

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE TEACHING OF READING SKILLS OF ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE AT SECONDARY LEVEL IN DISTRICT MARDAN (KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA)

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Abstract

Reading skills are the backbone of learning a foreign language i.e. English. Secondary level is a complete stage of education in itself. After its completion a certificate is awarded. The researcher focused on the evaluation of the teaching of reading skills of English at secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan). The data regarding the mentioned topic were collected with the help of classroom observation. Thirty classrooms of English at secondary level were selected as sample of the study from 30 different Boys Higher Secondary schools of Mardan. The observation checklist covered all the areas and aspects of the teaching of the reading skills. The collected data were tabulated and analyzed with the help of Chi-square formula. The analysis of the data revealed that there is a dearth of highly trained English language teachers in District Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. This research paper is very beneficial for the English teachers especially for the secondary level English teachers to look back over their practices of teaching English language.

Keywords: Reading skills, Secondary level

1. Introduction

Over the last many years, the methods of English language teaching have been developing and facing many changes and modifications. Communication approach to teaching and learning has been introduced and now this approach to teaching and learning is considered more important and successful than grammar based approach. Activity -based approach enhances all the four basic skills of language i.e. English language - listening, speaking, reading and writing. Among these four skills, reading skills are considered more important than the other skills because reading skills play a pivotal role in getting the higher education as English is considered the No.1 literary language and most of research work etc is being published in English.

Furthermore, today graduate is not only produced and prepared for local market, but also for global market and without the mastery over English language, the graduate may not be able to live up to the definition of graduate. Therefore, mastery on the reading skills of English is the pre-requisite for a successful graduate. English is the language of internet and it is the easiest and quickest way of getting information and data for research etc. Therefore, it is very essential to have developed reading skills in English. Internet can only be browsed and utilized, when one has a fair and developed level of reading skills in English.

Reading of books quenches the thirst for knowledge and information; therefore, reading is very vital as most of the printed materials are in English. This is the reality of the modern world and the proper teaching of reading skills in Pakistan particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are very important.

The proper teaching of reading skills in English has become very distinguished and substantial in the developing countries for getting higher education. Therefore, in our country the teaching of reading skills in English must be given full attention at Secondary level. Only then the acquirement of substantial higher education can be possible (Haque, 2006).

According to Hudson (2007) the already stored knowledge about the topic/subject under the reading process helps in a meaningful way for the better reading comprehension i.e. to take out the correct meaning from the reading text. This statement proves the vital role of reading.

The basic cause of the poor reading skills of the struggling learners is their insufficient knowledge of English vocabulary (Garcia, 2003). This statement guides us towards the proper and result oriented process of the teaching as well as learning of the reading skills in English. Students' proficiency of reading English in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is very poor. Majority of students at secondary level in District Mardan Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cannot access English books and the vast resources in the libraries, being in English, remain unutilized because of the poor reading skills of students at secondary level.

1.1 Problems Faced by Students during Reading

- 1) There are a plethora of problems which are faced by the students of EFL. These problems are; poor vocabulary, inefficiency in the use of dictionary, complication of sentences, poor knowledge of the language, poor performance in reading, the poor existed knowledge etc.
- 2) The reading is a tedious activity and is always done in loneliness. Proper reading needs many techniques and skills which are not possessed by the students (Greenwood, 1998).
- 3) The level of excellence in the reading skills entirely depends upon the students' motivational level and on the contrary the failure of students in the reading skills or poor reading habits in students are the causes of the poor level of interest and motivation on the part of students (Dechant 1982).
- 4) Lack of vocabulary or poor vocabulary is a worth mentioning cause of the poor reading habits of learners. This augmented the view Breen (1975) that the inability of the students' reading skills is due to lack of vocabulary. He further states that adequate free reading is very helpful for the improvement of reading skills. The students are also unable to parse the long and complicated sentences because of their poor vocabulary.
- 5) Poor incomplete knowledge of the language is also a problem faced by most of the EFL and ESL learners and students (Williams, 1996). This weakness brings difficulties and problems of comprehension during reading a text.
- 6) The reading process, Alderson (1984) states, is the same for all the languages. But in Pakistani context, the reading skill needs a syntactical reasoning. As the structure of the sentence of Urdu and English is different from one another syntactically. In English the order of the sentence is S.V.O i.e. subject, verb and object while in Urdu the order is S.O.V i.e. subject, object and verb. This difference also creates problems in the reading comprehension.
- 7) There are some common problems and issues, our students face during reading an English text.
 - a. Poor Eye-fixation
 - b. Lower level of articulation and enunciation
 - c. Poor experience and practice in reading
 - d. Lack of sensibility among students
 - e. Poor relation between reading and thinking
- 8) The following reasons are also responsible for the poor quality of reading skills (Nuttall, 1996). The reasons are;
 - a. Useless and unimportant reading assignments
 - b. The out dated methods of teaching the reading skills
 - c. Hasty desire for pre-mature achievement
 - d. The sub-standard of reading text
- 9) According to Dechant (1982) the following are the reasons for the poor reading efficiency of the students;
 - a. Inability of using dictionary
 - b. Inability of locating the words in dictionary
 - c. Inability of finding the appropriate contextual meaning

- d. Inability of determining the plural and singular
- e. Inability of parsing the sentence i.e. to find out different parts of speech

1.2 The Sub Skills of Reading

- a) **Skimming**
Skimming means to read a text rapidly to find its main points and central theme (Nuttall, 1996).
- b) **Scanning**
The scanning is a search for the precise and exact information excluding the irrelevant information and data from the reading text (Urquhart, 1998).

1.2.1 Browsing

Browsing means casual reading. In this sub-skill of reading objectives of reading are not well defined. In this the parts of a text are skimmed (Urquhart, 1998).

1.2.2 Probe Reading

This sub-skill of reading makes the sense clear by providing specific information needed in response to questions or sets of questions.

1.2.3 Cautious Reading

The main features of cautious reading, according to Urquhart (1998), are the following; This type of reading process is not selective. The reader adopts a vulnerable role and accepts the writer's arrangement.

1.2.4 Prediction

Prediction means the guessing or predicting ability of a text that what is to come next. It involves the use of grammatical, vocabulary related and cultural signals (Grellet, 1996).

1.2.5 Deducing

Deducing is that sub-skill of reading which makes the interpretation of a text desirable. That's why this is of central importance but a very complicated skill (Nuttall, 1996).

1.2.6 Previewing

Previewing covers and targets a specific area of elements in the reading process. It is indeed a very rapid and speedy technique to discover the area in the reading text from where the information is required (Grellet, 1996).

1.2.7 Anticipation

Anticipation is exactly the information of a chain of ideas of the subject matter of a written material. It is also the process and technique for looking

forward to the upcoming information before the start of the reading process (Grellet, 1996).

1.2.8 Presupposition

Presupposition is the major technique for improving the reading skills. It depends upon assumption and supposition (Nuttall, 1996).

1.2.9 Participated Assumptions

The message given in the reading text, as Nuttall (1996) states, is shared by both the reader and writer when the aim is only communication between them. The participated assumptions have many abstract things between the reader and writer like attitudes, values, beliefs and culture etc.

1.3 Teaching Methods/ Approaches of Reading Skills

Teaching method/ approach of reading skills depends upon the text size, reading purpose and allotted time. The students' interest and the quantity of the text should be kept in mind (Grabe, 2009; Hudson, 2007; Roe, 2009).

a. Top-Down Approach

This is the preceding knowledge and information about the language before learning the reading skills of that language (Grabe, 2009). In this approach the reader moves towards the relevant information in the reading text and leaves the irrelevant one.

b. Bottom-Up Approach

This takes place under an impulse and urge. The reader concentrates on chunks of the written material (Hudson, 2007).

c. Collaborated/ Interactive Reading

This is the blend of top-down approach and bottom-up approach (Grabe, 2009). Collaborate reading helps and guides the readers with the structure which is closely connected with the recognition of words, syntactic analysis and semantics (Hudson, 2007).

1.4 How to Teach the Reading Skills

The question of 'How to teach the reading skills?' strikes teachers because it has a key importance for the students.

Too many researches have been conducted for finding a proper technique for teaching the reading skills but still a lot to do in this regard unless a magic formula for good and efficacious reading is desired.

1.5 Class Room Performance for Teaching Reading

In order to develop the teaching of reading skills, the performance based activities inside the classroom are very important. In this regard, the students own generated questions and queries lead to the improvement and better learning of the reading skills (Hardy et.al, 2014).

1.5.1 Stages of Reading

1. *Pre- Reading*
This is one of the most significant stages as it leads the students to read more and more. It urges them and suggests paying attention to. This stage stimulates and motivates the students for the proper accomplishment of a reading text (Greenwood, 1996).
2. *While Reading*
This stage improves the intellectual growth of the students. This phase enables the students to know how to go through a text and how to respond to the reading texts and change in ideas of the author (Greenwood, 1998). Many activities for the while reading stage have been proposed.
3. *Post –reading*
In this stage the teacher in a very straight forward way asks about the responses to the text. In the words of Williams (1996) the post reading phase strengthens the learning process and outcomes.
4. *Summarization*
Summarization of the reading text makes the comprehension of the reading text very easy and fruitful. Summarization of the reading text promotes the learning abilities of the learners (Yu's (2008).

1.6 Different Methods of Teaching English

There are many methods in use for teaching English. Macau (2006) states that the following four are principles for the teaching of language;

- a. Selection of teaching/ learning materials
 - b. Limitation of the materials
 - c. Distribution of the materials for the teaching of the basic four skills of language
 - d. The graduation of the materials
- A. *Audio-Lingual Method*
According to this method language learning is the formation of habits. This is used for the acquisition and learning of mother language and foreign language.
 - B. *Audio-Visual Method*
In this method, communication is given the top most priority.
 - C. *Suggestopedia*
This method the attention is focused on the physical facilities inside the classroom. This method works well for the motivation of learners and they obtain good results (Richards and Rogers 2001).
 - D. *The Silent Way*
In this method the teacher's role is very little and the students are encouraged to go for the development of their own learning ways and means.
 - E. *Total Physical Response*
In this method the physical movements are involved. This method reduces the boredom, monotony and students' tension in learning the language.
 - F. *Community Language Teaching*

This method was introduced in 1972. In this method the teaching of grammatical structures of language and its rules are forsaken.

G. *Grammar Translation Method*

In this method the mother language of the learners is involved. It means that in this method of teaching word-for-word translation of the target language is conducted in the mother language of the learners (Abdullah, 2013).

H. *The Direct Method*

The basic principle of this method is no translation in the native language of the learners. The meanings of new words are taught with the help of Audio-Visual aids and demonstration (Hummer, 2004).

I. *Interactive Approach*

This is the blend of both the approaches of the teaching of reading skills i.e. bottom-up approach and top-down approach (Kintsch, 2005; Stoller, 2002). The students must be taught reading in way when they understand the material. Furthermore the learners will be able to bring the learnt reading material in the practical use. But only the teaching of reading techniques does not accomplish the work of the teachers.

The following were the two major objectives of this research.

1. To evaluate the process of the teaching of reading skills of English at secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
2. To make useful suggestions for the improvement of the process of the teaching of reading skills of English at secondary level in the under study area of Mardan in general and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular.

Method and Procedure

Thirty classrooms of English language at secondary level were observed by the researcher with the help of observation sheet. The observation sheet consisted of 37 indicators which covered all the major basic areas of reading skills. The results were analyzed and interpreted with the help of chi-square. Thirty classrooms of Secondary level English were observed by the researcher from the 30 rural and urban areas High and Higher Secondary Schools of District Mardan. The rural and urban areas schools were selected so that the sample might be representative. To make the research instrument valid and accurate the researcher sent the observation sheet to the senior English teachers for expert opinion. Their opinions were incorporated for the betterment of the research tool.

Analysis of Data

Table1: Analysis of the observations

No	Questions	Mostly	To Some Extent	Not at all	X ²	
1.	The teachers division of reading the lesson falls into these categories. I.e. Pre-reading ii. While reading iii. Post reading.	15	11	4	6.20	
2.	The teacher starts reading after explaining the background of the reading text.	16	12	2	12.60	
3.	The teacher provides opportunity of reading to every student.	11	15	3	8.60	
4.	The teacher provides guidance to the students in reading the text.	158	12	3	7.80	
5.	The teacher makes it certain that each of the students reads in the class.	11	12	7	1.40	
6.	The teacher gives importance to read the text by himself first and makes necessary explanation and interpretation of it.	23	5	2	25.80	
7.	The teacher lets the students read and explain/interpret the text after its reading out.	9	13	8	2.40	
8.	The teacher helps the students by giving meaning of the new words when they come across them.	17	12	1	13.40	
9.	The teacher stimulates the students to consult dictionary in case of facing unfamiliar words during reading.	10	18	2	12.80	
10.	The teacher guides the students to guess the meaning of new words by using contextual clues.	3	14	3	1	7.80
11.	The teacher indicates the problems regarding reading.	8	21	1	23.40	
12.	The teacher checks students' progress in comprehension questions after each reading.	1	11	7	1.40	
13.	The teacher asks the students introductory questions in English.	3	4	3	1	4.20
14.	The teacher allows/encourages the students to read a text quickly for specific information. (scanning)	6	18	6	12.60	
15.	The teacher teaches the student to read a text quickly to get/make a gist of it (skimming).	0	8	2	1	2.40
16.	The teacher puts stress on teaching learning (i.e. grammar, structure etc) in a reading class.	2	5	1	26.60	
		4				

1	The teacher enables the students to interpret and infer a text.	10	12	8	1.40
1	The teacher teaches the students the critical evolution of a text.	6	9	5	7.20
1	The teacher teaches the students the techniques of making/writing summary.	14	10	6	2.60
2	The teacher makes the use of cloze procedure for the purpose of reading.	2	17	1	0.53
2	The teacher teaches the student how to interpret (authentic and non-authentic material). (Newspaper, original text, essays etc)	7	10	3	5.00
2	The teacher enables the students to have analysis of the long sentences.	8	17	5	9.60
2	The teacher guides the students to survey text organization.	3	17	0	10.40
2	The teacher stimulates the students to read the text by themselves.	15	11	4	6.20
2	The teacher organizes pair/group activities to have discussion of the text.	9	16	7	3.80
2	The teacher asks the students to have extensive reading habit by reading additional, material i.e. Stories, Novels and Magazines etc at home.	10	10	0	0.20
2	The teacher makes necessary assessment of a particular text in order to enable the students to be prepared for reading the text.	7	17	6	7.80
2	The teacher modifies the text according to the purpose of reading in the class.	10	12	8	1.40
2	The teacher focuses on the intonation to make the students understand attitude, mood and tone etc.	9	14	7	3.80
3	The teacher teaches the students how to recognize tilt and prejudice in the text.	9	15	6	3.80
3	The teacher helps the students to value the writing style of text.	8	16	6	7.80
3	The teacher plays the role of an active partner in reading activities.	18	10	2	11.40
3	The teacher asks students to relate theoretical information (textual information) to the practicing knowledge (personal experience).	2	17	1	22.40
3	The teacher teaches the students how to read a long passage in a given time (i.e. extensively)	8	15	7	5.60
3	The teacher instructs the students how to predict about the given contents of the reading text.	6	14	0	6.20

3	The teacher teaches the students how to separate facts from opinion.	1 0	1 1	9 0	.80
3	The teacher helps the students to comprehend change and progression of ideas.	9 1	1 1	1 0	.40

Findings

1. The findings indicated that most of the students were not given the opportunity of reading and interpretation of the reading text by themselves. The majority of the students were not asked introductory as well as comprehension questions in English. The skimming technique and making of summary were totally ignored by the teachers. Most of the teachers were not aware of the cloze procedure and they did not teach their students to differentiate between authentic and non-authentic materials.
2. The findings revealed that the students were often not asked to read additional materials and the teachers did not modify the text for reading purpose. Furthermore, most of the time the teachers did not separate facts from opinions. The results showed that the teachers divided their reading lessons into three categories 1. Pre-reading, 2. While-reading and 3. Post-reading. Besides, the teachers did not guide the students regarding the change and progression in the ideas of the writers.
3. The results revealed that in most of schools the teachers explained the background of the reading text before starting the reading process. The teachers guided the students during the reading process. The results further showed that the students were taught the meanings of difficult words and they were stimulated by their teachers to consult dictionary. The study revealed that often the teachers guided the students to guess the meanings of difficult words with the help of contextual clues.
4. The results of this research paper revealed that teachers guided and taught their students the parsing of long sentences and organization of the text. The results also showed that the teachers stimulated the students for reading and assessed the reading text. The results further revealed that the teachers helped their students in knowing the biased attitude of the writer and in valuing the writing style of the reading text. The study further revealed that the teachers were active during the teaching of the reading skills and they also guided students to coordinate the theoretical information given in the reading text with their personal knowledge. The teachers also taught their students about the prediction of the reading text.

Discussion

The teachers' teaching methods of English were fully exposed as observation gets direct data and the careful observation helps in the collection of exact data. This study (has) revealed that there is a dearth of highly trained and sober English teachers in our province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially in District Mardan and .Its application in other provinces may be considered after conducting similar studies there . In the other research tools bias may be possible on the part of the

respondents but observation minimizes the chances of biased attitude and deliberate falsification on the part of teachers.

Conclusions

English is a compulsory subject in KhyberPakhtunkhwa and the rest of Pakistan up to graduate level but it is taught as a subject and not as a language. This is the reason that after the completion of 14 years education, most of our students cannot utter or write a correct sentence in English. Secondary level is a transitional level and it opens the door of higher education. So without the developed skills of reading in English language at this level, achieving a higher educational qualification either becomes difficult or its quality is impaired. Therefore, for the proficiency in English, the basic four skills of English must be developed and improved i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking. The present study indicated those problems which were faced by students during reading. The shortcomings of teachers were also brought into lime light. The poor reading skills of students are due to the poor level of teaching.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the study are;

1. The English curriculum of teachers' education need must be based on English language rather than literature and the concerned degree awarding institutions must strive in this regard for inclusion.
2. English language teaching and learning must be given the top most priority at secondary level.
3. The teachers are needed to be provided regular trainings in English teaching by the concerned education department, so that the teacher must be made aware of the modern trends and changes in English teaching.
4. The teachers training and training contents may be must be applied and practice based, therefore, the NITE, RITE, PITE, in Pakistan particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and degree awarding institutions do care about it.

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