PhD Cand.Irena Shehu
European University of Tirana
aneri-87@live.com

Causes of Reading Comprehension Deficiency in the Foreign Language, Case Study Albania

Abstract

When dealing with the issues of foreign language learning one certainly may think about the most important components of a Language, such as Reading, Writing, Grammar, and Speaking. The focus of this study is Reading Comprehension, as one of the most important part of language learning and when we come to the results and achievements it turns out to be one of the most difficult process where students do not succeed in getting high points.

Referring to Albanian Matura State Exams results in English Language, students' achievement was not satisfactory, mainly on Reading Comprehension part. In such a situation the main question asked by everyone is why students have these unsatisfactory results.

Actually there are a lot of causes that brings out low achievements on students' reading comprehension, some of the most important ones are: class size, community characteristics, out of school activities, reading material, strategy of instruction, teacher, motivation, interest commitment to the task etc.

But are these causes true in an Albanian context? For this we conducted a study with the help of the questionnaires. Thus it was mainly used a quantitative methodology with questionnaires spread on three different Albanian high schools and completed by 200 hundred students.

Based on the results of the study some of the most relevant causes that lead to Reading Comprehension deficiency are: motivation, strategy of reading and questioning. Students are not fully motivated; they have not enough interests and motivation to read a text in foreign language. Besides this in Albanian classrooms there is not a proper strategy to teach Reading Comprehension.

Key words: Reading comprehension, deficiency, causes, unsatisfactory results

1-Introduction

Reading comprehension is considered to be the pillar of Second Language Acquisition. Thus high achievement is necessary but this is not always possible. There may be satisfactory and not satisfactory results. Certainly, one worries more when the results are not satisfactory, in this context there is a need to find out the causes that bring out such results, and in this manner we would be able to find ways to have higher achievements.

As mentioned above, referring to Albanian Matura State Exams results in English Language, students' had deficiency in Reading Comprehension. In such a situation the main question asked by everyone is why do students have these unsatisfactory results.

There are many reasons and causes which contribute to Reading Comprehension deficiency. In order to be clearer and more precise the causes which will be tested through questionnaires in some important Albanian High school, are divided in two groups:

1. Outer causes such as motivation and interests.

2. Inner causes which will be discussed on the follow are: reading material, teacher of reading and questioning strategies.

2-Literature review

Some of the most important authors, whose works have been of a good value and have been   constantly consulted are:

1. Brown H Douglas.,2000. Teaching by Principles.,

2. Kahayanto.E. 2005.*A comparative study on Students` Achievements in Reading I of the Education Study Program of Palangkaraya University Who Entered Through PSB and SPMB in Academic Year 2003/2004*.

3. Krashen Stephen,(1981) Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning. New York: Pregamon Pres

Brown gives the idea of questioning strategies and he encourages teachers to use the strategies as much as possible in their class-

rooms. Every teacher should know how to motivate students by using a strategy of questioning the text. According to him the most important key to create an interactive learning is the initiation of inter- action from the teacher by using question, Brown (2001:169). Then he gives a number of different functions a teacher should fulfil in the classrooms.

He also gives the idea of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation According to Brown (2001:75) the students will be motivated to read when they feel that they need something from the text.

Kahyanto gives the notion of internal factors influencing students` achievements in Reading Comprehension. According to Kahayanto, these factors are usually known as personal factors, because they have existed inside the reader

Stephan Krashen with his input hypotheses gives the idea of exten- sive reading. According to his theory on Reading Comprehension, more precisely on his Input Theory :"The best way to improve read- ing is by reading, in this way we can improve second language ac- quisition as a whole process, comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, writing etc

3-Methodology

3.1-Study case key points

Location: three different Albanian High schools

Method: quantitative in the form of questionnaires (see appendix 1).

Focus :

• students' opinions about reasons why they find Reading Compre- hension difficult

• finding out if there are used the right techniques and the right ways of motivation

• the role of teacher, reading materials etc.

• the students' own opinions about ways how to improve Reading Comprehension results

3.2-Sample

When selecting the students for this study, there were chosen students from three different high school of Albania,, "Havzi Nela" high school, Kukes, "Kostandin Kristoforidhi", Elbasan, " Qemal Stafa", Tiranë. This was partly to minimize the risk of different schools having different policies of teaching , English level etc.

In each school there were a few students that could not attend when the questionnaire was handed out for various reasons. In total the questionnaires were filled in by 200 students.

3.3-Questionnaires

This study was done with the help of questionnaires hand out to the students in order they give opinions about the difficulties they face throughout reading comprehension activities.

The entire survey, the introduction as well as the questions, was written in Albania, This was because the questionnaire was not intended to test their understanding, but to get as reliable answers as possible by avoiding misunderstandings as some of the terms are difficult enough in the students' first language. A further reason was that at the end of the questionnaire there were two open-ended questions, and by being allowed to write in their first language, students would feel more comfortable writing and giving suggestions.

The questionnaire consisted of an introduction informing each student of the general subject of the survey, namely to investigate their opinions about motivation and interests on Reading and the students' own opinions about factors influencing reading comprehension

In the questionnaire there were mainly two types of questions. The first type was multiple-choice questions, and here students were told to give the answer they thought agreed with their own opinions.. For the second type of question, the closed ones, there was rating using words, like *Every day, Often, Rarely, and Never;* The students were here asked to circle only the one option they thought was closest to

their opinion.

Since these two types of questions were closed (and semi-closed), there was a need for the students to be able to say something in their own words at the end of the questionnaire. So in addition, as mentioned above, there were two open-ended questions at the end. In the first question, they were asked to give their opinion about any other reading comprehension factor they think have a great influence in reading comprehension.

3.4-Outer causes:

a- Community characteristics

One of the major reasons why students have poor results in Reading Comprehension test is the community characteristic. By this term we understand the relationship people have with reading. If people have good relationship with readings, that is to say, if they read a lot then their results in reading comprehension would be better.

b- Class size

Class size is another important factor of a great influence on Language learning, therefore on Reading Comprehension activities. It is quite evident that a large class has a negative effect on Reading comprehension activities.

c- Out of school activities.

Out of school activities related to Reading Comprehension otherwise can be referred with the term Extensive Reading. According to Stephan Krashen's theory on Reading Comprehension, more precisely on his Input Theory .[1] "The best way to improve reading is by reading, in this way we can improve second language acquisition as a whole process, comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, writing etc." Thus it is a must for students with poor result in Reading Comprehension to read and practice out of school activities.

4.4-Reading Material

 The students' achievements' in reading depends on the level of the difficulty of the text. Some texts are considered to be more difficult such as texts which lack organization, have plenty of new words,

scientific texts etc. Thus, it can influence students' achievement if the text given is not at the right level of the difficulty of the readers or the students.

4.5- Teacher of Reading

Another thing considered of a great importance is the teacher of reading. He or she should be careful in choosing the text and giving the tasks or using the right techniques and strategies to facilitate the students` way through text comprehension.

1.6 -Instructional strategies (Questioning)

Question strategy is a very important external factor to teaching Reading Comprehension. Every teacher should know how to motivate students by using a strategy of questioning the text. When dealing with questions strategies we turn back to Brown. According to him the most important key to create an interactive learning is the initiation of interaction from the teacher by using question, Brown (2001:169). Appropriate questioning can fulfil a number of different functions, such as:

1.   Teacher questions give the students the possibility to produce the language comfortably. It is very scary for the students to have to initiate conversation or topics for discussion.

2.   Teacher question can serve to initiate a chain reaction of students interaction among themselves.

3.   Teacher questions giving immediate feedback about students' comprehension.

4.   Teacher questions provide students with opportunities to find out what they think. As they are nudged into responding to questions about, say, a reading, they can discover what their own opinions and reactions are. This self-discovery can be especially useful for a pre-reading activity (Krashen Stephen, (1981) Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning. New York: Pregamon Pres)

If a teacher lacks the above points, the results will not be at a satisfactory level.

5-Inner causes

The internal reasons or causes are those that come from the inner side of the reader. The internal reasons or factors are usually defined as the factors which come from the reader himself. According to Kahayanto, these factors are usually known as personal factors, because they have existed inside the reader. Some of these factors are: motivation, interest, and commitment to the task.

5.1 Motivation

Motivation is regarded very important when analysing a text. It plays an important role in comprehending it. According to Brown (2001:75) the students will be motivated to read when they fell that they need something from the text. Furthermore he divides the motivation theory into two kinds, they are: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The intrinsic motivation is defined as follow:

"Intrinsically motivated activities are ones from which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. People seem to engage in the activities for their own sake and not because they lead to an extrinsic reward. It is aimed at bringing about curtaining internally rewarding consequences, namely, feelings of competence and self-determination." [3]

While extrinsic motivation is defined by him as extrinsically motivated behaviours that carried out in anticipation of a reward from outside and beyond the self. Such as; money, prizes, grades, and even certain of positive feedback.

5.2 - Interest

Another important internal factor is interest. It is being one of the important factors that influence in increasing the students' comprehension achievement in reading, for instance if a student has interest to read, it means that he or she will get a good achievement. On the other hand, if the reader has no any interest to read, it can influence his or her achievement. Thus we can conclude that it is impossible for the students to understand the text if he or she has no interest

and motivation to read. So the good interest and motivation result the good achievement of the students.

5.3-Commitment

When you are doing a task, in order to succeed first of all you need to have a strong commitment to it. Such is the case of language learning, therefore of Reading Comprehension.

6-Results of the study

Let us see more concretely these factors reflected to the students.

Based on the questionnaires we did in some of the high schools of Albania showed that students were not fully motivated and interested in Reading in English Language.

There were asked 100 hundred students to rate from 0 to 5 the rate their desire and willingness to read in English Language.

Their answer is shown on the char 1. Most of them rated number four which on the chart is shown on light blue.

Chart1.

1. The results for the second question: How often do you volunteer to read or answer a question about a certain text in the foreign language class?

Chart 2.

   3. What do you consider as an important motive to encourage you reading in the foreign language?

For this questions the results were like above:

30 %   *The Text*

20 %   *The teacher*

50%   *Reading and comprehending strategies*

4.Which are the causes of students' Reading Comprehension deficiency in the foreign language?

Strangely students listed almost the same factors mentioned above.

Most of them listed these reasons:

- *Motivation*

- *Interest*

- *Text*

- *Teacher*

- *Strategies and questions about the text*

5..How often does your teacher make pre-questions about a certain text?

Chart 3.

Chart 4.

Reading material which poses difficulties in comprehension.

Other important questions were about the strategies used for Reading Comprehension activities in the English class. Most of the students replied that the teacher mainly explains the main idea of the texts without leaving enough time and space for the students to be engaged themselves on Reading Comprehension activities, this happens for several factors such as the large class, not having a clear strategy, the right skills et.

Another important issue is the familiarity of students with some of the most important famous techniques used widely on teaching and the

result is:

50% familiar with *Venn diagram*

40% familiar with *Compare and Contrast*

10% familiar with *The map of events*

20% familiar with *Cluster*

10% familiar with *KWL(Know Want to learn Learnt)*

Concerning questioning strategies students were asked for the type of questions used mostly in English classes and the use of pre questions. Based on their answers we can say that in Albanian high schools there is not a proper question strategy, therefore it is necessary for teacher to be trained and encouraged to uses such strategies.

7 -Recommendation

Some important questioning strategies that help to easy Reading Comprehension process. Based on the questionnaires filled by the students one of the causes of Reading Comprehension deficiency is the lack of a proper questioning strategy use in English classes. Thus it is quite necessary to have an overview of these strategies and encourage teachers to use them on their teaching.

Pre-questioning

Brown's (2001 defined pre-questioning implicitly as some questions which are provided before the students read the whole text, in order to build the students' interest and motivation, also their cognitive factors and pre-questioning is very useful to activate the schemata, thus the students can predict what will be faced by them in the reading text.

Kinds of Pre-questioning

According to Harmer (1985:153), there are some kinds of pre-questioning, they are: Pre-questioning before reading to confirm expectations, pre-questioning before reading to extract specific information, pre-questioning before reading for general comprehension, and

pre-questioning before reading for detail comprehension. The explanations are as following:

Pre-questioning before reading to confirm expectations

The use of pre-questioning as a tool for placing great emphasis on the lead-in stage (where students are encouraged to become interested in the subject matter of the text), encourages students to predict the content of the text, and gives them an interesting and motivating purpose for reading.

Pre-questioning before reading to extract specific information

Pre-questioning as a tool to force the students to extract specific information from the text. They are going to answer before reading the text. If they do this it will be possible for them to read in the required way, they should seen the text only to extract the information the questions demand.

Pre-questioning before reading for general comprehension

In this case pre-questioning used to build up the students' prior knowledge.

Pre-questioning before reading for detailed comprehension

This kind of pre-questioning intends to give the students some detailed information that should be found by them in the whole of the text.

8-Conclusion

As a conclusion we can say that there is not a satisfactory English language outcome in Albanian high school students, mainly on the Reading Comprehension part, this is due to several reasons.

Based on our study and results some of the most important causes that lead to Reading Comprehension deficiency are: motivation, strategy of reading and questioning,

Students are not fully motivated. Based on the questionnaires we did in several Albanian schools the result was that they have not enough

interests and motivation to read a text in foreign language. Most of them rarely volunteer to read a text in the classroom and they have no desire to do extensive reading.

Another important cause is strategy of reading and questioning. They are consider by students to be important but not available in their classroom.

In this context it is highly recommended to use better strategies as for instance questions and pre questions, in this way the results would be better.

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