

Iranian Students of Management EAP Reading: Relationship between Attitude and Reading Proficiency

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Abstract

Attitude is regarded as cardinal factor influencing language learning and language success. The purpose of the present study was twofold. Firstly, it tried to investigate the relationship between the reading proficiency skill of managements' students and their attitude. Secondly, it attempted to evaluate the attitude that Iranian learners adopt toward EAP reading. For this purpose, at first by (QPT) test the students whose scores fell one standard deviation above the mean and below the mean were selected as the intermediate group. The study population comprised 100 students from whom 60 intermediate subjects were chosen in the Sobhe Sadegh University. Initially, one set of reading proficiency test was administered (RPT) to 60 male and female students. Then, one attitude questionnaire that examined their attitude toward EAP reading was given to them. Analyzing the data using SPSS indicated that there is no correlation between the attitude of learners and reading skill, and reading skill and attitudes of learners are two uncorrelated factors. However, it was found that students had positive attitudes toward EAP reading. EAP materials developers and instructors may benefit from the present findings.

Keywords: reading, reading proficiency, EAP, attitude

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays reading skills have become the main concern of teachers. Reading is a process that one needs not only to understand the direct meaning, but also to understand the implicit ideas. Grabe and Stoller (2001) believe that amongst the four skills, the most important academic language skill is reading because the main purpose for learning new information is reading. Reading a text has different aims such as: getting the main ideas, searching specific information, learning new information, evaluating information from multiple text, for broad comprehension, and for enjoyment.

An important need of EAP students worldwide is reading comprehension. Atai and Dashtestani (2013) quoting Hyland (2006) believe that "English for academic purposes

(EAP) is a branch of the field of English language teaching (ELT) which aims at helping learners to study English through linking language instruction to the cognitive, social, and linguistic requirements of specific academic field (p.23)".

Reading attitude fulfills a central role in the development and use of life long reading skills. Richek, List, and Lerner (1989) expressed that "the final success of instruction is strongly affected by the reader's attitude" (p.60). Lipson and Wixon (1992) conclude "the student's attitude toward reading is a basic factor affecting reading performance" (p.141).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading

Reading is a conversation, which is an interaction between readers and writers (Nuttall, 1996). Medina (2011) explained reading as a communication, participation of readers in producing meaning and operation of strategies. Rivers (1981, p.147) explained that "reading is the most important activity in any language class, not only as a source of information and a pleasurable activity, but also as a means of consolidating and extending one's which are knowledge of the language. Karbalaee (2010b, p.52) expressed reading as a "dynamic and interactive process, which learners make use of background knowledge, text schema, lexical and grammatical awareness, L1- related knowledge, and real world knowledge, as well as their personal purposes and goals, to arrive at an understanding of written material".

Background of EAP reading

At first EAP originated from England. Gillett and Wray (2006) explained EAP, as a branch of ELT, and the role of teacher is to understand the needs of students in academic course, and help learner act better in a limited time. It aims to teach student's grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and skills that they need for education. Hyland (2006, p.5) claimed that "EAP is a field open to self – scrutiny and charge, and for these reasons it offers language teachers an ethical, reflective, and fruitful field of research and professional practice and offers students a way of understanding their chosen courses and disciplines". According to Gillett (2011) the main aims of EAP is to teach language, both general academic language and subject specific language. As cited in Huang (2000, p.372) Flower dew and Peacock (2001) recognized some micro and macro reading skills that EAP students should develop them. "The macro- skills include the ability to make use of learners' prior knowledge to make sense of new material and fit new knowledge into their schema. Important micro skills include recognizing logical relationships, definitions, generalizations, examples, explanations, predictions, and distinguishing fact from opinion".

Atai and Fatahi- Majd (2013) advance three approaches to EAP reading comprehension teaching and learning, the first approaches indicates a shift in understanding the goal of reading comprehension from that of reading passage as a linguistic entity to that of reading passage as a medium of information (John & Davies, 1983). As to the second

approach, it underlines the role of skill and language aims at gearing the EAP lesson to language skills, and strategies outstandingly significant to EAP students (Dudley- Evans & St John, 1998). Genre-based teaching and learning, as the third approach, initiates based on the presupposition that making passages and contexts a center of analysis enables teachers to raise student's awareness of the interdisciplinary valued genre, the means utilized to foster meaning in context and how effective genres can be settled (Hyland, 2006).

Attitudes toward reading

Hosseini and Pourmandnia (2013) explained the concept of learners' attitude concentrate on the attention of learners in interpretation and investigation of human behavior. Attitude is defined as a tendency to respond negatively or positively towards idea, person, and situation.

According to Fazio and Olson (2003) attitude is included three parts such as affective, behavioral, and cognitive. Emotional refers to emotional response toward the attitude, cognitive refers to the idea and believe that everyone has about object toward attitude, and behavioral refers to the behaviors toward attitude. An important factor in educational environment is reading attitude. It affects students' reading achievement and reading activities of learners in the classroom, and defined whether they are independent readers or dependent readers (Logan & Johnston, 2009).

As cited in Parker (2004) reading attitudes are the ability of students to read. Students' reading attitude estimates their future successes in reading and writing. Attitude has an important role in development and use of reading skill (Krashen, 2002). The role of attitude in developing readers is important because of two reasons, first reason is that attitudes has an effect on the level of achievement. Second reasons is about poor attitude causes that the readers don't read when other option exist (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). A basic factor has an effect on performance of readers is attitude of learners toward reading. The attitude of learners are important because it has effect on the result of their work.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were addressed in the present study:

1. What attitudes do students of management adopt towards their EAP reading course?
2. Is there a significant relationship between management students' reading proficiency and their attitudes towards reading?

METHOD

Participants

To achieve the goals of this study, at first 100 students of Management were selected from EAP classes in University of Sobhe Sadegh. Then, a Quick Placement Test (QPT),

was run to select 60 homogeneous students based on their level of proficiency. Those students whose scores fell one standard deviation above the mean and those whose scores fell one standard deviation below the mean were selected. As the level of these learners were intermediate, In fact, very weak and very strong students were not selected. All the participants were within the age range of 20 to 35 years and they were all studying in the field of Management.

Instruments

In this study, three types of materials were employed for data collection:

QPT (Quick Placement Test)

Quick Placement Test (QPT) was conducted whose validity and reliability had already been confirmed. It consisted of 40 multiple choice items. The purpose behind such a test was to select 60 homogeneous students based on the normal distribution of the scores using the QPT level chart.

Attitude questionnaire

A researcher made questionnaire of 20 test items was designed to discover the attitudes of the learners toward reading. As for the reliability of the questionnaire, alpha Cronbach method was applied. Also, the validity was checked by two experts in the field of TEFL.

RPT (Reading Proficiency Test)

In this part, five reading comprehension texts from the book of management were selected. Each text was followed by ten questions related to the texts. By this test, the attitudes of learners toward EAP reading were measured. The reliability and validity of reading proficiency test was checked.

Procedures

This study was conducted in Sobhe Sadegh University. As it was mentioned in participant section, the sample of the study was 100 students. Participants were male and female. Then, a Quick Placement Test (QPT) was run to select 60 homogeneous students based on the normal distribution of the scores using the QPT level chart. The level of students were intermediate. Then researcher gave an attitude questionnaire to learners to obtain their attitude toward reading. Afterward, the researcher provided an EAP reading proficiency test that included 50 items in the field of management in order to obtain the attitudes of learners toward EAP reading.

RESULTS

In order to analyze the data and answer the research questions, the attitudes of learners toward EAP reading was measured and the relationship between management students' reading proficiency and their attitude towards reading was measured. Moreover, the

relationship between management students' reading proficiency and their attitude towards reading was measured. Along this line, in this research SPSS 22 software was used. In statistical analysis, descriptive statistics were used, to obtain initial information such as average, lowest and most amount, number of data, and standard deviation. In inferential statistics, one sample T-Test and Pierson's correlation test was used.

To reject or accept the hypothesis P- value =0.05 was used that it compared with significance level (sig) in the tables. If the significance level that is listed in table was smaller than 0.05 (sig<0.05) then null hypothesis is rejected and otherwise if it was bigger than 0.05 (sig>0.05), null hypothesis is accepted. In the following, the results of reading proficiency test and attitude questionnaire which were employed in this study will be presented.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of a Quick Placement Test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
QPT	60	22.00	26.00	24.25	1.84

In this study out of the 100 learners available to the researcher in Sobhe Sadegh University, 60 learners were chosen by the researcher based on their QPT scores, those learners were placed into intermediate level. The average of their scores was 24.2500 and standard deviation was 1.84.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of scores on attitude, age and reading

		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	58	20.00	35.00	23.81	4.05
Reading	60	7.00	50.00	30.81	13.24
Attitude	60	1.00	4.45	3.33	.60

In table 4.3 descriptive data of 60 participants in this research are provided. The lowest age was 20 and the highest age was 35. The mean was 23.8 and standard deviation was 4.05. The lowest reading skill score from 50 was 7 and highest score was 50, with an average of 30.8 and standard deviation was 13.25. Learner's attitude toward reading had lowest score 1 and highest score 4.45 with an average of 3.33 and standard deviation of 0.6.

Table 3. One-Sample Test of Attitude

Test Value = 3						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Attitude	4.27	59	.000	.33	.176	.487

According to table 4. There was a statistically significant difference between the learners' mean attitude score (M= 3.33) and the average value of the choices (i.e. 3.00) since the p value was smaller than the specified level of significance (.000<0.5). It could be thus concluded that the target learners had positive attitude toward reading.

Table 5. Frequency of one Question of Attitude Questionnaire: I thought EAP reading was a good way to learn English.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	7	11.7
Disagree	9	15.0
No Idea	17	28.3
Agree	22	36.7
Strongly Agree	5	8.3
Total	60	100.0

Table 6. Correlation of reading & attitude

	Attitude Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Reading	.088	.503	60

Pearson correlation was used to investigate the existence or non-existence relation between reading proficiency and attitudes of learners. Within the context of this study, then these two variables were considered to be not correlated. In fact, there was no statistically significant correlation between reading proficiency and attitude. That means, increases or decreases in reading proficiency do not significantly relate to increases or decreases in attitude.

As it can be seen in table 4.26, a significant correlation existed between attitude and reading skill was 0.503, and it was more than 0.05 and null hypothesis (all hypothesis were tested at the 0.05 level of significance) was accepted. Then within the context of this study, these two variables were considered to be not correlated. Then the research hypothesis that was there is no significant relationship between reading and attitudes of learners was accepted.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Reading skill is an important component in the area of education. In the modern world of science and technology reading is a pivotal need of people. Therefore, an attempt has been made in this study to investigate the attitude of learners toward EAP reading. The results were obtained through reading attitudes questionnaire, and reading proficiency test. Attitude is one of the main factors which influences language learning (Gardner, 1985). Moreover, in teaching and learning process attitude has an effective and important role.

One of the goals of this study is to answer the first research question: "What attitudes do students of management adopt towards their EAP reading course?" Many factors has an effect on language learning, the most important and facilitating factor is positive attitude (Mian, 1998). Schooten and Gloopper (2002, p.172) claimed that "educators have been interested in attitudes because of their possible impact on learning, and while attitudes have not been convincingly linked to achievement, they have been long considered an important outcome of education".

In this study, 20 items in the questionnaire were used to gain insight into the participants' attitudes toward EAP reading. The participants were asked to mark the statement that best express their opinion in each one of the Likert scale items. There were five possible responses in the scale. "strongly agree", "agree", "no idea", "disagree", "strongly disagree" and a value was assigned to each of these alternatives, (1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=no idea, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). A higher score indicated a more positive attitude toward reading.

Another goal of the current research was to investigate the second research question: Is there a relationship between reading proficiency and attitudes of the learners toward EAP reading? This research question was followed by the hypothesis that there is no significance relationship between reading proficiency and attitudes of the learners. The view of reading differs from person to person by considering the attitudes and goals of learners toward context. The meaning of reading depend on the aim of readers on the text, on the attitude of readers toward text, on the content of reading, and on the background of readers. Teachers can develop attitudes if they work to positively change some factors such as the idea of the readers that have about the results of the reading, history of reading experience, and motivation of readers (McKenna, Stratton, Grindler, and Jenkins, 1995). In this study, the reading proficiency test (RPT) that was made up five comprehension passages was used. Each passage featured ten multiple choice questions that tested students' reading skill. In addition one attitude questionnaire that mentioned above was used. At last, the researcher compared the correlation of attitude questionnaire and reading proficiency test. The findings revealed that there was no significant relationship between reading proficiency and attitude of learners.

Reading is a skill which permeates many aspects of modern life and in our society, it is simply assumed that individual can read. The aim of this study was to investigate the attitude of learners toward reading and investigate the nature of the relationship, if any, between reading proficiency and attitude of learners toward EAP reading. More specifically, the research hypothesis read as follow:

There is no significant relationship between reading proficiency and the attitude of learners. The results of the investigation showed that above hypothesis was true and this hypothesis was confirmed. The following conclusions were drawn: In addition, the findings of the present study demonstrated that managements' students had positive attitudes toward EAP reading. Then, there is no significant relationship ($p > 0.05$) between reading proficiency and attitudes of learners. The overall results of this study reflect the fact that the learners have both positive and negative attitudes toward reading skill, but here they had positive attitudes and the effects of attitudes on reading has an important result on education.

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