

Developing the Skills of Reading Comprehension of Learners of English as a Second Language

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Abstract : Though commonly utilized as a language improvement technique, reading has not been fully employed by both language teachers and learners to develop reading comprehension skills in English as a second language. In a Sri Lankan context, this area has to be delved deep into as the learners' show more propensity to analyze. Reading comprehension is an area that most language teachers and learners struggle with though it appears easy. Most ESL learners engage in reading tasks without being properly aware of the objective of doing reading comprehension. It is observed that when doing reading tasks, the language learners' concern is more on the meanings of individual words than on the overall comprehension of the given text. The passiveness with which the ESL learners engage themselves in reading comprehension makes reading a tedious task for the learner thereby giving the learner a sense of disappointment at the end. Certain reading tasks take the form of translations. The active cognitive participation of the learner in the mode of using productive strategies for predicting, employing schemata and using contextual clues seems quite less. It was hypothesized that the learners' lack of knowledge of the productive strategies of reading was the major obstacle that makes reading comprehension a tedious task for them. This study is based on a group of 30 tertiary students who read English only as a fundamental requirement for their degree. They belonged to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka. Almost all learners hailed from areas where English was hardly utilized in their day to day conversations. The study is carried out in the mode of a questionnaire to check their opinions on reading and a test to check whether the learners are using productive strategies of reading when doing reading comprehension tasks. The test comprised reading questions covering major productive strategies for reading. Then the results were analyzed to see the degree of their active engagement in comprehending the text. The findings depicted the validity of the hypothesis as grounds behind the difficulties related to reading comprehension.

Keywords : reading, comprehension, skills, reading strategies

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