

Looking Through the Reading Glass: Enhancing ESL Students' Reading Proficiency through English Language Exposure in the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

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Reading ability is a critical aspect in learning a second language and is a sure indicator of success for ESL students (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). ESL students' reading abilities are greatly dependent on the extent to which they are exposed to the language, not only as a subject to be learned but also as a means of communication (Krashen, 1985; Ellis, 2008). In this piece, we will discuss how learning activities, exposure to language, and linguistic knowledge all come together to enhance reading abilities. It will discuss how vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation are all key in improving reading abilities for ESL students (Nation, 2013; Koda, 2007). It will also discuss how the incorporation of technology and language-rich environments can greatly enhance reading abilities for ESL students (Lin, 2014). The piece will culminate in a call to actions to incorporate English in ESL students' learning to enhance their reading abilities.

Keywords: ESL, reading proficiency, English language exposure, reading comprehension, second language acquisition

Introduction and Background

Reading proficiency is one of the essential skills that ESL students must attain if they are to succeed in learning English as a second language. The development of the students' reading skills depends greatly on the presence of English as a taught subject as well as the medium of instruction.

This current research explores the impact of a second language (L2), the learner's linguistic ability, and instruction on the reading development of ESL learners. Meaningful and frequent interaction with the English language will help them acquire more words, recognize grammar structures, and comprehend the way ideas are organized over longer texts. These are all important aspects of reading ability (Krashen, 1985; Nation, 2013).

This is because reading development is dependent on both language and information processing skills, which involve how schemas are evoked and how prior knowledge is used (Rumelhart, 1980). On this note, this concept paper presents a framework that entails scaffold learning, technology-based learning, and increased English exposure for ESL students.

Problem Statement

For instance, many ESL students have difficulty learning to read because of their limited vocabulary, incomplete knowledge of English grammar, and lack of exposure to real English materials (Nation,

2013; Koda, 2007). The traditional learning approach favors test-based learning over the use of English; as such, it may cause boring and passive learning environments (Snow et al., 2007).

In addition, limited opportunities to read on their own and overreliance on teacher guidance cause students to lose their motivation and confidence (Day & Bamford, 1998). English is not used outside the classroom; as such, language and reading development may stagnate (Krashen, 1985).

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore the effects of English on the reading skills of ESL students. It will emphasize vocabulary acquisition, grammar, phonological awareness, and technology-based reading activities, as mentioned in Nation (2013) and Lin (2014).

It will also seek to determine effective teaching approaches for ESL students to promote language integration and a positive learning environment, as cited in Snow et al. (2007).

Theoretical Framework

The research investigates the connection between English language exposure and reading proficiency of ESL students through established second language acquisition and reading development theories. Krashen's Input Hypothesis states that learners acquire new languages through exposure to comprehensible input which exceeds their existing knowledge by one level ($i+1$) (Krashen 1985).

The theory demonstrates that learners require regular exposure to English texts which provide valuable content for reading development because such exposure helps them build vocabulary and grammatical skills. In addition, Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Theory suggests that learners' first language (L1) literacy skills can transfer to their second language (L2), provided that adequate exposure and proficiency in the target language are achieved (Cummins, 2000). This implies that strengthening English language competence is essential for successful reading development among ESL learners.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory shows that social interaction and guided learning serve as the essential components for cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) enables teachers to assist students in their reading comprehension development through scaffolding which includes incremental task challenges and suitable language support. Additionally, schema theory highlights the role of prior knowledge in reading comprehension, suggesting that learners actively construct meaning by connecting new information to existing cognitive structures (Rumelhart, 1980). This reinforces the need for instructional strategies that activate background knowledge and promote meaningful engagement with texts.

Theoretical perspectives which exist as a unified body of knowledge establish a solid base which enables ESL reading classrooms to use language exposure together with scaffolded instruction and interactive learning methods. The research shows that reading skills develop through ongoing interactions which involve linguistic input together with cognitive functions and social learning environments.

Methodology

A mixed-methods research strategy is suggested for this investigation. Pre- and post-reading comprehension assessments will be used to gather quantitative data in order to gauge pupils' development. Students' opinions regarding technology use and English reading will be investigated

through the use of questionnaires.

To investigate teaching methods and learning experiences, qualitative data will be acquired via teacher interviews, student reflections, and classroom observations. Purposive sampling will be used to identify secondary or tertiary ESL students as participants. For the qualitative part of the research, a wealth of descriptive data will be collected to provide a deeper and richer understanding of the learning process of the students. This can be seen through a quote by Vygotsky, 1978 which states **“What a child can do in cooperation today, he can do alone tomorrow.”** (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87) and how it translates to this research study is that it emphasizes the importance of social interaction and guided learning, which supports this research study’s point of view whereby qualitative data helps provide a deeper understanding of students’ learning processes, especially through observation, interaction, and reflection.

The intervention method will include scaffolded reading, extensive reading, and technology-based activities throughout the designated time. The data will be analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, and the qualitative data will be analysed using theme analysis.

This research will be conducted qualitatively and quantitatively to provide a complete and comprehensive picture. For the quantitative part of the research, the progress of the students will be monitored through a reading test before and after the intervention. This will provide a clear and precise measure of the progress of the students as quoted by Grabe and Stoller, 2019 **“Assessment provides a means for determining learners’ progress and the effectiveness of instruction.”** (Grabe & Stoller, 2019) which translates to the quantitative part of the research, whereby the progress of the students will be monitored through a reading test before and after the intervention. This will provide a clear and precise measure of the progress of the students

The intervention will include a range of reading exercises, extensive reading, and technology-mediated tasks (Day & Bamford, 1998; Lin, 2014).

Significance of the Study

In relation to ESL pedagogy, this study offers evidence for language-integrated reading instruction (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). And that, in itself, provides insights for teachers to design lessons that maximize language exposure and learner independence.

The results can help curriculum designers to integrate extensive reading and digital instruments into familiarities in ESL (Lin, 2014). Linguists and policymakers may help from insights on how language exposure affects literacy development in multilingual setting (Cummins, 2000).

Expected Outcomes

It is assumed that a formal study will show the association of regular exposure to the target language, English (when listening and reading), with improved reading performance in terms of vocabulary, fluency and comprehension (Nation, 2013; Krashen, 1985).

It is expected that the technology-enhanced environments foster and improve engagement, personalized learning (Lin, 2014). In conclusion, the study concentrates on designing a beneficial teaching model for ESL reading skills.

Conclusion

In ESL context, reading proficiency is correlated with exposure to language and competence in the target tongue (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). It is important for teachers to create language-rich environments that encourage meaningful interaction and learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

This concept paper support a comprehensive approach to extensive reading by integrating scaffolded instruction, vocabulary development and the digital technologies (Day & Bamford, 1998; Lin, 2014). Then, ESL learners who are exposed to English language instruction consistently perform better on literacy tests in the long run and fare well academically.

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