while reading in English.

Keywords : slow ESL reading speed, mental translation, complex syntactic constructions, back skipping

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