

Vocabulary Definition, Text Summary, and Pre-passage Questions as Pre-Reading Comprehension Strategies

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Abstract— Reading comprehension problems abound in the second language classroom. Since reading is considered the primary means by which the content in the various discipline areas are learned then, there was an apparent need to find alternative means to improve comprehension and thereby, success in the academe. This study explored the utility of three pre-reading activities, namely; vocabulary definition, text summary, and pre-passage questions in enhancing the reading comprehension of students. The respondents were divided into three groups at random, with each group receiving one particular pre-reading activity. The pre-reading activities were administered prior to the actual reading of the texts to activate their schema or background knowledge. The respondents' reading comprehension was then measured using the reading comprehension test designed by John Langan (1986). The research result indicated that there is no significant difference in the reading comprehension of the respondents exposed to the pre-reading activities. This implies that there are other factors that are contributory and are equally important to improving reading comprehension and that the use of pre-reading activities should not be relied in the attainment of the same.

Keywords— *Pre-Reading Comprehension Strategies, Pre-passage Questions, Text Summary, Vocabulary Definition.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In a country like the Philippines where English, a second language, is used in formal instruction, students must acquire a sufficient level of language proficiency to be able to perform adequately in the various academic learning tasks. In a second language classroom, the ability to read with comprehension is often demanded. This is so as much as the content in the discipline areas is taught through reading. As part of their learning in the different content areas, students are required to read books and other academic materials. Thus, reading is viewed as the primary means by which

students acquire information. However, problems relevant to reading comprehension abound in a second language classroom. A scenario of an English-as-a-Second Language classroom where students fail to answer questions adequately right about a passage that they have read or are not able to perform well on a given activity related to a certain passage is an indication that something is missing in the reading process itself. Most students exhibited difficulties such as identifying meaning of words or concepts taken from a reading text, forming correct associations among the information read, decoding text incorrectly and slowly thus, slowing too their speed of reading and hence, their comprehension. These signs are indicative of a problem affecting reading comprehension. With these problems around, their academic performance is adversely affected. As such, this study was conducted to address the problem by introducing pre-reading activities that are believed to facilitate the comprehension of the texts.

Pre-reading activities are administered before the actual reading of a text. In this study, it includes vocabulary definition, text summary, and pre-passage questions. These are designed to activate the students' collective background knowledge which are thought to facilitate comprehension by bringing up to mind previous knowledge and experiences which may help them process the text at hand.

In this study, the reading comprehension of the students was determined after giving them pre-reading activities. The main objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To determine the utility of pre-reading activities as means to enhancing reading comprehension.
2. To determine if certain pre-reading activities are better than the others in activating the students' background knowledge.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research study adopted the descriptive method in determining the utility of pre-reading activities as means of

enhancing reading comprehension. It made use of the reading comprehension test designed by John Langan (1986) in his book "Reading and Study Skills" as the main instrument. It consists of ten reading passages with five questions each. The questions correspond to the five reading comprehension skills which were identified by Langan (1986) to be most important in reading. These skills include: 1) determining the main idea of the selection; 2) recognizing key supporting details; 3) identifying vocabulary in context; 4) summarizing a selection in a several-word title or heading; 5) making inferences and drawing conclusions. The reading comprehension test had a total of 50 items. It was pre-tested to students other than the respondents of the study to ensure that the passages are well within the respondents' cultural and linguistic knowledge and experiences. An item analysis was made to determine the index of difficulty of each item and revisions were made on the items that were perceived difficult.

It made use of Temporada's (2006) classification of reading comprehension levels, namely; independent (with test scores above 53%), instructional (with test scores between 44% to 53%), and frustration (with test scores less than 44%).

The respondents of the study were 30 first year BS Industrial Technology students comprising one class in English 1. Since there were three pre-reading activities, ten students were randomly assigned to each activity.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study is presented below. Table 1 shows the summary of scores of the respondents. The respondents who were given Vocabulary Definition got a percentage score of 37.6; those who were given Pre-Passage Questions got a percentage score of 38; and those who were presented with a Text Summary got a percentage score of 40.6.

Table.1: Summary Scores of Respondents

Pre-Reading Activities	N	X	% Score	Reading Comprehension Level Description
Vocabulary Definition	10	18.8	37.6	Frustration
Pre-Passage Questions	10	19.0	38.0	Frustration
Text Summary	10	20.3	40.6	Frustration

This result contradicts the research findings of Norrish (1994) which hold the idea that pre-reading activities facilitate reading comprehension. This contrast of result can be explained when reading comprehension is viewed not singly as a result of the employment of pre-reading strategies alone but a product of a successful interplay of all the other elements that make reading comprehension possible.

It is a fact that reading comprehension is a complex process involving a myriad of interrelated skills. Wren (1997) stressed that comprehension is a product of decoding and language comprehension skills. Both of these skills depend upon the development of fundamental cognitive elements that reinforce them. According to Wren, the cognitive elements needed for decoding include 1) cipher knowledge, the underlying knowledge that enables one to read and pronounce regular words correctly, 2) lexical knowledge, the knowledge that allows one to recognize and pronounce familiar, irregular words correctly, 3) awareness of phonemes or the cognizance that spoken words are made up of sounds, 4) knowledge of the alphabetic principle, a knowledge that spoken words are made up of phonemes and

that those phonemes are represented in text as letters, 5) knowledge of letters or the familiarity of letters in the alphabet, and 6) understanding concepts about print. Wren (1997) went on to identify the cognitive elements that support the development of language comprehension. This include background knowledge and linguistic knowledge which in turn, is made up of knowledge of phonology, syntax, and semantics. The development of these skills determines the reading comprehension capability of the learners.

Considering the above facts in relation to the data obtained, it can be said that although the subjects were provided pre-reading activities to activate their existing knowledge database, but if the fundamental skills indicated above are not yet fully developed in them, then comprehension, without a doubt, would be impaired.

This research study also intended to find out whether certain pre-reading activities are better than the others in enhancing comprehension. Table 2 shows that there is no significant difference in the reading comprehension of the respondents who were given the pre-reading activities.

Table.2: Summary Table for the One-Factor Analysis of Variance

Pre-reading Comprehension Activities	Average Scores	Computed F	Tabular F (0.05)	Decision	Interpretation
Vocabulary Definition	18.8	0.37	3.35	Accept H ₀	Not Significant
Pre-Passage Questions	19.0				
Text Summary	20.3				

Based on the result obtained, it can be said that not one of the three pre-reading activities can be considered superior to the other pre-reading activities used in this study. Each has its own contribution in the activation of prior knowledge. Since each group was given only one pre-reading activity, it can be deduced that providing readers with a single pre-reading activity may not be enough to heighten sufficient comprehension.

The result points out to the necessity of using a variety of activities to promote reader's comprehension. Employing a host of various activities that cater to the different levels of comprehension can help bring about a fuller understanding of the texts and move students beyond the literal comprehension of the text. Thus, in relation to the current study, the respondents' level of comprehension may have been shaped, other factors aside, by the kind of pre-reading activity given to them.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The use of pre-reading activities alone is not enough in the activation of the students' schema or background knowledge. Moreover, not one pre-reading activity was found to be superior to others insofar as facilitating reading comprehension is concerned. Hence, it is recommended that the choice of pre-reading activity must be considered in relation to other factors which may affect reading comprehension such as the amount of prior knowledge, amount of vocabulary, the development of the decoding and language comprehension skills, topic familiarity, and lack of interest on the topic in a text. Moreover, to promote maximum activation of prior knowledge at a level where sufficient comprehension will work, learners must not only be exposed to one but several other pre-reading activities.

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