
***Title: Adapting a Content-Based Approach in ESP Teaching: an Action
Research on the Master Students of Developmental Psychology***

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Biodata

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Abstract :

Using English nowadays as a lingua franca within the newly emerging world-order and international market-place, learning English for specific purposes is of an urgent need. To better cope with this demand, researchers around the world publish their research articles and books in that language. As a result, an adequate knowledge of the reading skills along with effective reading strategies have become *a defacto* for better access to the up-date materials.

In spite of this significance, teaching the reading skills in the ESP context seems to be taken for granted without paying more attention to the pivotal role of selecting appropriate content as far as interesting texts and suitable activities. This paper aims, basically, at displaying the significance of providing learners with content closely related to their subject courses and whether this might enhance their reading comprehension and language proficiency.

Key-words: ESP, Reading Comprehension, Content-familiarity, Language Proficiency.

الملخص:

إن استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة عالمية أصبح ضرورة حتمية أملتها متطلبات الحياة، لذا يعد تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة حاجة ملحة. و للتعامل بشكل أفضل مع هذه الاحتياجات، انصب اهتمام الباحثين في جميع أنحاء العالم على استعمال هذه اللغة في نشر مقالاتهم وبحوثهم. ولهذا أصبح من الملح على القراء أن تتوفر لديهم المعرفة الكافية لمهارات القراءة جنباً إلى جنب مع استراتيجياتها الفعالة من أجل تحسين الوصول إلى استخدامها الأمثل في كل المجالات.

فبالرغم من اهتمام الباحثين في هذا المجال ، فان تعليم مهارات القراءة في سياق تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض معينة لم يلق اهتمام الكافي من حيث الدور المحوري لاختيار المحتوى المناسب من النصوص والأنشطة. وتهدف هذه الدراسة بالدرجة الأولى إلى إبراز دور الإدراك المعرفي للموضوع و دوره في تعزيز الفهم في القراءة وإتقان اللغة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة، القراءة مع الفهم، الإدراك المعرفي، إتقان اللغة

1.1.Introduction

The majority of the articles and textbooks are published in English, thus, whatever language of instruction in the academic context; students are required to be able to read in the English language. As a result, reading for specific or academic purposes is often considered as an important skill among the other four skills as viewed by Robinson (1991:102) who defines reading as “*probably the most generally needed skill in EAP worldwide*”

Starting from the view that academic discourses contain certain language features that occur more frequently such as technical and sub-technical terminology, providing ESP / EAP learners with appropriate content is, usually, believed to be of major significance. In This vein, Jordan (1997) deems that the focus has to be on two important aspects while reading, namely the subject matter of what they read and the language which is expressed. In other terms, these include paying attention to both the content and the form of the text. The motive behind this is that the EAP learner is not only concerned with decoding passages but also the way these texts are used to convey communication.

Nonetheless, what draws the researchers’ attention over a long period of time is how this content may affect the students’ reading proficiency. As a result, several studies have been conducted on the role of content-familiarity and unfamiliarity in developing reading comprehension.

1.2.Aim and Objective of the Study

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This research, thus, aims at investigating whether an ESP course in psychology-based reading may enhance the students' reading comprehension despite their language weaknesses. Hence, the purpose guiding this study is:

- To identify whether our ESP teachers teach reading strategies and determine the students' interests on these courses.
- To investigate whether training students to read psychology-based themes may improve their reading comprehension.
- To display the significance of content-familiarity to increase reading comprehension, i.e., identifying whether the learners compensate for their language weaknesses.

1.3.The participants' Needs and Requirements

The subjects selected as a sample population in this present study are first-year master students of developmental psychopathology at ABU-BAKR BELKAID University of Tlemcen. Due to the fact that there are a limited number of students in this department, this experiment, in general, consists of a random assignment of the population; all the members of this group are included without exception so as to ensure the validity of the research study, enabling the researcher to probably obtain *generalizability* of results.

This group almost composed of 10 females and 6 males ranging in age from 21 to 26 years old, coming from two different learning environments, namely letters and scientific streams, they have Arabic as the only language of instruction; however, due to the process of globalization, the psychology department offers an obligatory ESP course in the two semesters. As a result, they attend these courses with different English language background since only four of these students have received ESP courses during their graduation studies.

The rationale behind choosing this group is that, at this stage, these learners are supposed to be aware of the importance of the English language in their field of specialization and are believed to be enough motivated and interested in the ESP courses. This idea has been stated by Kennedy *et al* (1984:13- 14):

The older a learner is, the more likely to have his own definite ideas on why he is learning English...the utility of learning English is likely to be more apparent.

Students, therefore, should be aware of this importance of English as a worldwide language; most of the researches and studies are published in that language. Thus, it is necessary for the present study to cater for the immediate needs of these students as a result, ESP reading courses were offered during their academic year for the sake of providing them with materials based on their discourse community, and therefore developing their reading comprehension.

1.4. Research Methods and Tools

The present research work is, thus, based on the following O'Brien's action research model, relying on the afford mentioned steps namely, diagnosing; acting; observing and reflecting.

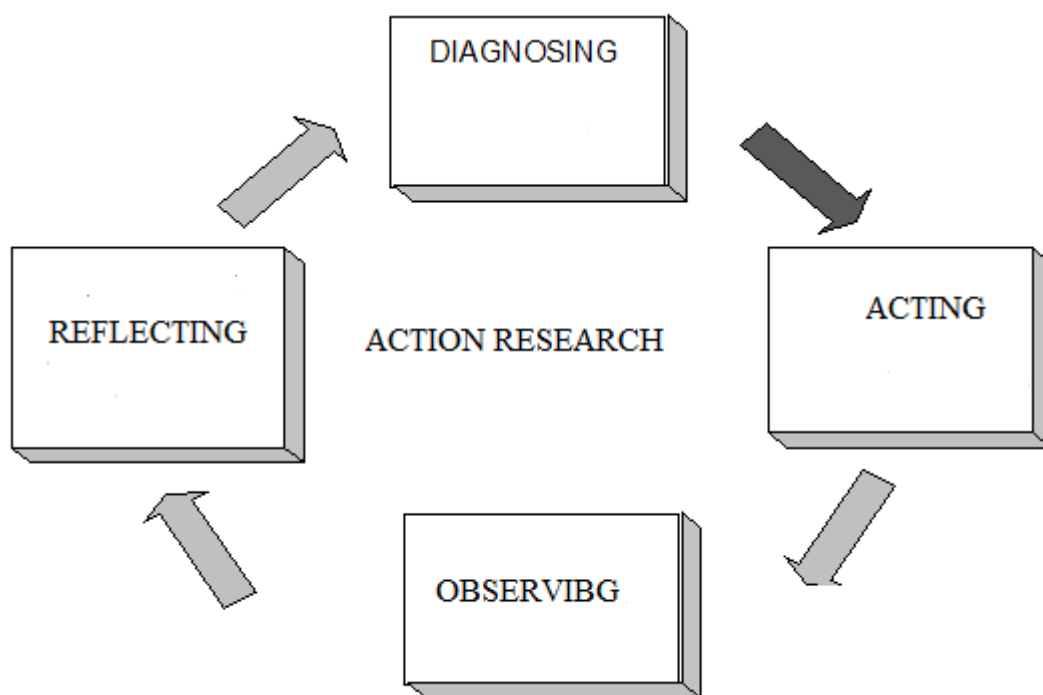


Figure1: Cyclical AR model based on O'Brien (1998).

Consequently, due to the type of present research, data have been collected through two phases. The pre-training phase has been designed as an identification step aiming at investigating the learners' difficulties as far as reading comprehension and strategy use. To achieve the required data, two diagnostic instruments were used, namely the teachers' semi-structured interview and the learners' placement test.

The post-training phase, on the other hand, has been used as an evaluation step, aiming at assessing the effects of the planned action which included strategy-awareness to approach psychology-based themes. This has been undertaken through the submission of two evaluation instruments, namely the students' proficiency test and a semi-structured interview

1.5. Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis have been used for the sake of obtaining multi-level of analysis, and therefore reaching a near full picture of reality. Moreover, the researcher has opted for the same procedures undertaken during the data collection phase, i.e., data have been analyzed and interpreted through three different stages namely:

- Pre-training phase.
- While training phase.
- Post-training phase.

1.6. Findings

In the light of the results obtained in this pre-training test, one would say that the students' low performances of reading comprehension lied significantly in their poor application of some strategies, namely those of activating background knowledge such as *previewing*. Despite the fact that the content of the test was drawn primarily from the students' subject-matters courses, they were unable to transfer the already existed skills in their mother tongue. In this end, they seem to use a *bottom-up* model while reading focusing, most of the time, on the text as a separate process.

Using quantitative analysis, the researcher opted for some statistical techniques such as those of measuring central tendency and variance. The following table sums up the findings of this pre-training test:

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Central tendency			Variance	Standard deviation
Mode	Mean	median	2.936	1.713
09	10.09	10.5		

Table 1: Summary of the Students’ Pre-Training Scores.

The use of central tendency in this kind of analysis was meant to see the total distribution of the scores attained by our ESP learners. Therefore, this table displays that the most frequently score obtained in this placement test was nine (09), while the median of the group that represented the midpoint of the scores was ten and a half (10.5).

For this reason, one may conclude that the majority of the scores were below the central value. This practically means that the test was positively skewed and was difficult to the majority of the students (Norton, 2009). This obviously explains the students’ low achievement.

Knowing the normal spread of the students’ scores, the choice was made upon S.D which was, in fact, used to indicate whether the learners have had approximately the same level of achievement or not. Taking into account that their scores roughly ranged from 07.5 to 15, it seems wiser to say that they were little bit far from the mean, i.e.; 10.09. This indicates that the S.D was far from the mean which signifies the low performances of the majority of the learners.

Training learners to make use of reading strategies resulted in enhancing their reading comprehension to approach content-familiarity. This, respectively, confirms the hypothesis put at the onset of this present research work. Having a look at the learners’ scores, one may notice that most of them succeeded in the comprehension of the text, obtaining scores ranging from 10 to 16 which indicates a considerable achievement compared with pre-instruction scores. Going over statistical analysis and based on the central tendency and the standard deviation, these marks may be further elucidated. The following table endeavors to uncover the learners’ performances in the post-training phase:

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Central tendency			Variance	Standard deviation
Mode	Mean	median	3.482	1.866
10	12.34	12.5		

Table 2: The Students' Post-Training Scores.

Statistically speaking, as it shown in this table, the results display that all of the scores; that is 10, 11, 12, 13, and 16 were not very far the mean of the group which was 12.34. This justifies that the learners are homogeneous, which resulted on the fact that strategy-training was highly effective. In addition to this, the majority of the learners' scores were almost above the central value of the group which indicated that the majority of them adequately perform the task.

Furthermore, and for the sake of measuring the students' improvement in both tests, the following *t-test* formula was applied:

$$T = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{\text{var}_1}{n_1} + \frac{\text{var}_2}{n_2}}}$$

\bar{x}_1 stands for the mean of the first test.

\bar{x}_2 stands for the mean of the second test.

Var 1 stands for the variance of the first test.

Var 2 stands for the variance of the second test.

N stands for the number of the students.

$$T = \frac{10.09 - 12.17}{\sqrt{\frac{3.76}{16} + \frac{3.74}{16}}} = \frac{-2.08}{\sqrt{0.235 + 0.234}}$$

$$= \frac{-2.08}{\sqrt{0.469}}$$

$$\begin{aligned} &= \frac{-2.08}{0.685} \\ &= -3.037 \end{aligned}$$

The number -3.037 represents the *t-test* results, bearing in mind that it is negative; this indicates that the pre-test scores were lower than the students' post-test performances which means that they highly achieved the test.

1.1. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the results and conclusions drawn previously, this section seeks to provide pedagogical implications which may be of great importance of the ESP teachers of reading. Accordingly, some recommendations have been devoted to enhance the students' awareness of reading strategies in general, and activating their background knowledge in particular.

Additionally, and in an attempt at providing an effective reading course, a focus has to be put on the teachers' role in materials selections, reading tasks and reading strategies.

The reading skill is usually conceived as a difficult task to be developed to high level of proficiency, as there is also relationship between reading skills, at the one hand, and language proficiency, on the other hand. It seems, logical, for the ESP teacher to take into consideration the two directions that may result in successful reading comprehension.

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