

Understanding Reading In English: An Analysis Of Students' Project Work

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Abstrak : This study attempts to investigate the students' understanding of reading in English by analyzing the students' project work. The objectives are to know the skills in note making the students used to assist in their understanding of reading text and how the note making help them in writing a summary. This study also looks at how the students' proficiency in English help them in understanding their reading material. Data were taken from the project work made by the students. The project work requires the students to read a piece of reading material, make notes on the reading material and write a summary of the reading material based on the note making that they have made. The students who did the project works were from the TESL and Civil in Education course in Faculty of Education in UTM. The findings show that most of the students employ some type of skills in note making. These skills are; using linear and non-linear form of note making, clear organization of idea, using simple words in the note making and also sufficient content. In addition, the students' proficiency in English also plays a role in understanding English. This study aims to help the students in their reading of English as a Second language by providing the skills that are useful in note making that can assist in understanding reading in English. It is also hoped that teachers of English as a Second language will benefit from the study where they can use the skills provided in their language learning classroom.

Keywords : understanding reading, English, Project Work

Introduction

Reading and understanding a reading material or text in English as a second or target language has always been difficult for second language learners. Different skills and strategies in reading in the first language or native language text may be applied differently in the reading of the second language. The ability to understand a reading text or material in a second language is needed to be a proficient reader in the second language. Ways in which the learners can understand a second language text also help them in better understanding of the text. This way could be referring to the dictionary or underlining the main idea of the text. Therefore, this study attempts to present the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study and also the scope of the study.

Statement of the Problem

According to Goldman et al (2006), text comprehension is a complicated process. Many aspects of reading need to be considered such as the word perception, syntactical analysis, semantic analysis, and inference making for a text comprehension process to happen. This shows that reading and understanding is a difficult process where learners have to engage in a process before they can understand a piece of reading material. The research made by Goldman et al is for the text of first language, but it can also be applied for the reading of second language. The problem is much bigger for reading in second language because not all of the learners have the sufficient vocabulary to understand a piece of second language reading materials. For a proficient reader in English, the process has already become automatic where he did not realize

the process that is occurring when he reads. As for the low proficient reader, he has to go through this process of understanding a text where he needs some guidance in understanding reading in second language such as a certain skills in reading and translation of the reading text.

From the statement above, we could say the most of the learner have problem in comprehending a reading materials regardless of the language. In this study, the focus is the reading in second language which is English. The problems that usually occur are when the students were given a text that they are not able to understand or did not get what the writer of the text is trying to convey. As the researcher is a student herself, many of the other students have complained of difficulty in understanding a reading materials especially if it is in English. A lot of lecturers also made comments on students who are uninterested in reading materials in English because they think it is difficult to comprehend. Understanding a piece of reading material is usually the first step in doing any task which requires reading. Students have to understand the text to be able to answer the given question or to make remark of the reading material.

Another problem is that students may have problem in summarizing the text in their own words after reading the text. This is due to the lack of skills, strategies and command of the target language. Since the skills in the first language can not always be transferred to the second language, it is therefore problematic to the students to master the skills in second language reading. Here, it will be skills in reading in English.

The project work that the students have to do in this study require the students to read a second language text, make notes and summarise the text read. Thus, this task requires the students to be able to understand the reading text before they can come up with the notes and subsequently the summary. From the statement mentioned in the previous paragraphs, it is assumed that the students will face or will probably encounter problems in understanding the reading materials in some way or another regardless of his proficiency.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are: i) to identify the skills in note making that can assist students in understanding reading in English and in writing summaries based on their chosen articles. The study also attempts to find out the extent in which the students English language proficiency plays a role in understanding reading in English. The English language proficiency of the students is based on the students' MUET (Malaysian University English Test) results. The study also attempts to determine the strategies that the students commonly used in note-making. The analysis conducted hoped to give an understanding for the teachers to help their students in their reading in the second language.

Significance of the Study

Students in higher education institution are required to equip themselves in skills in reading which is very crucial to excel in their study. With the vast collection of books on science and technology written in the English (or target language), it is therefore important for the students to master the skills and strategies in reading. Hence, the significance of the study is to students whose second language is English and having problem with understanding the reading materials written in English. It is also beneficial for learner who wants to know some of the skills in note making that can assist them in understanding reading in English. Furthermore, the study could also be of interest to teacher of second language learners who are interested in a new perspective on reading.

Research Instrument

This research will attempt to use qualitative research methodology where the data analyzed were based on what the students' work that without looking at the process of producing the work. The data analyzed will also look at the written material produced by the students where findings will be based on work of the students and not on the process that the students went through to finish the work. The instruments used to analyze the data used a table that contained criteria for each article, the note making and the summary writing (Refer Appendix A). The table was used to see the relationship between the articles read and the note making produced as well as the summary written.

Each project work was analyzed using this table (see Appendix A). The table had the name of each article in the project work, a section for the remarks made in the article where it sought to understand how the students made notes through highlighting of important ideas proposed by the author, scribbling of notes on the reading materials and underlining on the articles.

The table also had a column where the researcher could put remarks or notes, for example, the overall view of the work done by the students. This column also was used to record the researcher's opinions on the validity and the quality of the students' note-making and summary writing based on the articles read.

Result

In the summary writing, the students were required to use their notes as a guideline for writing their summary. They have to make use of the keywords in the note making and elaborate it using their own words in their summary.

Student A2 summary followed the note making closely with all the ideas in the note making being transferred into the summary. The elaboration of ideas in the summary was very little with one to two sentences for each idea. Student A2 did not paraphrase any sentence from the article but use her own sentence in the summary.

As for student B3, the summary did not reflect the note making where the note making was made of short and simple words with lacking in content but the summary is made of ideas that did not appear in the note making. The sentences in the summary were based on the paraphrasing from the article with a few elaboration made by student B3. The student B3 ideas in the summary are were not found in his note making. It could be said that student B3 have referred to the article to write the summary.

Summary C4 content is based on the note making made. The ideas in the note making appeared in the summary. Student C4 used all the ideas that she put in the note making into her summary. The elaboration of ideas in the summary were also being made by the student C4 herself with no paraphrasing from the article.

The length of the summary varies from one student to another. There are students writing the summary for two or more pages and some of the students provide less than two full pages of summary.

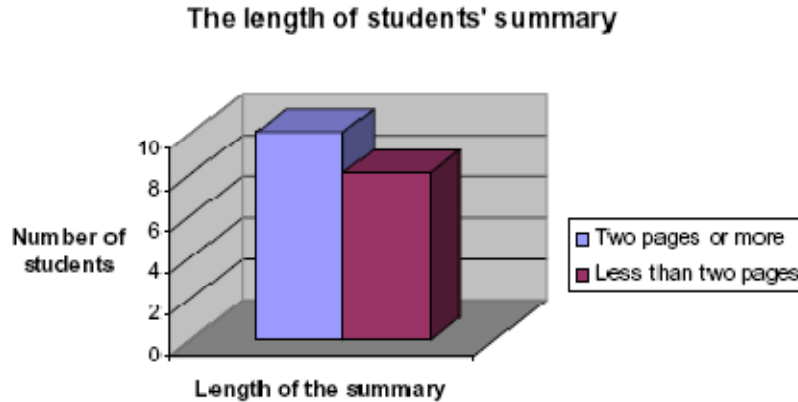


Figure 1: The length of the students' summary

A total of 10 students had written two or more pages of the summary writing whereas the remaining eight students produced a less than two pages of summary writing.

Students A1, A3, A5, B1, B2, B3, B4, B6, C1 and C6 had made two or more pages of summary writing. The length of the summary might have shown the lengthy or extensive elaboration of ideas made by the students or the sentences used by the students in the summary. Paraphrasing from the article will make the summary longer and lifting the sentences from the article will also make the summary longer.

As for the students who did not properly use the note making, it can be seen in the summary where the ideas in the note making did not appear in the summary. The students have taken other ideas to be put in the summary. It could also be seen where the students' summary did not really reflect the article they had read. This could mean that the students did not understand the article they read where they failed to provide the necessary ideas in the article into the note making and then to the summary writing.

From the summary writing made by the students, referring back to the article when doing the summary could mean that the note making that the students have made are not sufficient to assist them in their summary writing.

From the data, we can see that the students' English language proficiency does play a role in the students' work. It can be seen that the student who achieved Band 4 or above in their MUET tend to do well in their note making and summary writing. This means that, the students made use of good note making skills in their note making and wrote a better summary compared to the students who get Band 3 or lower in their MUET.

Students who obtain Band 5 and above in their MUET scores have shown good note making where their note making are clear in terms of the organization of ideas, language usage and also the content. It can be seen in student A3's example of note making.

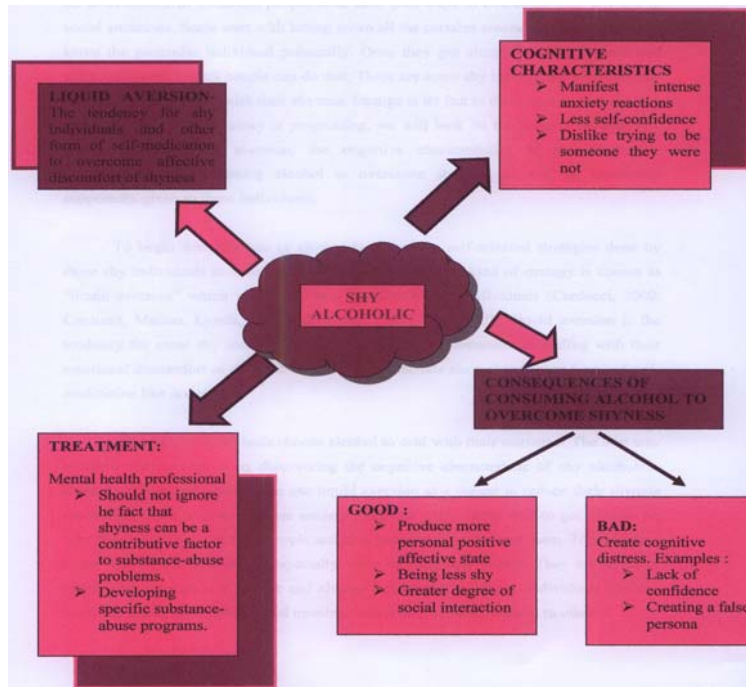


Figure 2 : Sample 9: Note-making made by high proficiency student

Figure 2 above shows example of student A3's note making. In the note making, the ideas in the article are being organized in a clear manner where main ideas are put as the headings in the boxes and the sub ideas listed under the main ideas.

Looking at the student who obtained Band 2 in his MUET score shows a lack in note making skills where the note making does not have a clear organization and also lack in the term of the content. It can be seen in student B3's example of note making in.

Discussion

From the findings, it can be concluded that the skills in note making used by the students are helpful in making them understand the text better. The ability of the students to extract the important ideas in the text has shown that they understood the text if not thoroughly, they understood the main ideas the writer tried to convey. The note making were the evidence that they understood what they were reading. In order to transfer the information in the text into note making, it requires them to understand the text. Looking at the contents of the note making, it can also be seen that most of the students managed to make use of almost all of the important ideas in the text by integrating them into their note making.

The skills used by the students in the note making have helped them in understanding their reading by providing a simplified version of the text. In doing the note making, they were able to see the important ideas being extracted from the text they read, thus, giving them a clearer picture of what the author's tried to convey. They were also able to see the flow of the ideas being mapped or written in the note making. The skills used in note making were useful to help them understand the text better because the key words in the note making provided a clue of the main ideas being mentioned in the text. Students can also relate the keywords in the note making to the text.

In terms of the contents of the notes made, some students provide an elaborate explanation of ideas in the notes, while others provide important ideas in the note making without lengthy explanation of the main ideas.

The summary that most of the students did was based on the note making. This shows that the students utilize the note making to help them in writing their summary. In the summary, the main points of the note making that the students made appear in their summary.

The elaboration of ideas in the summary could show that the students understand the article based on the note making that they have made. The ability to transfer the note making into the summary had helped the student understand the article better.

For the students who have taken the sentences from the article, there are two possible reasons in doing so. It could mean that the students refer to the article for quotation made in the article or need to use specific words in the article. Another reason could be that they have to refer to the article for scientific definition of terms where they cannot use their own word to explain the terms. In using the sentences from the article, it did not mean that the students have abandoned the note making altogether. The note making had helped them in providing the main ideas to write the summary and some of the sentences in the summary taken from the article are used to support the main ideas.

The students' English language proficiency did play a role in the students understanding of reading. Students with higher command of the language made a better note making using the skills mentioned above to help them in their reading, whereas students with lower command of the language did not have all the necessary skills in note making to help them in understanding their reading. Having a higher command of the English language had helped students in understanding the article that they read. The note making made by the students have shown that those who have the necessary skills in note making were able to provide all the important ideas in the article into the note making.

The inability to have a certain skills in preparing the note making will result in insufficient content or ability in the summary writing. The students have to understand the article to make note of it and hence to write a summary of the article.

The students' English language background provides the researcher an overview on the students' command in the language. The significant achievement of the students from the TESL course could be due to the high expectation of the course that demand the students' excellent achievement before they can join the TESL course in UTM.

The students' particular in Table 4.4 include the students' name, MUET results and also the course that the students are attending in UTM.

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