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A Qualitative Study of Reading Comprehension: An Insight from Pakistani Context Bridging the Needs of Engineering Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the teachers' opinions in terms of reading comprehension instruction to the engineering students for bridging their difficulties in reading academic text in communication subject. The study was conducted in the four engineering departments of one university in Pakistan. Semi-structured interviews of 10 teachers were used as a qualitative instrument to collect data for this study to know the needs of engineering students in terms of reading comprehension. The data was analyzed through NVivo version 8 for interpretation of the results. This study provided the most promising findings to develop reading ability among engineering students. The findings revealed that teachers should use rereading text, text scanning, and text skimming strategies to develop reading comprehension ability of engineering students.

Keywords: reading comprehension, reading strategies, academic reading, reading instruction

1. Introduction

In these days, reading comprehension proficiency is critical part of learning language; though the world is digitally well informed and easily accessed, engineering students cannot read and understand well the written text in academic life. Eskey (2005) asserted that students want to read texts in order to obtain information and to use it according to their needs. Similarly, Levine Ferenz & Reves (2000) considered reading comprehension as one of the most important skills for students at university level to enhance reading academic text ability. This study has investigated reading comprehension used by teachers teaching engineering students to develop reading comprehension in Pakistan. The research transferred from getting overall familiarity about how students learned and believed about text perception in the English language. In Pakistan, English language is used as the second and medium of instruction (Channa, 2012) in all institutions related to the education; this language is also considered as the official language in the country. Similarly, multinational companies in Pakistan prefer to recruit employees having sound knowledge of reading texts as they need to be capable of reading and comprehending agreements, contracts, bonds, deals, and give-and-take official messages through emails with seniors, managers, coworkers, and in their daily businesses. Further Channa Soranastaporn Engchuan & Tirataradol (2013) investigated needs, wants, and problems of using English by first year engineering students in QUEST, Pakistan. This study investigated the reading ability of engineering undergraduates were at a low level. The main problems in reading were: sentence structure, vocabulary in context, paragraph organization, grammatical rules (structures), prior reading and comprehending knowledge, and weak paragraph organization. The results showed that engineering students had difficulties in reading and comprehending texts.

2. Reading Comprehension Models

Different studies such as Taverner (1990), Aebersold & Field (1997), and Urquhart & Weir (1998) described reading comprehension as the most difficult area which has not been comprehended and elaborated in terms of meaning of the text. However, reading comprehension as in the words of (Urquhart & Weir, 1998, p. 17) means "the whole parcel of cognitive activities" that readers initiate in order to comprehend the text for apprehension the correct meaning. Similarly, Taverner (1990, p. 4) defined reading comprehension for "a means of extending experience" based on the reading material which they read and perceive the actual meaning according to the text.