

## **Escalating the Forte of Academic Reading through EAP wielding Strategies**

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Worldwide there has been steady demand for EAP (English for Academic Purpose) courses among non-native speakers to forte their acumen in communication skill. Why do students need such courses like EAP? Study skills have been coming increasingly to the fore since 1970s in practice material for students of English. Many non-natives students have already possess study skills to an advanced level in their own language. They may simply need help to transfer their skills into English. But student's needs may differ according to the learning environment. The first requirement of students will be the development of study skills to an appropriate level for the advanced subjects to be studied, in conjunction with the development of language proficiency. Once they are over the basic hurdle of study skills and language adequacy, they then have to learn the academic code. This will involve a number of elements, depending on the level of education being pursued like undergraduate, post-graduate, research and so on.

### **Study Skill**

A dictionary explanation of study skills encapsulates the essence of abilities, techniques, and strategies which are used when reading, writing, or listening for study purposes. (Richards, Platt and Platt 1992)

Reading as a study skill is a fundamental characteristics of the target academic situation in which students are typically reading books, journals, noting, summarizing etc. Reading is always with the purpose of obtaining information. In the process of reading students will be concerned with the subject which involves comprehension. Depending on the reading purpose, different reading strategies are vital like the four main approaches – psychological, linguistic, content- oriented and pedagogically- oriented. Such robust tools will enhance student's flair of the language. It is argued that the idea of successful language learning is dependent on immersing students with tasks that entail negotiation of meaning as well as meaningful communication. This perception is the core of language teaching and this leads to teaching materials being produced with this particular concept in mind .By promoting the task-based work in language teaching that the students will not only develop

communication skills, they will also develop an acceptable standard of performance through task-based work.

Reading as a skill, is normally linked with writing. This is a fundamental characteristic of the target academic situation in which students are typically reading books and journals, noting, summarizing, paraphrasing, and then writing essays, etc. . In practice material for reading, the link with writing is normally included. Although the focus may be on various reading strategies and comprehension practice, the resultant exercises usually involve writing (apart from some multiple-choice questions and yes/no, true/false formats).

### **SKILL OF READING**

Encoder or Writer----- Message----- Decoder or Reader

Reading is mainly a decoding process. The encoder encodes the message and the decoder decodes it and understands it. Reading activity involves perception, recall, reasoning, evaluating, imagining, organizing, application and problem solving. The goal of all reading is the comprehension of meaning. Effective reading includes not only a literal comprehension of an author's word, but also an interpretation of his mood, tone, feeling and attitude (Dechant and Smith, 1977, P. 237). Gray (1967) views that when people read something they understand it at three levels. First, the purely literal responding to the graphic signals only with little depth of understanding, the second level at which the reader recognizes the author's meaning, and the third level where the reader's own personal experiences and judgments influence his response to the text. These three levels can be summarized as "Reading the lines, Reading between the lines and Reading beyond the lines".

Reading for academic purposes is a multifaceted subject. However, there is one fundamental aspect which can be the starting point for other considerations. When students read, it is for a purpose. Clearly, students can have different purposes in their reading; these will include:

- to obtain information (facts, data, etc.)
- to understand ideas or theories, etc.
- to discover author's viewpoints
- to seek evidence for their own point of view (and to quote) all of which may be needed for writing their essays, etc.

In the process of reading, students will be concerned with the subject content of what they read and the language in which it is expressed. Both aspects involve comprehension, though

of different kinds. Depending on the reading purpose, different reading strategies and skills will be involved; in turn, the skills can be divided into sub-skills.

### **Strategies and skills**

Some of the main strategies, skills and sub-skills utilized in reading are as follows

- prediction
- Skimming
- Scanning and
- distinguishing between:
  - factual and non-factual information
  - important and less important items
  - relevant and irrelevant information
  - explicit and implicit information
  - ideas and examples and opinions
  - drawing inferences and conclusions
  - deducing unknown words
  - Understanding graphic presentation (data, diagrams, etc.)
  - understanding text organization and linguistic /semantic aspects, e.g.
  - relationship between and within sentences (e g cohesion)
  - recognizing discourse/semantic markers and their function.

All of them play a part in comprehension.

The skills listed above are frequently taken as the basis for practice material in textbooks. Sometimes the skills are taken separately, or in combination, and used as the focus for the unit or exercise, but more frequently they are integrated within units in the form of activates/tasks/problem-solving, which are topic or content-based. The texts that are used as the basis for the practice are usually authentic, though possibly adapted or abridged, depending on the language level. Although the focus of the practice is on the reading skills, some exercises are usually included on the comprehension of certain aspects of the reading passage together with word study/vocabulary practice and some relevant grammatical focus.

### **Categorizing reading courses**

Bloor (1985) has suggested an alternative approach to the consideration of reading courses; categorizing them according to the philosophies adopted by the writers. In

proposing this, Bloor acknowledges that individual books usually incorporate more than one of the underlying philosophies, usually combined with skills/strategies practice. Four main approaches have been identified: psychological, linguistic, content-orientated and pedagogically-oriented.

**a) psychological**

This approach focused on ‘what takes place in the mind of the individual reader’. Such courses endeavour to practice the processes involved in reading, by means of exercise, often at two levels: the first is at the level of ‘simple word recognition’, while the second is at the level of ‘interpretation’. Books following this approach are: University of Malaya (1980-81), Morrow (1980), and Moore (1979-80).

**b) Linguistic**

This approach focuses on the words and sentences of the text. ‘The assumption is that if learners can handle linguistic features of the text efficiently, reading ability will be improved’. This approach is often presented in a number of activities in many reading books. Overt grammatical exercises are included in books such as Sim and Laufer-Dvorkin (1982) and Glendinning and Holmstrom (1982).

**c) Content-orientated**

This approach is based on the view that if readers have, or are given, a specific purpose for their reading, efficiency will be improved. For example, the learner may be required to extract specific information from the text by means of pre-reading questions or tasks. It is also assumed that if there are reading passages on topics related to students’ specific areas of interest, their interest and involvement in reading will be stimulated. This is the basis for a number of books including a wide range of extracts from different disciplines, and topics that might have an international appeal, e. g. ‘the individual and society’, ‘food for thought’, ‘pollution’, ‘language’, ‘academic success’, etc.

**d) Pedagogically-orientated**

This approach is exemplified by ‘those courses where learning theories are the prime motivation for the design of the total course rather than the design of individual exercises’ (Bloor 1985). Self-access materials, from which students make their own choices and work at their own pace, exemplify this approach, with sets of reading cards as an example (Jolly 1982; and SRA Reading laboratory for NS).

Bloor points out that it is almost impossible to evaluate these four approaches as there are so many variables, a major one being the students' freedom of choice in reading. How far the learner is interested in the content of the reading passage would distort any results one might obtain'.

### **Reading for information**

The reading purpose is clearly fundamental to all reading in EAP. In an important article, Johns and Davies (1983) maintain that in EAP a text is a 'vehicle for information' not a 'linguistic object'. They propose a methodology for studying written texts so that the focus is on the information in them. This involves the notion of topic-types, or conceptual frameworks, e.g. physical structure, process, characteristics by which texts can be graded: from simple information structures to the more complex. An integral part of the approach is small group work involved in puzzling out the meaning of the text.

Many reading skills books focus on reading for information; in doing so, they often give practice to various strategies, e.g. scanning, skimming, seeking the main idea, prediction (e.g. Jordan 1980; Wallace 1980).

### **Reading speed**

As students need to read extensively as well as intensively, it is important that they are able to do so in most efficient way possible. Efficiency is coupled with speed of reading. It is for this reason that some reading courses include practice material aimed at increasing reading speed and comprehension rate.

It should be noted that there are two diametrically opposed points of view regarding reading speed. One is that because students have difficulties with reading comprehension, probably linked to a narrow range of vocabulary, they will naturally read slowly, and any attempt to increase reading speed before improving reading comprehension is misguided. The other point of view is that by improving reading speed, the student is able to see longer stretches of language with each fixation of the eyes and thus more easily contextualize unknown vocabulary and be able to achieve general understanding.

One well tried method of increasing reading speed is for students to note the time they take to read a passage in words per minute and then to answer comprehension questions-often true/false or multiple-choice, noting their score. This information is then recorded in a progress chart (e.g. Abdulaziz and Stover 1989) Fry used reading passages divided into topics

on public health and diseases: these were based for recognition, structuring and interpretation exercises, and also for reading speed and comprehension practice.

One book (Mosback and Mosback 1976) is devoted to giving practice in faster reading, with the material organized into topics. The speed reading technique is the same as Fry's, but the practice that follows is more extensive, consisting not only of comprehension exercises (Ideas), but also vocabulary (synonyms), paragraph topics and summary completion.

Various books exist on methods to increase reading skills. Clearly, a student is at disadvantage if faced with the long reading list if he or she can only read slowly. Slowly, of course, subjective, and will vary from reader to reader, and will depend on the text type. It is easier to read a light novel quickly with understanding the densely packed text book.

Reading speed courses usually discuss the causes of slow reading. These invariably include preference to eye movement (i.e. mechanical) and brain function (i.e. comprehension). Factors considered are eye and recognition span ; reading word by word instead of in word groups / thought unities; eye regression along the line; excessive finger pointing; slowness in word recognition; poor vocabulary range; vocalizing(i.e. mouthing words); sub vocalization (i.e. saying the word silently to oneself); and inability to predict language.

Methods to reading efficiency usually involve exercises and practice in increasing vocabulary range, anticipation of language, improved comprehension, awareness of eye movements, variable reading speed and timed reading passages.

It is essential for students to be able to skim and to scan text. Skimming involves the quick reading of a text- not every word – in order to understand the gist or main points of a passage, i.e. the overall meaning. Scanning involves quickly looking through a text or surveying it, in order to find specific information. When skimming and scanning, a student should be looking at the heavy information words (or 'content words', i.e. noun and verbs) rather than the grammatical or structural words (articles or preposition).

Reading speed is normally measured in words per minute (WPM). Over the years various measures and estimates have been made of slow, average and fast reading speeds for

serious reading materials. Less than 200 WPM is considered slow, about 250WPM average, and above 300 to 400 WPM fast ( Tabachnick 1969; D.E Leeuw and D.E Leeuw 1965).

### **Oral and Silent reading**

Reading aloud is closer to pronunciation than to comprehension. The reader Shares information that the members of the audience want. The “real-life” purpose of reading aloud to others is to convey information to them, to entertain them, or to share a good story that they do not have (Zintz and Maggaut, 1989, P. 425). Silent reading is considered to be a “see and comprehend process” rather than a “see, say and comprehend” process. Buswell (1947) noted that silent reading should be a process of association between perceptual stimulation and meaning “without a mediating.

### **Reading comprehension and vocabulary**

In reading their subject textbooks, students frequently meet unknown words and phrases. Hewings (1990) takes the example of texts concerned with theoretical model building in economics. She points out that various straightforward study skills techniques can help in different ways. For example, scanning headings and sub-headings, and skimming through text, can give an overview and set the scene. Using the index to finding a definition or explanation. Failing that, the existence of suitable glossaries or subject dictionaries could be brought to the students’ attention.

Bramki and Williams (1984) are concerned with strategies to help students use context clues to puzzle out the meaning of newly-introduced specialist vocabulary. They first analyzed instances of intentional lexical familiarization in an economics textbook and discovered that the most frequent categories, in descending order, were: exemplification, explanation, definition (these three together accounting for almost 90 percent of all instances),stipulation, synonymy and non verbal illustration. They then proposed strategies for capitalizing on familiarizations deliberately implanted in text by the author, so that the reader can work out for himself the meanings of the terms concerned?. Initially, the teacher marks up a text-term, signaling and familiarization with coloured pens on the OHP, or by underlining, boxing, etc. on texts for photocopying or duplicating. This is to raise the

students' awareness. The next stage is to mark up only one or two of the three elements in each case, with the student completing the marking up. The third stage is for an asterisk only to be placed in the margin where familiarization occurs, and the students work in pairs to mark up the text themselves.

Thus these robust will certainly will help students in enhancing and developing critical reading approaches and improving reading efficiency.

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