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Title

Problems Encountered in Reading for Academic Purposes

The case of First Year Master Students in Applied Linguistics and ESP at Ouargla University

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Dedication

To the memory of my father

To my lovely mother

To everyone who helped me in Algeria, especially during my first days

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This work could not have been achieved without the support of the following people; I am deeply grateful to them.

First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my parents who have never ceased to provide me with their selfless love.

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List of Abbreviations

AL: Applied Linguistics

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

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General Introduction

1. Background to the Research

Academic students studying in a foreign language need to develop a number of study skills that help them achieve their academic goals. For example, they should know how to listen to a lecture; how to take notes or present a paper during a seminar; how to write an essay, a report or a dissertation; how to read for their exams or academic research; etc. These are sub-skills of the four main language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Of these four macro-skills, many researchers would agree that reading is the most important academic skill. In support of this claim, Carrell and Grabe (2006) argue that the ability to read in a second language (L2) is considered to be an essential skill for academic students and that it represents the primary way for independent language learning (cited in Juan & Martinez-Flor, 2006). Similarly, Fairbairn and Fairbairn (2001) state that reading underpins much of the academic work of a student.

Although reading skill is considered as essential for independent academic learning, it is possible that university students undertake their under/postgraduate courses without having had the opportunity to develop this skill. This is due, in part, to the fact that at some universities, students do not study reading skills as an independent module. Therefore, it is likely that they cannot acquire all the necessary skills involved in reading. By ignoring the complex nature of reading, these students are likely to be faced with many problems when reading for academic or research purposes. To put it another way, if they are not aware that a reader engages in a phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, discourse, etc. process, they will have many difficulties in reading. For example, they may have difficulties related to vocabulary, sentence structure, unfamiliar text, length of the text, lack of previous knowledge, etc.

Consequently, the problems that students encounter when reading for academic purposes are likely to affect their attitudes towards reading in general. For example, students who don't know how to guess the meaning of words from context may think of reading as boring. This is because whenever they come across new words, they have to look them up in a dictionary. Likewise, students ignoring the skills of scanning and skimming may regard reading as time consuming. The reason for this is that when they are looking for specific information in or the main idea of the text, they read the text from the beginning to the end.

Although second language readers may experience the same reading problems, these problems are likely to differ from one context to another (the term context is taken here in its

broad sense). Our research is conducted at Ouargla University. It aims mainly at identifying and analysing possible problems that First Year Master students in Applied Linguistics and ESP face when they are reading for academic purposes.

2. Statement of the Problem

In academic settings, students are required to undertake a number of different academic tasks. For example, they may be asked to summarise a book, to write an essay, to read suggested references, etc. In order to undertake most of these tasks, students are much more likely to rely on themselves than on teachers. This is because, in most cases, what is given in lectures is not sufficient to carry out all academic tasks. In fact, as Williams (2001) argues, “the purpose of a lecture is probably to stimulate students to do work by themselves. The end result of a course must be to try to make a student autonomous, happy to find things out for himself” (p. 3). From this argument, the question that arises is how students can rely on themselves and become independent learners. Grabe and Stoller (2001) provide an answer to this question by confirming that reading is the primary means for independent learning, whether the goal is performing better on academic tasks, learning more about subject matter, or improving language abilities.

However, due to the lack of awareness of the complex nature of reading, students are likely to face many problems when they are reading. These problems have a great impact on their ability to read. Besides, the difficulties that students experience in reading may affect their attitudes toward reading. In fact, as Westwood (2008) points out, weak readers read very little and are the very students who use a variety of tactics to reduce the amount of time they spend engaging with books. The cause of this is that they find reading a very frustrating and often embarrassing task. He then confirms that “reading difficulties have a detrimental influence on a student’s self-esteem, confidence and motivation.”

This study attempts to identify and analyse the problems faced by First Year Master students in AL and ESP at Ouargla University when they are reading for academic or research purposes. By problems, we mean possible barriers, as perceived by students themselves, which prevent them from achieving the academic purposes for which they read.

3. Aims of the Study

The present study has two main objectives. First, it attempts to identify and analyse problems that First Year Master students in Applied Linguistics and ESP encounter when they

are reading for academic purposes. Second, it evaluates the awareness of the reading strategies. To put it another way, it examines the extent to which the aforementioned students use the reading strategies in order to solve the reading problems they face. In addition to these two main objectives, the study investigates students' attitudes towards reading in general.

4. Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What attitudes do First Year Master students in AL and ESP at Ouargla university have towards reading in general?
2. What problems do they encounter when they are reading for academic purposes?
3. To what extent are they aware of the reading strategies?

5. Significance of the Study

The importance of this study is threefold. First, raising awareness of the complex nature of reading, it is hoped that this study will help students recognize the reading problems they face, which is – as Nuttall (1996) argues – the first step in finding solutions to the problems.

Second, since one of the aims of this study is to investigate students' attitudes towards reading in general, it is hoped that this study will help students to change not only the way they read, but also the way they think about reading. Finally, as there may be – in the future – the need to teach reading skill as an independent module, it is expected that this study will help teachers and other University stakeholders in the development of a an appropriate reading programme.

6. Methodology

This study is conducted on First Year Master students in AL and ESP at Ouargla University. The subjects were chosen because the academic studies they are undertaking require of them to do much reading in their speciality. Consequently, they are likely to encounter problems in their reading.

Although there are many methods of conducting research, we opted for a descriptive method. This is due to the nature of the problem. According to Singh (2006), descriptive research is concerned with the present and attempts to determine the status of the phenomenon under investigation. To collect data, we employed a five-point rating scale questionnaire. A questionnaire is one of the tools of data collection in a descriptive research as it is explained

by William (2011) who states that descriptive research relies on observation as a means of collecting data and that ‘observation’ can take many forms; since questions can be distributed, people interviewed, etc. We opted for a questionnaire in order to survey as many participants as possible. Besides, a questionnaire requires of the participants less time, and of the researcher minimum expense of both money and effort. The data collected was analysed by means of descriptive statistics. Finally conclusions were drawn and some suggestions made as well.

7. Limitations of the Study

Despite the importance of this study, it does have some limitations. First, not by any means can we pretend to have covered all the reading problems faced by students while reading for academic purposes. We have dealt with only the main ones. Second, our study attempts to identify the reading problems, but does not account for the causes of these problems. Finally, this study was conducted at one university. It, therefore, cannot be generalised unless the same results are found by other researchers by means of the same research tools.

8. Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into two main parts. The first part – which comes after the general introduction – presents a review of related literature. This part consists of three chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the nature of reading. The second one deals with academic reading and the purposes for which university students read. As for the third chapter, it deals with some of the problems faced by L2 readers. The second part of the dissertation presents the methodology for data collection. It also explains the methods and tools used to analyse the findings. In this second part, the findings are analysed and discussed. This part is followed by a general conclusion.

9. Definition of Key Terms

- **Academic purposes** (with regard to reading): are different purposes for which students read. Some of these purposes are: to obtain information, to understand ideas or theories, to discover the author’s viewpoints, etc. (Jordan, 1997).
- **Reading**: “is a complex information processing skill in which the reader interacts with the text in order to (re)create meaningful discourse.” (Silberstein, 1994)
- **Reading strategies**: “mental activities that readers use in order to construct meaning from text” (Richards, 1997). These mental activities are sometimes called **reading skills** (see Mikulecky, 2008). Some of them are unconscious and therefore automatic (e.g.

word recognition). Others are employed deliberately (e.g. setting the purpose for reading). In the present study, the terms *skills* and *strategies* are used interchangeably to refer to actions – whether automatic or deliberate- taken by the reader in order to make sense of the text.

Part one: Review of Related Literature

Chapter one: The Nature of Reading

Introduction

1.1. Definitions of Reading

1.2. Views of Reading

1.2.1. Environmentalist View of Reading

1.2.2. Innatist View of Reading

1.2.3. Interactionist View of Reading

1.3. Processes Involved in Reading Comprehension

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1.4.1. Bottom-up Approach

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1.5 Relationship between L1 and L2 Reading

Conclusion

Introduction

For some people, it may sound stupid to ask, at a tertiary level (at university), such a question: “What is reading?” This is because “*reading is something many of us take for granted*” (Grabe, 2009). A possible answer to this question may look like this one: “We have been reading since early years of our schooling; such a question is not worth asking.” Even those who don’t take reading for granted may still feel reluctant to take a book about reading; they may say that it is a waste of time.

But, is reading really as easy as it seems to be? Of course not. Since there is a number of questions we cannot understand if we take reading for granted. Some of these questions are: What does it mean to be able to read? What does reading involve? Why do people read? What do good readers do to understand what they read? Is the role of the reader passive? Or, is the reader involved actively in the process of reading? What is it that makes people understand the text? Is there any relationship between L1 and L2 reading? These are but some of the questions that can be asked about reading. We cannot get an idea about these questions unless we engage ourselves in understanding the nature of reading. For example, how can we possibly ascertain somebody’s reading problems if we have no idea about what might be a source of difficulties in a text?

Bearing in mind the main objectives of our study, we will try – in this chapter – to provide a review of the literature on the nature of reading. However, we cannot pretend to provide an exhaustive review. In fact, as Alderson (2000) argues, “any review of the nature of reading is bound to be somewhat pretentious”. For that reason, we will be selective about what to include in this review. Besides, some of the questions raised above will be dealt with in detail in subsequent chapters. Now, it is worth turning to the main question of this chapter: “What is reading?”

1.1. Definitions of Reading

The term *reading* means different things to different people in different contexts. Thus, to a child learning to read at the very elementary level, reading consists of translating the symbols printed on a page or a computer screen into sounds (Fairbairn & Fairbairn, 2001). Here, the business is not to understand what is read, it is just to decode it. This situation can be compared to the one presented by Wallace (1992) in which an optician asks his client (an adult) if he can read something on a card. Here, the client is not tested on whether or not he understands what he reads. Instead, he is tested on whether he has the ability to identify it. Likewise, to

small children – too young to get a proper understanding – who are asked to read holy texts, what they do has little, if not nothing, to do with meaning (Fairbairn & Fairbairn, 2001; Wallace, 1992)

Contrary to the above-mentioned situations wherein the main concern is not understanding what is read but decode or identify it, most of the reading we do in our daily lives has much to do with comprehension. After all, whatever the reason of our reading might be (information, enjoyment, criticising, etc.), it is less likely that we are interested in the pronunciation or grammatical structure used. Instead, we read because we want to get the message intended by the writer (Nutall, 1996).

Given all the ways in which the term *reading* can be used and the different purposes for which people read, it follows that “no single statement is going to capture the complexity of reading” (Grabe, 2009). Here are some definitions of reading:

- *“Reading is a complex skill, that is to say it involves a whole series of lesser skills.”* (Broughton et.al,1980)
- *“Reading is a complex information processing skill in which the reader interacts with the text in order to (re)create meaningful discourse.”* (Silberstein, 1994)
- *“Reading is a complex set of activities requiring a range of skills”* (Fairbairn & Fairbairn, 2001)
- *“Reading is a conscious or unconscious thinking process. The reader applies many strategies to reconstruct the meaning that the author is assumed to have intended.”* (Mikulecky, 2008)
- *“Reading is the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print”* (Urquhart & Weir,1992; cited in Grabe,2009)

With all these definitions of reading, it would not be unreasonable to say that the nature of reading is complex. Besides, it can also be seen that there is much more to reading than decoding the shapes of letters printed on a page. Moreover, in order to achieve most of the purposes for which we read, it seems that understanding what we read is a prerequisite. And to get a better understanding, we make appeal not only to our linguistic knowledge, but also to the knowledge we have about the world – schematic knowledge (see chap. 3). We also use a number of strategies. To put it simply, we engage in a number of processes (interactive, comprehending, evaluative, strategic, etc.). We shall deal with these processes in the next section.

Since the term *reading* is used in different ways, we must be clear about what we mean when we use it in this dissertation. To do so, we have to keep in mind the main objectives of our study. We set out to investigate the reading problems that First Year Master students in AL and ESP at Ouargla University encounter while reading for academic purposes. To achieve most, if not all, of the academic purposes for which these students read, it seems that understanding what is read is a prerequisite. We, therefore, adopt Nuttall's (1996) view of reading which is essentially concerned with meaning and excludes any interpretation of the term *reading* in which meaning is not central.

1.2. Views of Reading

We have seen above that the term *reading* is used in different ways. But, so far, we have not yet talked about how the view of reading has changed over time. This is what we shall deal with in this section. Since reading skill is dealt with within the field of language learning and teaching, we shall see how the view of reading has changed according to the way language learning and teaching was approached.

1.2.1. Environmentalist View of Reading

This view of reading prevailed in the field of language learning until the end of the 1960s (Uso-Juan & Martinez-Flor, 2006). It emerged from two schools of thought in linguistics and psychology. In linguistics, Bloomfield's (1933) structural school of linguistics was very influential in the 1940s and the 1950s. Bloomfield's proponents (structuralists) view language as "consisting of different elements related to each other in a linear way by means of a series of structures of rules" (ibid). In his book, *Language* (1933), he insists that a scientific theory of language must reject all data that are not directly observable or physically measurable (cited in Malmkjar, 1991). Thus, Bloomfield focuses on what is empirical at the expense of the mental aspect of language learning.

In the meantime, in the field of psychology, there was an influential behaviourist school of thought. The main figure of this school, B.F. Skinner, based his theory of learning on three important elements: stimulus, response and reinforcement. As it is the case with Bloomfield, Skinner does not account for the mental aspects of language. To illustrate this, let us consider one of the four basic claims he made in his book, *Verbal behaviour* (1957): "Language behaviour can be explained of observable events, without reference to the internal structure of the organism" (cited in ibid, p.72) It can then be seen that for both Bloomfield and Skinner, the role of environment is of paramount importance in language learning.

In this environmentalist view of language learning, reading was regarded as a passive process, whereby a reader is not actively involved in the process of reading, he is just a decoder of shapes of letters printed on a page.

1.2.2 Innatist View of Reading

In 1957, Noam Chomsky published a revolutionary book, *Syntactic structures*, which came as a challenge to the environmentalist view of language learning. Chomsky believes that children are born equipped with the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), that is, they are born with an innate predisposition to learn a language.

Following Chomsky's innatist position, researchers were interested in understanding how this view would work in the acquisition of reading. For example, studies such as the ones conducted by Goodman (1965, 1967, 1969), Smith (1971), have shown that reading is not a passive activity, it is rather an active process in which readers derive meaning from the text using both their knowledge of the language and their background knowledge (cited in Uso-Juan & Martinez-Flor, 2006).

1.2.3 Interactionist View of Reading

By the 1970s, a view of reading emerged from the development that was taking place in the fields of linguistics and cognitive psychology. In the field of linguistics, there was a shift of attention from sentences to discourse (or language beyond sentences). At the same time in the field of cognitive psychology, researchers were interested in understanding what goes on in the mind of the reader during the reading process. Thus, story grammarians (Ramlhart, 1975; Thorndyke, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1975; Cited in *ibid*, 2006) attempted to formulate correspondence between the structure of story and the processing properties involved in the reading process and its effect on understanding. The problem with story grammarians is that they were so structural and neglected the non-textual factors (background knowledge) involved in the reading process.

It was not until the advent of the *schema theory* (see chap. 3 for more detail) in the late 1970s that the non-textual factors were taken into account. Those who applied it (Grabe, 1988; Rosenblatt, 1988; Swaffrar, 1988) found that that reading is an interactive process, that is, a dynamic interaction between the writer and the reader whereby the reader creates meaning from the text by activating his stored knowledge and extending it with the new information supplied by the text.

1. 3. Processes Involved in Reading Comprehension

We have seen above that much of the reading we do in our day-to-day lives has much to do with comprehension. The question many of us may ask is what processes we are involved in when we try to comprehend what we read. Before we see how Grabe and Stoller (2011) answer this question, let us first see what reading comprehension is. Many reading researchers (Anderson, Hiebert, Scoot, & Wilkinson, 1985; Jenkins, Larson, & Fleischer, 1983) point out that “reading comprehension is the process of constructing meaning by coordinating a number of complex processes that include word reading, word and world knowledge, and fluency” (Cited in Klingner et al., 2007)

To turn to the very question of this section, there are ten processes involved in fluent reading comprehension (Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Grabe, 2009). First, fluent reading is a *rapid* and *efficient* process. Thus, a skilled reader reads at the rate of 250 – 300 words per minute. Many non-native speakers of English and some native speakers have problems with reading faster; they read at speeds which are below 300 words (Nation, 2009). In addition to reading faster, skilled readers do it with less effort; they, therefore, read efficiently.

Fluent reading is then a *comprehending* process. In fact, we read to understand the message the writer intended via the text. In trying to understand the message, we interact with the writer using both our linguistic and background knowledge. This is the reason why fluent reading is an *interactive* process.

Similarly, to comprehend the text, we make appeal to a number of strategies such as previewing, identifying difficulties in understanding, using context to maintain comprehension, re-reading, etc. Consequently, fluent reading is a *strategic* process. It is also a *flexible* process in the sense that as we understand what we read, we adjust the reading processes with our purposes for reading.

Since fluent readers always read with a purpose in mind, fluent reading is always a *purposeful* process. Likewise, it is an *evaluative* process in that while we read, we have to evaluate whether what we are reading is coherent and suits our purposes for reading. And the result of our evaluations makes reading a *learning* process. Finally, since we cannot read without knowing the script (code) and structure of the language, reading is fundamentally a *linguistic* process.

1.4. Approaches to Text Processing

There has been controversy over the ways readers process and comprehend a text, hence the dichotomy *bottom-up* and *top-down processing*. In addition to these two opposed approaches, there is another one known as *interactive approach* according to which the bottom-up and top-down approaches go hand in hand.

I.4.1. Bottom-up Approach

According to this approach, the reader, as Alderson (2000) puts it out, starts with the printed word, recognises graphic stimuli; he then decodes them to sound, recognises words and decodes meanings. Similarly, Nunan (1993) provides a good explanation of how bottom-up processing proceeds.

In the case of reading, the bottom-up model assumes that the reader first identifies each letter in a text as it is encountered. These letters are blended together and mentally ‘sounded out’ to enable the reader to identify the words that they make up; words are chained together to form sentences; sentences are linked together into paragraphs; and paragraphs are tied together to form complete texts. Comprehension is thus the final step in a length process of decoding ever larger units of language. (p.79)

It follows from this that the bottom-up approach does not take into account the knowledge the reader brings to the text, his experience of having encountered other texts – his background knowledge.

I.4.2. Top-down Approach

Contrary to the bottom-up approach, top-down approach gives much importance to the knowledge the reader brings to the text. According to this approach, the reader works out the meaning of the text by activating schemata, that is, in Alderson’s words, ‘networks of information stored in the brain which act as filters for incoming information’ (Alderson, 2000, p. 17). Looked at from this angle, reading, as Hudson (2007) argues, is an active process in which the reader uses not only his knowledge of the language, but also his internal concepts of how language is processed and his background knowledge.

I.4.3. Interactive Approach

According to this approach, there is a great deal of interaction between the bottom-up and top-down processing. As Nutall (1993) acknowledges, both approaches are complementary. In fact, while reading, a reader adopts sometimes the top-down approach to

make assumptions about what might follow and also draws inferences. Likewise, he sometimes adopts a bottom up approach to check what the writer really intended.

1.5. Relationship between L1 and L2 Reading

A great deal of research has been conducted to investigate the relationships between L1 and L2 reading. Thus, the following question has attracted much interest. Is second language (L2) reading a reading problem or a language problem? To put it differently, does success in reading a second language depend upon one's L1 reading ability or upon the reader's second language knowledge? Or, is a good reader in L1 necessarily a good reader in L2? Researchers hold different views on this question.

Some researchers such as Jolly (1978), Coady (1979) claim that success in reading a second or foreign language depends crucially on one's L1 reading ability rather than on the reader's level in L2 (Cited in Hudson, 2007). They are in support of the hypothesis, as posed by Alderson (1984), that poor reading in a foreign language is due to poor reading ability in the first language and that poor first- language readers will read poorly in the foreign language and good first-language readers will read well in the foreign language (ibid).

Other researchers (Clarke, 1980; Czico, 1980) argue that L2 learners need to develop adequate L2 language proficiency before L1 reading skills can transfer to facilitate L2 reading (cited in Grabe, 2009). They are in support of what Clarke called *Short-circuit Hypothesis*. This hypothesis posits that inadequate knowledge of the second language *short-circuits* or prevents the successful L1 readers from reading well in an L2 (Alderson, 2000).

Addressing the question of whether L2 reading is a reading problem or a language problem, Alderson (1984) reviewed the studies of that time. He concluded that there is likely to be a **threshold** of linguistic knowledge without which L2 readers cannot expect any L1 reading ability to transfer to L2 reading. In other words, Alderson supports what is known as *The Language Threshold Hypothesis* according to which L2 readers must develop a reasonable language proficiency (linguistic threshold) in L2 before their L1 reading abilities are likely to transfer to facilitate L2 Reading (Grabe, 2009). This hypothesis is potentially in conflict with what is known as *Interdependence Hypothesis* which is a hybrid of both the above views. Cummins (1979), one of the supporters of this hypothesis, argues that reading or learning to read is achieved only once. He also confirms that after learners have matured in their ability to read in the L1, the combined L1 linguistic and cognitive resources transfer to the L2 and do not need to be learned (Cited in Grabe,2009).

Conclusion

The nature of reading, though simple it may seem to be, is very complex. The way it is viewed has changed over time. Consequently, the term *reading* can be used to mean different things in different contexts. Since the achievement of most of the purposes for which we read presupposes a better understanding of what is read, reading comprehension is therefore, as Beck & McKeown (1998) argue, the “*sine qua non of reading*” (cited in Klingner et al., 2007). For fluent reading comprehension to take place, we get involved in a number of processes. Sometimes we adopt a top-down approach; sometimes we take the bottom-up one.

In the case of L2 reading, researchers take different positions on the question of whether L2 reading is a reading problem or a language problem. Some believe that poor L2 reading is due to poor reading inability in L1. Some others support the idea that before L1 reading skills can transfer to L2 reading, L2 readers must develop a reasonable proficiency in L2, that is, what Alderson (1984) calls a *language threshold*.

In this chapter, we have attempted to provide a review of the nature of reading. We have used the term *reading* without reference to a particular context. In the next chapter, we shall put it in an academic context wherein comprehension of what is read is of paramount importance. We will deal with the skills and strategies that academic students – especially EFL students – use to overcome the difficulties they encounter while reading for academic purposes.

Chapter Two: Academic Reading and Reading Skills and Strategies

Introduction

2.1. Academic Purposes for Reading

2.2. Reading Skills and Strategies

2.2.1. Skills versus Strategies

2.2.2. Classification of Reading Strategies

2.3 Effective Academic Reading

2.4. Extensive Reading and its Benefits

Conclusion

Introduction

At university, it is likely that the majority – if not all – of the students still remember their reading experiences at primary and/or secondary school. Some may still remember the reading they did in the classroom when teachers used to give texts to be read so as to answer a series of comprehension questions. They may also still remember the times a teacher used to ask someone to read a text aloud for the whole class. For some students, it might have been difficult to take a book to read unless it was an obligation. For some others, reading might have been an activity of great interest. Despite these different past experiences, most of us would agree that academic reading is much likely to be different from the reading we used to have at primary and/or secondary school.

In academic settings, things become different for a number of reasons. First, as Fairbairn and Fairbairn (2001) agree, some subjects – especially in arts and social sciences – such as history, literature, linguistics, sociology, etc. involve a lot of reading. Second, since in most cases, students cannot get everything from lectures, they do have to become independent learners by relying much on themselves rather than on teachers. And to become independent learners, reading is the primary means (Grabe, 2001). Finally, the structure of academic texts such as textbooks, book reviews, conference abstract, etc. is different from the structure of non-academic texts such as friendship letters, etc.

These above-mentioned factors – along with others – which make academic reading different from non-academic reading are likely to constitute reading challenges for EFL students. To confront these challenges successfully, students have to be aware of skills and strategies they can use. For example, they should know how to be selective about what to read, how to get the main idea of the text, how to look for specific information, how to monitor comprehension, how to deal with unfamiliar words, etc. In this chapter, we shall deal in detail with reading skills and strategies. We shall also explain what extensive reading is and show its benefits for university students. But first, let us have a look at different academic purposes for which students read.

2.1. Academic Purposes for reading

Pritchard (2008) argues that a great deal of the time devoted to university work is likely to be spent on reading. So why do university students spend much of their time reading? Answered simply, it can be said that university students read to perform academic tasks. But,

which tasks? To get an idea about this question, we have to consider the main tasks university students are involved in. Sometimes they are asked to summarize a piece of writing or synthesize a number of articles or even textbooks. At other times, they are given a written assignment or presentation to prepare; they may also be asked to read in order to get an idea about a lecture before they attend it. More importantly, to get a university degree, students are required to write a dissertation or a thesis.

The above-mentioned tasks are only some of the tasks performed at university. Therefore, we cannot pretend to have given here all the reasons for which university students read. Fairbairn and Fairbairn (2001) provide a list of reasons for reading as a student. They acknowledge that some of these reasons are regarded as positive and helpful, others are considered to be negative and unhelpful. Table 2.1 below lists only the positive reasons for reading (pp.194-195).

Table2.1. Positive reasons for reading as a student (adapted from Fairbairn and Fairbairn, 2006)

| Positive reasons for reading as a student |
|---|
| - <i>To get ideas for essays and assignments.</i> |
| - <i>To expand your knowledge about a subject.</i> |
| - <i>To understand what others have written about topics in which you are interested.</i> |
| - <i>To understand ideas from lectures or seminars, or from other written sources.</i> |
| - <i>To follow up a reference from another source.</i> |
| - <i>To contextualise the views you express in your assignments by showing how they relate to what others have said.</i> |
| - <i>Because you are interested in your topic and you want to know more.</i> |
| - <i>To legitimate or back up what you want to say in an assignment.</i> |
| - <i>Because reading what others have said might cause you to change your mind about a subject.</i> |
| - <i>So that when you come to criticise what others have said, you can do so in an informed way.</i> |
| - <i>For enjoyment – because reading is giving you pleasure.</i> |
| - <i>Because there is a particular piece of information you want or need to find out.</i> |
| - <i>Because your lecturer/tutor wrote the book or article and it might help you understand his/her views and research.</i> |

Given these different purposes for which university students read, it would not seem illogical to ask the question of whether or not it is important to know one's purpose for reading. Scream (2007) claims that determining one's purpose for reading is the most important step in taking control of the reading process. The reason behind this is that the purpose for reading determines which reading strategy to be selected. For example, if the reading purpose is to get

the main idea or to look for specific information, the best strategy to achieve the purpose is to skim or scan.

Likewise, with regard to the above question, Ediger (1999) carried out a study on a particular purpose in academic context. The study was conducted on writing a research paper based on the reading of a number of articles on a chosen topic. Thus, the real task – which becomes the purpose for reading – was to write a synthesis paper on the topic. After the study, she found that two graduate students continually referred to their purpose. Their reading purpose, synthesising, formed the basis for the decisions they made such as skipping some pages, rejecting completely an article judged irrelevant to the purpose, re-reading a particular paper, etc. (cited in Ediger, 2006). Having seen that university students read for a number of different academic purposes, it is important to address the idea of how these purposes can be achieved successfully. For this reason, the next section is devoted to skills and strategies that university students can adopt to accomplish their purposes effectively.

2.2. Reading Skills and Strategies

In our day-to-day lives, we perform different tasks. To perform almost every task – if not all tasks, we are required to have at least some knowledge. However, having that knowledge does not necessarily guarantee success. This is the reason why in addition to knowledge, we should develop skills and strategies of doing the task. When we acquire skills and strategies, we are much likely to achieve successfully the results we want with minimum expense of both time and effort. To put it another way, skills and strategies help us to become more effective and efficient.

Reading is a lot like performing any other task. In fact, to be successful readers, we must have the knowledge about the language. In addition to that knowledge, we need to have the knowledge about the world – background knowledge. We also need to develop reading skills and strategies in order to read effectively and efficiently. In this section, we shall deal with reading skills and strategies. But first, let us see whether or not the terms *skill* and *strategy* mean the same thing.

2.2.1 Skills versus Strategies

To get an idea about the two terms, we have to consider reading in the broad context of language learning. In the literature on language learning, there is no clear-cut distinction between *skills* and *strategies*. To understand what researchers say about this distinction, let us start with the

term *skill*. Harris and Hodges (1981) define skill as “an acquired ability **to perform well; proficiency**” (cited in Hudson, 2007) [emphasis is ours]. It follows from this that, as Hudson comments, the term *skill* can be used to denote a reading behaviour such as decoding words; or it can be used to indicate a relative level of reading ability – hence the concept of a *skilful reader*.

In the works of some researchers (Nuttal, 1996; Nation, 2009), we find the concept of *attack skills* in expressions like ‘word attack skills’ or ‘text attack skills’. Do these researchers use the term *skills* to mean the same thing as *strategies*? To find an answer to this question, let us quote Nuttal (1996).

Students need a range of strategies to deal with texts. As we want them to confront problems, instead of running away from them, we refer to these as **attack skills**, borrowing a term from mother tongue teaching. (p.41)

In this quotation, it is not so clear whether or not the terms *skills* and *strategies* are used to mean the same thing. So, how is the term *strategy* defined? Again, we have to put it in the context of language learning. Thus, learning strategies are defined as follows:

- ✓ *Specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed and more transferable to new situations.* (Oxford,1990, p.8) [emphasis is ours]
- ✓ *Learning strategies are techniques, approaches, or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information.*(Chamot,1987, p.71, cited in Macaro,2001) [emphasis is ours]

It can be seen from the above definitions of skills and strategies that there is no clear-cut distinction between the two terms. In fact, if we take a close look at these definitions, we can see that whether it be skills or strategies, the aim is the same – ‘to perform well’, ‘to make learning easier’, and ‘to facilitate the learning’. Due to lack of clear-cut distinction between the two terms, there is still disagreement about whether *strategies* should be used to refer only to deliberate actions taken by the readers in opposition to *skills*, which are automatic and therefore unconscious (Ediger,2006). Some researchers (Paris, Wasik & Turner, 1991; Pressley & Woloshyn, 19995) argue that strategies can become skills when automatized and that skills can conversely become strategies when used intentionally (ibid.). To avoid ambiguity in the current study, we shall use the two

terms interchangeably to refer to actions – whether automatic or deliberate – taken by readers to achieve their reading purposes effectively and efficiently.

2.2.2. Classification of Reading Strategies

Depending on the level or type of processing involved, reading strategies can be classified into three categories: metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies. Starting with metacognitive strategies, they involve metacognition, that is, “*thinking about thinking*” (Klingner, Vaughn & Boardman, 2007). To put it another way, metacognitive strategies are those involved in planning, monitoring, and evaluating comprehension (Peterson, 2001).

Concerning cognitive strategies, they operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in a way that enhances learning (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). Thus, they involve cognition, that is, “the act or process of knowing or perception” (Richards, 1997). According to Schraw (1998), cognition differs from metacognition in that cognitive skills help one to perform a task, whereas metacognitive skills help one to understand and regulate the performance on a task (cited in Hudson, 2007, p.112)

As for social/affective strategies, they are regarded as a broad grouping which involves either interaction with another person or the control of one’s feeling with regard to learning – in our case reading (O’Malley & Chamot). With regard to classification of reading strategies, there have been attempts to come up with a comprehensive list of the reading strategies. Ediger (2006) provides a list of strategies that each of the above three categories encompasses. The list is adapted from the works of other researchers (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Oxford; Sarig, 1993; Pressley, 2000; Anderson, 1991, 1999). In the Figure2.1 bellow, we present Ediger’s account of key reading strategies.

Metacognitive Strategies

Purpose-oriented strategies:

- Planning what to do next, steps to take
- Reminding oneself about the purpose for reading
- Evaluating information in terms of whether it reads to one’s purpose
- Deciding whether a text is relevant to one’s purpose
- Comparing information from one text with that of another

- Reflecting on how well objectives were met
- Evaluating the quality of the text
- Checking the time one has available

Comprehension-monitoring strategies:

- Assessing comprehension
 - o Evaluating one’s understanding
 - o Identifying difficulties in understanding

(...)

- Summarising what one has read
- Reviewing a text after reading is complete
- Repair strategies
 - Re-reading
 - Slowing down reading again
 - Trying to pronounce words

Strategies that focus on learning from reading:

- Reflecting on what has been learned from the text
- Underlining or marking in the text
- Thinking how to use the text in the future
- Making notes about what one has read
- Paraphrasing what the author said in order to remember it

Cognitive Strategies

Strategies for interacting with author and text:

- Previewing a text
- Predicting the content of the text
- Checking/confirming predictions
- Asking questions about the text
- Looking for answers to questions about the text
- Connecting one part of the text to another
- Critiquing the author
- Critiquing the text
- Evaluating and revising hypotheses that arose while reading
- Interpreting the text
- Making associations to ideas presented in the text based on prior knowledge

- Constructing mental images to represent the meaning expressed in the text

Strategies involving different ways of reading:

- Reading slowly
- Reading quickly
 - Skimming for general idea
 - Scanning for specific information
- Re-reading
- Ignoring certain texts or parts of a text
- Reading out loud (and listening to how it sounds)
- Reading selectively/deciding whether or not to read something
- Reading ahead

Strategies for handling unknown words:

- Using other information in the context to understand an unknown word
- Skipping or ignoring an unknown word
- Waiting to see if more information is provided above
- Analysing the structure or parts of a word in order to understand it
- Asking someone the meaning of a word
- Looking up a word in a dictionary
- Thinking other related words that one already knows

- Thinking about cognates in L1
- Translating a word/phrase into L1
- Checking the spelling of a word

Strategies involving prior knowledge

- World knowledge
 - Thinking about what one already knows about a topic
 - Making connections between a text and one's prior knowledge
 - Revising one's prior knowledge that is consistent with ideas in the text

- Knowledge of texts and text formats
 - o Using discourse markers to identify relationships
 - o Connecting one part of a text to another
 - o Paying attention to text structure
- Verifying whether one's guess about meaning fits the context and one's conceptual knowledge; then revising or seeking alternative explanation
- Analysing texts (e.g., stories, science reports) into the typical components and language of that genre (e.g., story grammar, steps/components of science experiments)

Affective and Social Strategies

- Rewarding oneself
 - Talking with others about what one reads
 - Encouraging oneself
 - Selecting what one wants to read
-

Figure 2.1. Key reading strategies (Ediger, 2006)

2.3. Effective Academic Reading

It has been said above that reading is likely to take most of the time devoted to university work. University students do not spend much of their time on reading for the sake of reading; they rather spend it to achieve academic purposes such as summarising, synthesising, understanding ideas from lectures or seminars, etc. But how can university students – especially EFL students – read effectively to fulfil these purposes? Before proceeding, let us first see what is meant by effective reading. According to Greenall and Swan (1986), effective reading means “being able to read accurately and efficiently, understanding as much of a text as one needs in order to achieve one’s purpose”(p.1). To understand what we read, we need to be actively involved in the process of reading. We also need to be efficient, that is, using minimum time and effort to obtain satisfactory results.

Effective reading requires of the students to be active readers. An active reader, as Nuttall (1996) argues, knows the purpose for which he is reading. He also realises whether he has problems, which is the first step in finding solutions to them. To get the meaning of the text, he makes predictions and guesses by using both his knowledge of the language and his background knowledge (Reid, 1993; cited in Uso-Juan & Martinez-Flor, 2006). By knowing the purpose for reading, an active reader, before reading, previews and skims the text to check whether or not it is relevant to his purpose. He therefore adopts a strategic reading. According to Grabe (2001), strategic readers have a range of good strategies at their disposal; they apply these strategies in combination to

monitor comprehension, recognize miscomprehension, and repair comprehension problems effectively.

To read effectively, students also need to be more efficient. In other words, they have to know how to read faster with a good understanding so that they can cope with the long list of materials they have to read. This can be done by increasing the reading speed. The average reading speed is said to be 265 wpm (words per minute) (McMillan & Weyers, 2006). In addition to speeding up reading, students have to know well how to scan and skim. As Mikulecky (2008) explains, scanning means looking through a text very rapidly for specific information; and skimming means reading quickly to get the gist (main idea) or overview of a passage or book.

Effective reading finally requires of the students to read critically. Critical reading is of great importance in academic settings. In fact, it is not rare that academic researchers have contradictory views. Faced with such views, students need to be able to distinguish between information which is accurate and reliable and information which is dubious in some way or another (Pritchard, 2008). It follows from this that in addition to understanding what is read, students should challenge it by – for example – checking the author’s position or intent, distinguishing between fact and opinion, etc.

To recapitulate, it can be seen from the above discussion that to become effective academic readers, students need not to be passive. Instead, they have to actively engage in the process of reading. They then have to speed up their reading by developing the skills of scanning and skimming. They also have to be critical in order not to believe in everything being read, but challenge it. In the following section, we shall discuss the benefits that extensive reading can bring to the development of academic reading.

2.4. Extensive Reading and its Benefits

In the above sections, we have seen that students read for a number of different academic purposes. To achieve these purposes successfully, they (students) have to become effective academic readers. Therefore, they have to develop skills and strategies which help them become active, efficient and critical readers. But, are there any benefits extensive reading can bring to the development of these skills and strategies? Before dealing with this question, let us first see what is meant by ‘extensive reading’. According to Bamford and Day (1993, p.1), extensive reading is “an approach to language teaching in which learners read a **lot of easy material** in the new language” [emphasis is ours].

The easy material talked about here is what Grabe (2001) refers to as *level-appropriate texts*.

In extensive reading, students choose what they want to read – something which is easy or level- appropriate – and read it independently of the teacher (ibid). Besides, the purpose being usually related to pleasure, information or general understanding, students read as much as possible. By reading Grabe's (2009) review of research on extensive reading effectiveness, we can see the following benefits associated with extensive reading. First, it helps students to develop positive attitudes towards and motivation for reading. Second, with extensive reading, they get rich in vocabulary. Finally they develop the language skills of listening, grammar, spelling and writing.

Given all these advantages of extensive reading, it would not be unreasonable to say that extensive reading is of great importance for university students. In fact, it involves a lot of reading, which is essential in the development of reading abilities such as fluency, reading speed, vocabulary acquisition and reading strategies (Slaght & Harben, 2009). Besides, it is argued (ibid) that the better one reads, the better one will be. Similarly, according to Anderson (1996) and Elley (1991), one does not become a good reader unless one reads a lot (cited in Grabe, 2001).

Conclusion

Academic reading is much likely to be different from the reading students used to do at primary and/or secondary school. Thus, university students read for a number of academic purposes. To achieve these purposes successfully, students need to develop reading skills and strategies. And the best way to acquire reading skills and strategies is simply to read and read a lot (Nuttall, 1996). To get into the habit of reading a lot, students can make use of extensive reading, which requires of them to read as much as possible.

In this chapter, we dealt with reading skills and strategies. We have seen that by developing skills and strategies, students become active, critical and efficient readers. However, not all of L2 readers possess the necessary skills and strategies to overcome the difficulties they encounter while reading. In the next chapter, we shall deal with some of the problems faced by L2 readers.

Chapter Three: Some of the Problems Faced by L2 Readers

Introduction

3.1. Language-Related Problems

3.1.1. Lexical Problems

3.1.2. Syntactic Problems

3.2. Discourse-Related Problems

3.2.1 Cohesive Devices

3.2.2. Text Organization

3.3. Lack of Background Knowledge

3.3.1. Formal Schemata

3.3.2. Content Schemata

3.3.3. Cultural Background

Conclusion

Introduction

In the previous chapters, we have seen that the nature of reading is very complex. We have also seen that university students read for a number of academic purposes. To achieve these purposes successfully, it seems that comprehending what is read is a prerequisite. However, university students – in particular EFL students – do not always find it easy to understand what they read. In fact, comprehension problems may emerge from a number of different sources. For example, they may arise from unfamiliar words, structure of sentences, lack of background knowledge, lack of cultural background, etc.

In this chapter, we shall deal with reading problems (the above-mentioned and others) which hamper students' comprehension of the text and therefore prevent them (students) from fulfilling academic purposes successfully.

3.1. Language-Related Problems

Before we proceed, let us first clarify the terminology used here. By *language-related* problems, we refer to problems related to linguistic competence, which itself is one of the components of communicative competence (Uso-Juan & Martinez Flor, 2006). Linguistic competence consists of the elements of the linguistic system such as grammar rules and knowledge of vocabulary (ibid).

3.1.1 Lexical problems

Bean (2011) argues that inadequate vocabulary knowledge hampers reading comprehension of many students. Thus, for many EFL students, comprehension difficulties arising from insufficient vocabulary knowledge are much likely to constitute a reading challenge. This is because of a number of reasons. First, unlike most L1 readers who are believed to have acquired a vocabulary of approximately 40,000 to 50,000 words by the time they reach college (Just & Carpenter, 1987; Nation, 2001; Cited in Hudson, 2007), many L2 students enter university with an insufficient vocabulary knowledge.

The second reason is that EFL students may find it difficult to learn vocabulary. This is due to the fact that learning vocabulary is not as simple as it might seem to be. In fact, knowing a word involves knowing a lot of things; it involves, as Qian (1999) shows, knowing its (i) pronunciation and orthography, (ii) its morphological properties, (iii) its syntactic properties and collocations, (iv) its meanings, (v) its register, and (vi) its frequency (Cited in Hudson, 2007, p.233). These different aspects make words more difficult for L2 readers. For example,

for a word which has several meanings, students may have difficulties in choosing the meaning appropriate to the context. A Third reason is that, as Bean (2011) puts it, texts that students read often contain technical terms that are used in unusual ways or terms which have undergone meaning changes over time.

Despite these comprehension difficulties that arise from inadequate knowledge of vocabulary, there are ways to deal with them. Students can guess meaning of words from context; they can make use of dictionaries. Yet, they should not rely far too much on dictionaries. The reason is that students who look up every new word in the dictionary read much less effectively (Nuttal, 1996). Another way of dealing with vocabulary problems is simply to read and read. In fact, as Mikulecky (2008) claims, the more students read, the better their vocabulary knowledge; and the more vocabulary they know, the better they can read.

3.1.2. Syntactic Problems

As it is the case with vocabulary, syntax is likely to be a source of comprehension difficulties for many EFL students. Thus, long sentences and difficult syntax can block comprehension even when vocabulary is familiar (Nuttal, 1996). Faced with long sentences, EFL students may fail to distinguish between main clauses and subordinate ones. To illustrate this, let us consider the following:

The warnings, issued to at least 100 criminal defence attorneys in several major cities in the last week, have led to an outcry by members of the organized bar, who claim that the information is protected by members of attorney- client privilege. (Greenbaum, 1996)

EFL students studying law, for example, may be familiar with most of the technical words used in the above sentence. Yet, they may fail to understand it because of its syntactic complexity. Broken into simple sentences, the sentence is likely to become easier.

The warnings have led to an outcry by members of the organized bar. They were issued to at least 100 criminal defence attorneys in several major cities in the last week. The members of the organized bar claim that the information is protected by attorney-client privilege. (ibid.)

It follows from the above discussion that students need to develop skills of dealing with complex syntax. To do so, they should, as Bean (2011) argues, learn to translate complex passages into their words. They should also practice rewriting long sentences into simple ones.

3.2. Discourse-Related Problems

3.2.1. Cohesive Devices

Cohesive devices or text-forming devices (Nunan, 1993) are words or phrases which enable the writer to establish relationships across sentences. They thus help the writer to tie sentences in a text together. In other words, they help the writer to achieve cohesion. There are five types of cohesion: 1) referential, 2) substitution, 3) ellipsis, 4) conjunction, 5) and lexical cohesion. In what follows, we shall talk briefly about them. Besides, we will provide some examples and show how these cohesive devices may be a source of comprehension difficulties for L2 readers.

Starting with **referential** items or devices, they include pronouns such as *he, her, him his, them*, etc. and determiners such as *this, that*, etc. These devices can point the reader to something mentioned backwards (anaphoric reference) or something coming forward (cataphoric reference). **Substitution** relations (Hudson, 2007) occurs when a word or phrase is replaced by another. **Ellipsis** occurs when there is an omission of a repeated linguistic element. **Conjunctions** such as *because, however, therefore, then, but* etc. establish relations between sentences. These relations may be *additive, adversative, causal* or *temporal*. As for **lexical cohesion**, it includes the use of repetition, synonymy and collocations.

Unlike most English native speakers – who are less likely to encounter difficulties in finding cohesive relations established by cohesive devices, EFL readers may find it difficult to recognize these relations. To illustrate this, let us consider the extract below (Nunan, 1993):

Recognizing that his country had to change, Gorbachev could have become a cautious modernizer in the Chinese fashion, promoting economic reform and sponsoring new technology while holding firm against political change. **This** did not happen. (P.23)

In the above example, the demonstrative *this* – an anaphoric marker – refers to the underlined clause in the previous sentence. Students who cannot recognize this relationship will not get a proper understanding. Perhaps the example is not very complex, but with more complex anaphoric markers, more distant and more complex antecedent referents, poor readers have great difficulties in locating prior reference (Ehrich, 1996); Pretorius, 2005; cited in Grabe, 2009) . It has to be noticed that all the five types of cohesive devices are potential source of

comprehension difficulties for EFL readers. For this reasons students must be aware of the way cohesive ties are structured in order to construct meaning (Hudson, 2007).

3.2.2. Unawareness of Text Structure

In addition to vocabulary, syntax and cohesive devices, text structure is likely to be another source of comprehension difficulties for EFL students. To understand this, let us see what is meant by *text structure*. According to Klingner, Vaughn & Boardman (2007), the term *text structure* refers to “the way a text is organized to guide readers in identifying key information”. Similarly, text structure is defined as “specific ways in which ideas in a text are interrelated to convey meaning to a reader” (Meyer & Rice, 1984; cited in Koda, 2004)

There are two main types of text structure: *narrative* and *expository*. A narrative text may be organized in this way: *setting* (Once upon a time there was a lovely princess who lived in a castle near a forest), *beginning* (One day the princess was walking in the woods and she encountered a large ugly dragon.), *Simple reaction* (the princess was startled and frightened), *goal* (The princess wanted to escape from the dragon.) *attempt* (When she started to run away...), *Outcome* (The dragon breathed fire in her path.), ..., *Ending* (The princess was happy to be home again.) (Graesser et al., 1996, p. 180; cited in Hudson, 2007). It can be seen that, as Grabe (2009) argues, a narrative text conveys episodic information.

Expository texts are essentially informational and are intended to provide new insights (Koda, 2004). They are of different organizational structures such as cause/effect; compare/contrast, problem/solution, classification, description, etc. This is one of the reasons they are more challenging than narrative texts (Klingner, Vaughn & Boardman, 2007). Besides, Grabe (2009) argues that an expository text engages readers with examples, facts, details, and graphics and that such details can often overwhelm poor readers with information overload.

From the above discussion, it follows that EFL students unaware of the way texts are structured are likely to face comprehension difficulties. On the contrary, Meyer (1984) argues that when students are familiar with the text structure, this can help them to make expectations about what they will read, to organize incoming information, to judge the relative importance of what they read, to improve their comprehension, and finally to enhance their recall (cited in Klingner, Vaughn & Boardman, 2007). Likewise, an awareness of text organization can help students focus on main concepts without the distraction on unnecessary details (Gascoigne, 2002b, cited in Gascoigne, 2008)

3.3. Lack of Schematic Knowledge

Schematic knowledge or background knowledge may be a source of comprehension difficulties for many L2 readers. To get an idea about this, we have to first consider *schema theory* under which the role of background knowledge – the knowledge a reader brings to text – has been the subject of many studies. Bartlett (1932), Ramlhart and Ortony (1977), Rumelhart (1980) argue that any text, spoken or written, does not carry meaning by itself. Rather, it provides directions for readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their previously acquired knowledge (Cited in Carrel & Eisterhold, 1983). This previously acquired knowledge is known as the *reader's background knowledge*. It is structured into what is called *schemata* (ibid). Schemata (plural form of *schema*) are considered as 'interlocking mental structures representing readers' knowledge (Alderson, 2000, p. 33). In processing the text, readers integrate the new information from the text into their pre-existing schemata (ibid). According to schema theory, comprehending a text is an active process between the reader's background knowledge and the text (Carrel & Eisterhold, 1983).

In the literature on reading, there is a distinction between two types of schemata or background knowledge: *formal* schema and *content* schemata. We shall provide a brief explanation of both types and see how they may constitute a potential source of comprehension difficulties for EFL students. In addition to this two types of schemata, we shall deal with another type of knowledge which is often referred to as *cultural background*.

3.3.1. Formal Schemata

The term 'formal schemata' refers to the linguistic knowledge that the reader brings to the text (Carrel & Eisterhold, 1983; Alderson, 2000; Hudson, 2007). Formal schemata includes the knowledge about syntax, vocabulary, cohesion, text structure or rhetorical organization of different types of text, i.e. knowledge of how texts are organized (Alderson, 2000). Some of the components or aspects of formal schemata such as syntax, vocabulary etc. have been dealt with in the previous sections of the present chapter. As we have seen in the previous sections, these aspects of formal schemata are likely to constitute reading challenges for EFL students. We have seen, for example, that long sentences can block comprehension even when vocabulary is familiar (Nuttal, 1996).

3.3.2 Content Schemata

The concept of ‘content schemata’, on the other hand, refers to knowledge about the content area of the text, such as washing clothes, economy or history, etc. (Carrel & Eisterhold, 1983). Content schematic knowledge is what Wallace (1993) refers to as topic schemata, that is simply, what is being talked about. She argues that our schematic knowledge may be organized around topics such as American football, linguistics, sociolinguistics, politics etc. In order to show how topic knowledge is useful in making sense of a text, Wallace uses a sample text about finance and business. She argues that readers who do not have access to a specialized knowledge about finance and business will have difficulty in making sense of such a text.

Given the importance of formal and content schemata in making sense of the text, EFL students who read without background knowledge on a topic are likely to face comprehension problems. In addition to the topic schema, there is another aspect of schematic knowledge known as *cultural background*. This knowledge has attracted much attention among L2 reading researchers as we shall see in the following section.

3.3.3 Cultural Background

So far, we have seen that making sense of the text involves not only readers’ linguistic knowledge, but also their background knowledge. To put it another way, our interpretation depends on the schemata activated by the text (Nuttal, 1996). And successful interpretation depends on whether our schemata are sufficiently similar to the writer’s (ibid). However, our schemata are not always sufficiently similar to the writer’s. This is because schemata, as Widdowson (2007) argues, are “representation in mind of what is *familiar and customary*” (p.33) [emphasis is ours]. Since what is familiar to one group of people may be unknown to another, and customs vary across communities (ibid). The point is that our schemata are culturally-based, though some knowledge – as Wallace (1992) agrees – is universal. Thus cultural background is crucial in making sense of the text.

Cultural background may be a source of comprehension problems for many EFL students. The reason for this is that, as Carrel and Eisterhold (1983) argues, reading comprehension is culturally based and culturally biased. It means that, as Alderson (2000) and Hudson (2007) demonstrate, when students read culturally familiar texts, they read efficiently with better understanding than when they read texts that are culturally unfamiliar.

Because students have their own beliefs, attitudes and values, this is likely to affect their comprehension (Carrel & Eisterhold, 1983; Wallace, 1993).

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with some of the reading problems that EFL students face. We have seen that students reading with insufficient knowledge of vocabulary and sentence structure are likely to face comprehension problems. Likewise, students who cannot recognize the relationships established by cohesive devices between sentences cannot get a proper understanding of the text. The same problems may occur when students do not know how the text is organized or when they lack schematic knowledge about the text, including both formal and content schematic knowledge, and cultural background as well.

Part Two: Application

Chapter Four: Data Collection and Analysis of the Findings

Introduction

4.1. Methodology and Procedures

4.2 Analysis and Discussion of the Findings

4.2.1. Techniques for Data analysis

4.2.2. Analysis and Discussion of the Findings

4.2.2.1 Analysis of Student's Attitudes towards Reading in General

4.2.2.2 Analysis of the Problems Faced by Students

4.2.2.3. Analysis of Reading Strategies Used by Students

Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology for data collection and the techniques used to analyse the findings. It also discusses the results obtained from the analysis of the questionnaire.

4.1. Methodology and Procedures

This study has been conducted on First Year Master students in AL and ESP at Ouargla University. Its main purpose is to investigate the aforementioned students' reading problems and their awareness of the reading strategies. These students have been chosen because the academic studies they are undertaking require of them to do much reading especially in the modules of AL, ESP, Discourse Analysis, General Linguistics and Research Methodology.

To achieve our goals, we have collected data by means of a five-point Likert Scale questionnaire, which is made of 45 items altogether (see Appendix). The questionnaire is divided into three parts. The first part (10 items) investigates student's attitudes towards reading in general. The items of this part have been developed by referring to William, Teale and Lewis (1971); Ajzen (2005). The second part of the questionnaire attempts to identify the main reading problems faced by students. To construct this part, we have taken into account what might constitute a source of reading difficulties for L2 readers. Therefore, we have referred to Nuttall (1992), Grabe (2001), Hudson (2007), Slaght and Harben (2009), Bean (2011). As for the third part, it investigates students' awareness of reading strategies. Most of the items of this part have been devised by adapting Ediger's (2006) account of the key reading strategies (see Figure 2.1, p. 20). The items 25 and 26 consist of respectively 5 and 6 statements. The item 25 stands for skimming, whereas the item 26 stands for previewing.

The questionnaire has been administered to 27 students with the help of our supervisor. The students have been asked to answer all the items of the questionnaire and have been told that there are no right or wrong answers. For each item, they have been given five options. Concerning the first part of the questionnaire, students' attitudes towards reading in general are rated on a five-point Likert scale. Thus, students have been asked to say how much they agree with each of the 10 statements in this part. Choices range from *strongly disagree* (score = 1) to *strongly agree* (score = 5). For the rest of the items, students have been asked to say how often they face a given problem (e.g. unfamiliar words) or how often they use a given reading strategy (e.g. scanning). Choices range from *never* (score = 1) to *very often* (score = 5).

4.2. Analysis and Discussion of the Findings

4.2.1. Techniques for Data Analysis

The raw data collected from the questionnaire have been analysed quantitatively by means of descriptive statistics including the mean (average: M) and the standard deviation (SD). We have opted for this technique for two reasons. First, as Dornyei (2007) points out; descriptive statistics are used to summarise numerical data in a way that helps conserve time and space. Second, since descriptive statistics make no predictions but simply report what has been found (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007), such statistics will help us to report students' reading problems, the strategies they use, and their attitudes towards reading in general as well.

As has been said above, for each item of the questionnaire, students have been given five options which are scored from 1 to 5 (see Appendix). This has allowed us to attribute scores to all the items of the questionnaire for each participant. To understand the variables in this study (attitudes, reading problems, reading strategy awareness), we have computed the mean and standard deviation of the questionnaire. To do so, we have used Microsoft Excel 2013.

Because in the second and third parts of the questionnaire participants have been asked to say how often they face a given reading problem and how often they use a given strategy, we have analysed the frequency of reading problems and strategy use. By frequency, we mean – in this study – the extent to which a given reading problem is encountered or the extent to which a given strategy is used. To analyse the frequency of problems and strategies, we have drawn on the frequency scale devised by Oxford (1990) as Table 4.1 below shows.

Table 4.1: Frequency scale of Reading Problems and Strategies (adapted from Oxford, 1990)

| Mean score | Frequency scale | Interpretation | |
|------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| | | Reading Problems | Reading strategies |
| 1.0-1.4 | Low | Never or almost never faced | Never or almost never used |
| 1.5-2.4 | | Generally not faced | Generally not used |
| 2.5-3.4 | Medium | Sometimes faced | Sometimes used |
| 3.5-4.4 | High | Usually faced | Usually used |
| 4.5-5.0 | | Always or almost always faced | Always or almost always used |

Based on Oxford's (1990) frequency scale, the above table shows that the frequency of reading problems and strategies is revealed by the mean (average). Scores between 1.0- 2.4 indicate that problems/strategies are “never or almost never faced/used”. Scores between 2.5- 3.4 indicate “sometimes faced/used. Scores between 3.5- 4.4 indicate “usually faced/used”. And scores between 4.5- 5.0 are interpreted as “always or almost always faced/used”.

4.2.2. Analysis and Discussion of the Findings

In this section, the data collected from the questionnaire are analysed and then discussed. The mean and the standard deviation of the questionnaire have been computed by means of Microsoft Excel 2013.

4.2.2.1. Analysis of Students' Attitudes towards Reading in General

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Attitudes towards Reading in General

| N° | Item description | N | Mean | SD |
|----------------|--|----|------|------|
| 1. | Reading is an important skill for university students | 27 | 4.89 | 0.32 |
| 2. | I enjoy reading in my mother tongue. | 26 | 4.12 | 0.65 |
| 3. | I enjoy reading in foreign languages, especially English. | 27 | 3.81 | 0.92 |
| 4. | I would rather read a newspaper than watch TV. | 27 | 3.11 | 1.09 |
| 5. | When I start reading a book, I have to finish it. | 27 | 3.00 | 1.11 |
| 6. | I like reading when I am on vacation. | 27 | 3.11 | 1.25 |
| 7. | I feel interested when I have a reading assignment. | 26 | 3.73 | 0.92 |
| 8. | When I see a book shop, I would like to get in even if I don't have money to pay for a book. | 27 | 3.63 | 1.15 |
| 9. | I feel so happy when I get a book as a present (gift). | 27 | 4.26 | 0.90 |
| 10. | Reading is a good way of acquiring knowledge. | 26 | 4.88 | 0.33 |
| Average | | | 3.85 | 0.86 |

N= Number of Participants; SD= Standard Deviation

As shown on Table 4.2, the overall mean score of students' attitudes towards reading in general is 3.85 (SD= 0.86). This result indicates that the majority of the students have a moderate attitude towards reading in general. Besides, the above table shows that only two items (1 and 10) have mean scores which are above 4.50. This demonstrates that among students who have displayed positive attitude towards reading, a few of them have a very positive attitude. These two items (1 and 10) which scored above 4.50 show that a great majority of students strongly agree that reading is a good way of acquiring knowledge and that reading is an important skill for university students. On the other hand, items 5 and 6 have respectively the mean scores of 3.00 and 3.11. This shows that most of the students do not finish books they start reading and that they do not like reading when they are on vacation. To sum up, although

a great majority of students believe that reading skill is important for university students, they have a moderate attitude towards reading in general.

4.2.2.2. Analysis of the Problems Faced by Students while Reading

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics of the Problems Faced by Students while Reading

| N ^o | Item description | N | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|----------------|--|----|------|------|----------------|
| 1. | While reading, I find concepts that are new to me. | 27 | 4.41 | 0.75 | High |
| 2. | I do not comprehend what I read because of a lack of background knowledge about the subject. | 27 | 3.48 | 0.75 | Medium |
| 3. | Comprehending what I read becomes difficult because of long sentences/complex sentences. | 27 | 3.37 | 1.01 | Medium |
| 4. | After reading for a while, I find that what I want is not in the text. | 26 | 2.69 | 0.55 | Medium |
| 5. | I use a lot of time to finish what I read. | 27 | 4.00 | 0.78 | High |
| 6. | When I am reading, I find a lot of unknown/unfamiliar words. | 27 | 3.67 | 1.00 | High |
| 7. | I don't recognize the text structure (e.g. description, classification, cause/effect, compare/contrast, etc.). | 27 | 2.48 | 0.98 | Low |
| 8. | I have difficulties in recognizing the sentence relationships established by connectors such as <i>however, therefore, because, in fact, while, etc.</i> | 27 | 2.26 | 0.76 | Low |
| 9. | After reading, I cannot remember what I have read. | 26 | 2.73 | 0.92 | Medium |
| Average | | | 3.23 | 0.83 | Medium |
| Min | | | 2.26 | 0.76 | Low |
| Max | | | 4.41 | 0.75 | High |

N= Number of Participants; SD= Standard Deviation

Table 4.3 above shows that the overall mean score of students' reading problems is 3.23 (SD=0.83). This indicates – on the basis of Oxford's (1990) frequency scale – that students sometimes have reading problems. Besides, the above table shows that the problem which is frequently faced by students is that they find concepts that are new to them while they are reading for academic purposes. This problem has the highest score (Mean= 4.41; SD= 0.75). Another problem which is usually faced by students is that they use a lot of time to finish what they read (Mean= 4.00; SD=0.78). This problem may be due to poor word recognition which causes slow reading. Similarly, the problem of encountering unfamiliar words also has a high frequency among students (M= 3.67; SD= 1.00). Other problems such as the problem of the lack of background knowledge about a subject, the problem of facing long sentences, the problem of finding the text irrelevant to one's purpose after reading for a while and the problem

of remembering what one has read have mean scores which are between 2.69 and 3.48. This indicates that students sometimes face such problems. The problems which are least faced by students are the ones of recognizing sentence relationships established by connectors and the one of recognizing the text structure. In general, students sometimes have reading problems. The problem which is least faced has mean score of 2.26 (SD= 0.76) which is slightly below the medium level. This indicates that among the nine reading problems presented on the above table, almost no problem is rarely faced by students.

4.2.2.3. Analysis of Reading Strategies Used by Students

Table 4.4: Descriptive Statistics of Cognitive Strategies

| Subcategories of Cognitive Strategies | Items in the Questionnaire | Mean | Interpretation |
|---|----------------------------|------|----------------|
| Strategies for handling unknown words | 1, 2, 3, 4 | 3.54 | High |
| Strategies involving background knowledge | 5, 6, 7, 8 | 4.13 | High |
| Strategies Involving different ways of reading | 17, 18, 19, 26 | 3.42 | Medium |
| Strategies for interacting with the author and the text | 20, 21, 22, 25 | 3.32 | Medium |
| Average | | 3.60 | High |

As indicated on the above table, the overall mean score of cognitive strategies is 3.60. This means that students usually use cognitive strategies to solve their reading problems. However, because of the fact that this overall mean score of cognitive strategies is slightly above the medium level (2.5-3.4) on the frequency scale established by Oxford (1990), this shows that cognitive strategies are not very often used by students. Besides, Table 4.4 displays that among cognitive strategies, those involving the use of background knowledge are the ones which are highly used by students (Mean= 4.13). On the contrary, strategies involving interaction with the author and those involving different ways of reading (reading selectively, scanning, skipping parts of a text, and skimming) are the least used among cognitive strategies. Those involving handling of unknown words have a means score of 3.54. This means that although they are usually used by students, they are far from being used very frequently.

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics of Each Item of Cognitive Strategies

| NQ | Item Description | N | Mean | SD | Frequency Scale |
|-----------|--|----------|-------------|-----------|------------------------|
| 1. | I guess the meaning of new words from context. | 27 | 3.67 | 0.78 | High |
| 2. | I skip/ignore unknown words. | 27 | 2.81 | 1.00 | Medium |
| 3. | I look up difficult words in a dictionary. | 27 | 4.15 | 1.03 | High |
| 4. | I analyse the structure or parts of a word in order to understand its meaning (e.g. intergovernmental) | 27 | 3.52 | 1.19 | High |
| 5. | I think about what I already know about the topic in order to understand new ideas. | 27 | 4.30 | 0.61 | High |
| 6. | I make connection between the text and my prior knowledge. | 27 | 4.48 | 0.64 | High |
| 7. | I pay attention to the structure of the text (e.g. cause/effect, compare/contrast, classification et.) | 27 | 3.81 | 0.96 | High |
| 8. | I try to connect one part of the text to another | 27 | 3.93 | 0.92 | High |
| 17. | I read selectively by deciding whether or not to read something. | 27 | 3.48 | 0.70 | Medium |
| 18. | I quickly read the text to find specific information. | 27 | 3.44 | 0.89 | Medium |
| 19. | I skip texts or parts of a text. | 27 | 2.81 | 1.11 | Medium |
| 20. | I question/critique what I read | 27 | 3.15 | 1.01 | Medium |
| 21. | I challenge the ideas of the author. | 27 | 2.30 | 0.87 | Low |
| 22. | I recognize when the author presents facts or opinions | 27 | 3.74 | 0.98 | High |
| 25. | Previewing (a, b, c, d, e) | 27 | 4.08 | 0.82 | High |
| 26. | Skimming (a, b, c, d, e, f) | 27 | 3.94 | 0.95 | High |

NQ= Number of the item in the questionnaire, **N**= Number of participants, **SD**= Standard deviation

Table 4.5 shows that strategies 17, 18, and 19 have mean scores which range between 2.81 and 3.48. This indicates that although such strategies are used by students, they are used at a medium level on the frequency scale. In other words, these strategies are only sometimes used by students. It can also be seen that strategies 20, and 21 (which involve critical reading) have mean scores which are respectively 3.15 and 2.30. This shows that students are not generally critical readers. Similarly; Table 4.5 displays that among the strategies involved in the handling of unknown words, strategy 2 (skipping or ignoring words) has the lowest score ($M = 2.81$; $SD = 1.00$). This explains that students do not usually use such a strategy, which is likely the reason why they have reported to use on a high frequency strategy 3 (looking up difficult words in a dictionary). This strategy has the mean score of 4.15 with a standard deviation of 1.03. Table 4.5 also indicates that strategies 5, 6, 7, and 8 – which involve the use of background knowledge – have mean scores which range between 3.81 and 4.48. This shows

that they are frequently used by students. Similarly, we can also see from the above table that the strategy of previewing (25) and skimming (26) are often used by students. Their mean scores are respectively 4.08 and 3.94. In sum, in order to handle unknown words, students often use the strategy of looking up words in a dictionary whereas the strategy of skipping or ignoring unknown words is less used. Besides, the above table shows that students are not generally critical readers.

Table 4.6: Descriptive Statistics of Metacognitive Strategies

| Subcategories of Metacognitive Strategies | Items in the Questionnaire | Mean | Interpretation |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Comprehension Monitoring Strategies | 9, 10, 11 | 3.68 | High |
| Strategies that focus on learning from reading | 12,13 | 4.33 | High |
| Purpose-oriented strategies | 14,15,16, | 3.83 | High |
| Average | | 3.95 | High |

As presented on Table 4.6, the general mean score of metacognitive strategies is 3.95. According to Oxford (1990), the frequency scale of such strategies is high which means that most of the students usually use them. This table also indicates that among metacognitive strategies, those involving comprehension monitoring are the least used whereas strategies that focus on learning from reading are highly used by students.

Table 4.7: Descriptive Statistics of Each Item of Metacognitive Strategies

| NQ | Item description | N | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|-----------|--|----------|-------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| 9. | When I don't understand, I ask myself why I don't understand | 27 | 4.15 | 0.99 | High |
| 10. | After reading is completed, I review the text. | 27 | 3.41 | 1.22 | Medium |
| 11. | After reading, I make a short summary of what I have read. | 27 | 3.48 | 1.05 | Medium |
| 12. | I underline/highlight key information in the text. | 27 | 4.59 | 0.69 | High |
| 13. | I take notes about what I read. | 27 | 4.07 | 0.78 | High |
| 14. | I remind myself about the purpose of reading. | 27 | 3.70 | 0.95 | High |
| 15. | I decide whether a text is relevant to my purpose. | 27 | 4.11 | 0.80 | High |
| 16. | I check the time available to me to read the text. | 27 | 3.67 | 0.92 | High |

NQ= Number of the item in the questionnaire, **N**= Number of participants, **SD**= Standard deviation

Table 4.7 reports that strategies 10 and 11 have respectively the mean scores of 3.41 and 3.48. This means that such strategies are not usually used by students. In other words, after reading is completed, students do not usually review the text, nor do they usually summarise what they have read. On the contrary, strategies 9, 12, 13 and 15 have mean scores which are above 4.00. This indicates that they are frequently used among metacognitive strategies.

Table 4.8: Descriptive statistics of Social/Affective Strategies

| NQ | Item Description | N | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|----------------|--|----------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 23. | I encourage myself to read. | 27 | 4.00 | 1.07 | High |
| 24. | I talk with others about what I have read. | 27 | 3.19 | 0.92 | Medium |
| Average | | | 3.59 | 0.99 | High |

NQ= Number of the item in the questionnaire, **N**= Number of participants, **SD**= Standard deviation

As shown on the above table, most students encourage themselves to read (M = 4.00; SD= 1.07). On the other hand, Table 4.8 indicates that students do not usually talk with others about what they have read (M = 3.19; SD= 0.99).

Table 4.9: Descriptive Statistics of Reading Strategies

| Types of Strategies | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Cognitive | 3.60 | 0.92 | High |
| Metacognitive | 3.95 | 0.90 | High |
| Social/Affective | 3.59 | 0.99 | High |
| Average | 3.71 | 0.93 | High |

SD= Standard Deviation

The above table indicates that the overall mean score of reading strategies is 3.71 (SD = 0.93). This reveals that students usually use reading strategies in order to solve the problems they encounter. However, because this overall mean score of reading strategies is far from 4.5, this shows that such strategies are not used very frequently by students. This should be the case for university students. The table also displays that metacognitive strategies are more used than cognitive and social/affective strategies.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have presented the methodology and procedures for data collection. A five-point rating scale questionnaire has been used to collect data from 27 students. The data

collected have been analysed by means of descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. To report the frequency of the reading problems and strategies, we have drawn on the frequency scale devised by Oxford (1990). The results of this study revealed that the major reading problem is that students frequently encounter new vocabulary items. Besides, it was found that students use a lot of time to finish what they read. Although students reported that they usually use reading strategies, these strategies are not used very frequently. The findings also showed that students have a moderate attitude towards reading in general.

General Conclusion and Suggestions

In this final section of the dissertation, we provide a short summary of the present study and draw conclusions from the findings. We then make some suggestions for further research and pedagogical implications.

1. Summary and conclusions

The main purpose of this study is to identify and analyse the main problems that First year Master students in AL and ESP at Ouargla University encounter when they are reading for academic or research purposes. To do so, the study evaluates the extent to which these students are aware of the reading strategies. In other words, it examines the extent to which they use the reading strategies to solve the problems they face. Since the reading problems that students face may affect their attitudes towards reading in general, this study also investigates the aforementioned students' attitudes towards reading in general.

To achieve our goals, we have asked the following research questions: (i) what attitudes do First Year Master students in AL and ESP at Ouargla University have towards reading in general? (ii) What problems do they face when they are reading for academic purposes? (iii) To what extent are they aware of the reading strategies?

In order to find answers to these questions, we have first conducted a review of the literature related to our study. We have then collected data by means of a five- point rating scale questionnaire which includes 45 items. The questionnaire is divided into three parts. The first part (10 items) investigates students' attitudes towards reading in general. The second part (9 items) attempts to identify the reading problems faced by students. As for the last part (26 items), it examines strategy awareness of these students. With the help of our supervisor, the questionnaire was administered to 27 participants.

To analyse the questionnaire, we have used descriptive statistics such as mean (average) and the standard deviation. The mean and standard deviation of the questionnaire have been calculated by means of Microsoft Excel 2013. In order to report the frequency of the reading problems and strategies, we have drawn on the frequency scale devised by Oxford (1990).

In the first part of the questionnaire, the findings have revealed that the majority of the students in this study have a moderate attitude towards reading in general. Besides, it has been concluded that although a great majority of students believe that reading skill is important to university students, many of them do not finish the books they start reading. Concerning the

second part of the questionnaire which attempts to answer the main question of our study, the results have indicated that all the 27 students – who participated in this study – sometimes encounter reading problems. The findings of this part of questionnaire have also shown that the problem which is frequently face by the majority of the students is that while they are reading for academic purposes, they encounter new concepts (Mean = 4.41; SD = 0.75). Another problem that was found to be frequent among students is that they use a lot of time to finish what they read. This problem is followed by the one of facing a lot of unfamiliar words (Mean = 3.67; SD =1.00). In general, the findings of the second part have revealed that among the nine (9) problems presented, almost no problem is rarely faced by students.

After analysing the findings of the third part which attempted to evaluate strategy awareness, it has been concluded that although reading strategies are usually used by students, they are not employed very frequently. The results have also shown that the students surveyed are not generally critical readers. Besides, it has been concluded that metacognitive strategies are more used than cognitive and social/affective strategies.

This study has found that the 27 students very often encounter reading problems. It has revealed that these students have a moderate attitude towards reading in general. It has also shown that they do not use reading strategies very frequently.

2. Suggestions

On the basis of the findings of this study, we suggest the following:

First, since this study has revealed that the students surveyed frequently face reading problems, it is, therefore, suggested that further studies be carried out to ascertain the causes of these problems.

Second, since reading is, as Grabe and Stoller (2001) claim, the primary means for independent learning, and since students cannot learn well independently if they do encounter reading problems, it is suggested that a module of reading skill be included in the curriculum at the very low level of undergraduate studies. Such a module would help students to improve not only the reading skills and strategies, but also other language skills such as writing, listening and speaking. In fact, once they know how to read academically, students can learn how to write by reading about writing; how to listen by reading about listening; and how to speak by reading about speaking.

Finally, since the module of reading skill is not part of the curriculum at the Department of English at Ouargla University, it is suggested that teachers should raise awareness of the complex nature of reading in the very first lectures they deliver to students at the beginning of each academic year.

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Appendix: Student's Questionnaire

Dear student,

The main purpose of this questionnaire is to identify the problems that students face while reading for academic purposes. In doing so, it investigates their attitudes towards reading in general; it also examines the awareness of the reading strategies. Please, read the instructions and then write your answers. We would like to remind you that this is not a test. So, there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Besides, you don't even need to write your name. We thank you very MUCH in advance for your help!

PART ONE

Below are statements describing attitudes towards reading. Each statement is followed by five boxes (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5). Please put a cross (X) in **one** of the boxes following each statement depending on how much you **agree** or **disagree** with the statement. Put a cross in box 1 (*strongly disagree*); in box 2 (*disagree*); in box 3 (*neutral=neither agree nor disagree*); in box 4 (*agree*); in box 5 (*strongly agree*).

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Example: If you *strongly agree* with the statement "English is the easiest language to learn in the world", you put the cross in box 5.

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| English is the easiest language to learn in the world. | | | | | | X |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|

| N° | Statements | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Reading is an important skill for university students | | | | | |
| 2. | I enjoy reading in my mother tongue. | | | | | |
| 3. | I enjoy reading in foreign languages, especially English. | | | | | |
| 4. | I would rather read a newspaper than watch TV. | | | | | |
| 5. | When I start reading a book, I have to finish it. | | | | | |
| 6. | I like reading when I am on vacation. | | | | | |
| 7. | I feel interested when I have a reading assignment. | | | | | |
| 8. | When I see a book shop, I would like to get in even if I don't have money to pay for a book. | | | | | |
| 9. | I feel so happy when I get a book as a present (gift). | | | | | |
| 10. | Reading is a good way of acquiring knowledge. | | | | | |

PART TWO

This section is about problems faced by students while reading for academic purposes. You are required to answer as you did in section one (putting a cross). But this time you say *how often* you face a given problem in your reading.

| | | | | |
|-------|--------|-----------|-------|------------|
| Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very often |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | | |
|----|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| 1. | While reading, I find concepts that are new to me. | | | | | |
| 2. | I do not comprehend what I read because of a lack of background knowledge about the subject. | | | | | |
| 3. | Comprehending what I read becomes difficult because of long sentences/complex sentences. | | | | | |
| 4. | After reading for a while, I find that what I want is not in the text. | | | | | |
| 5. | I use a lot of time to finish what I read. | | | | | |
| 6. | When I am reading, I find a lot of unknown/ unfamiliar words. | | | | | |
| 7. | I don't recognize the text structure (e.g. description, classification, cause/effect, compare/contrast, etc.). | | | | | |
| 8. | I have difficulties in recognizing the sentence relationships established by connectors such as <i>however, therefore, because, in fact, while, etc.</i> | | | | | |
| 9. | After reading, I cannot remember what I have read. | | | | | |

PART THREE

In this section, the statements describe strategies used while reading. Please, answer the same way you did in part two.

| | | | | |
|-------|--------|-----------|-------|------------|
| Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very often |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

| | | | | | | |
|----|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| 1. | I guess the meaning of new words from context. | | | | | |
| 2. | I skip/ignore unknown words. | | | | | |
| 3. | I look up difficult words in a dictionary. | | | | | |
| 4. | I analyse the structure or parts of a word in order to understand its meaning (e.g. intergovernmental) | | | | | |
| 5. | I think about what I already know about the topic in order to understand new ideas. | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. | I make connection between the text and my prior knowledge. | | | | | |
| 7. | I pay attention to the structure of the text (e.g. cause/effect, compare/contrast, classification et.) | | | | | |
| 8. | I try to connect one part of the text to another | | | | | |
| 9. | When I don't understand, I ask myself why I don't understand | | | | | |
| 10. | After reading is completed, I review the text. | | | | | |
| 11. | After reading, I make a short summary of what I have read. | | | | | |
| 12. | I underline/highlight key information in the text. | | | | | |
| 13. | I take notes about what I read. | | | | | |
| 14. | I remind myself about the purpose of reading. | | | | | |
| 15. | I decide whether a text is relevant to my purpose. | | | | | |
| 16. | I check the time available to me to read the text. | | | | | |
| 17. | I read selectively by deciding whether or not to read something. | | | | | |
| 18. | I quickly read the text to find specific information. | | | | | |
| 19. | I skip texts or parts of a text. | | | | | |
| 20. | I question/ critique what I read. | | | | | |
| 21. | I challenge the ideas of the author. | | | | | |
| 22. | I recognize when the author presents facts or opinions. | | | | | |
| 23. | I encourage myself to read. | | | | | |
| 24. | I talk with others about what I have read. | | | | | |
| 25. | Before I read a text: | / | / | / | / | / |
| | a) I look at the title. | | | | | |
| | b) I look at the headings. | | | | | |
| | c) I read the first and the last paragraphs. | | | | | |
| | d) I identify the topic sentence of each paragraph. | | | | | |
| e) I ask myself about what I know about the topic. | | | | | | |
| 26. | Before I start reading a book, | / | / | / | / | / |
| | a) I look at the back cover of the book. | | | | | |
| | b) I look at the table of contents | | | | | |
| | c) I look at the index. | | | | | |
| | d) I look at the foreword/introduction. | | | | | |
| | e) I make prediction about the content of the book. | | | | | |
| f) I ask myself about what I already know about the topic. | | | | | | |

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Abstract

The present study attempts to identify and analyse problems that First Year Master students in AL and ESP at Ouargla University encounter when they are reading for academic purposes. In doing so, it evaluates the extent to which these students are aware of the reading strategies. It also examines their attitudes towards reading in general. By adopting a descriptive method, the data were collected by means of a five-point rating scale questionnaire which was administered to a total number of 27 students. The data gathered were analysed using descriptive statistics. To interpret the findings, the study drew on Oxford's (1990) frequency scale. The results of this study revealed that the major reading problem is that students frequently encounter concepts that are new to them. Besides, it was found that students use a lot of time to finish what they read and that they face a lot of unfamiliar words. Although students reported that they usually use reading strategies, these strategies are not used very frequently. The findings also showed that students have a moderate attitude towards reading in general.

Keywords: academic purposes, reading, reading strategies,

Résumé

La présente étude vise à identifier et analyser les problèmes rencontrés par les étudiants de première année de Master en Linguistique Appliquée et Anglais sur Objectifs Spécifiques à l'Université de Ouargla quand ils lisent à des fins académiques. Pour ce faire, elle évalue la mesure dans laquelle ces étudiants sont conscients des stratégies de lecture. Elle examine également leurs attitudes envers la lecture en général. En adoptant une méthode descriptive, les données ont été recueillies au moyen d'un questionnaire qui a été distribué à un nombre total de 27 étudiants. Les données recueillies ont été analysées en utilisant les statistiques descriptives. Pour interpréter les résultats, cette étude s'est basée sur l'échelle de fréquence élaborée par Oxford en 1990. Les résultats obtenus ont révélé que le problème majeur de la lecture est que les étudiants rencontrent fréquemment de nouveaux concepts. En outre, il a été constaté que les étudiants utilisent beaucoup de temps pour terminer ce qu'ils lisent et qu'ils font face à beaucoup de mots inconnus. Bien que les étudiants aient indiqué qu'ils utilisent généralement des stratégies de lecture, ces stratégies ne sont pas utilisées très fréquemment. Les résultats ont également montré que les étudiants ont une attitude modérée envers la lecture en général.

Mots-clés: lecture, stratégies de lecture, fins académiques