

The Importance of Brainstorming In Improving ESP Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

Reading is an important skill that could be mastered. It is important to improve the students needs to become efficient and Proficient readers. Students in ESP courses need novel techniques that enable them to have full Comprehension of what they have already read. Therefore, interesting preparation of ESP reading textbooks that are independently taught in the Syllabus. Al so, texts should suit. The students ability to meet challenges in vocabulary, structures, ideas and novelty deduction. Thats to say, skilled brainstormer should have different Characteristics, requirements, techniques and activities to a better comprehenders.

Keyword: Reading comprehension, Brainstorming

Introduction

Brainstorming (Henceforth BS) is an effective technique for teaching reading comprehension (RC) at all stages of study and specialties.

Through this device, students can freely express and then comprehend various vocabulary structures, ideas, etc. related to a given ESP reading text before the reading activity in class. (Ahmed, 2001:96).

Thus, this study analyzes and describes the effectiveness of the BS technique on teaching ESP reading. In the beginning, the significance of the problem, the aim and limits of the study are put forward. The study, then, investigates the selection of ESP reading texts, the necessity of ESP textbooks, BS in the ESP reading texts, difficulties with using EFL, the skilled barnstormer in ESP, and the BS requirements and techniques for teaching ESP reading. Conclusions are finally drawn to crystallize the main results of the study.

Significance of the Problem

Stemming from the idea that students in advanced ESP course are often more knowledgeable than their ESP teacher concerning the area of specialization being read or discussed (Abbott, 1978:137), many teaching techniques have been used to improve their comprehension level in such courses. However, these techniques focus only on the product and process of RC. (AL- Marsumi, 1994:137). They disregard certain learning factors that effectively stimulate them to become efficient and proficient readers of ESP texts. Also, most of the Jordanian advanced ESP

courses rely heavily on the conventional techniques of reading instruction which simply involve reading the text, explaining its meaning, and answering its questions. Students in ESP courses need novel techniques that enable them to have full comprehension of what they have already read. One of such techniques is believed to be the BS adopted here as a new orientation to ESP reading instruction. This technique can better improve students' level of reading by allowing them to freely express themselves on a topic relating to a given text prior to the reading activity in class. Consequently, BS can be adopted as the most effective teaching technique and included in the teaching techniques of ESP reading since to the best of the research's knowledge, no previous study has investigated the effectiveness of BS for the improvement of the ability of Jordanian University students in ESP reading.

Aim and Limit of the Study

The study aims at analyzing and describing the effectiveness of using BS as a technique for teaching reading in advanced ESP courses. Owing to certain BS requirements, it is highly believed that students taught according to BS master the reading texts in ESP better than those taught according to other teaching techniques, i.e. the conventional techniques. However, this study is limited to undergraduate students who have the capacity to use the foreign language if they are provided with the permissive and simulative atmosphere.

Selection of ESP Reading Texts

The selection of ESP reading texts can rely on the following criteria:

- 1- Most terms incorporated in such texts are the specialized terms that are vital to the comprehension of each text. This means that such texts involve various word formations that contribute a lot to the mastery of vocabulary in the specialty concerned.
- 2- The texts relate to student's background through which they can create more ideas and some novelty ones. In this regard, (Wood 1982:171) stipulates that if students have a difficult subject from the specialization concerned they will find themselves tangled in complicated terminology and difficult concepts that they cannot understand.
- 3- While simple statement patterns dominate most of the texts, other sentence structures can be adopted. If other complicated structures are used, students may face difficulties in self-expression and comprehension of the given texts.
- 4- The texts should be devoid of any form of complexity and difficulty with meaning, vocabulary, structures ideas, styles, etc. As to the ideas chosen, they should be formulated in a simple, clear, interesting and stimulating way. Otherwise, student's reluctance to provide ideas may arise occasionally.
- 5- Concerning the kind of ESP texts, expository and argumentative texts are the most desirable since they can stimulate in students the diversion of thoughts that make them create some novelty ones. However, factual texts such as narrative and descriptive ones are so easy for students to express and comprehend (Lackstrom, 1972:59).
- 6- The balance which has to be maintained between the linguistic and the conceptual level of students is perhaps more evident in ESP programmer than general English (Kennedy and Bolithen, 1984:14).

In addition to all the criteria above, careful instruction in the significance and value of using English as a means of improving Knowledge, skills and attitudes related to a particular specialization should be provided for the students. The English language provides ESP students with the most up-to-date scientific and advanced knowledge concerning their specialty. Any lack of such convincement may adversely influence their performance in the foreign language.

ESP Reading Textbooks

ESP reading textbooks constitute a solid foundation towards stimulating students to read and comprehend various specialized texts. In this regard, students become highly interested in the content that occupies an independent entity in the syllabus. They disregard English taught in the form of idioms or expression include within subjects other than English. Accordingly, we argue for a careful preparation of ESP reading textbooks that are independently taught in the syllabus. As a result, student's attention, interest and interaction with the specialized contents are enhanced for comprehending the reading texts in ESP. Hence, BS can be applied to teaching ESP textbooks that are interesting and stimulating, i.e. the contents covered in such textbooks involve problems or situations related to student's specialization, interest, background knowledge, etc.

BS in ESP Reading Texts

To storm the brain of students of ESP reading, the teacher includes his student to attend to the text, to rotate their knowledge and experience to it, and to make associations, abstractions and inferences from it. This necessitates that that BS teacher of ESP continually provides his students with opportunities related to various reading texts in an active interchange of communication (Brown and Race,1997:102). He conveys his experience as well as the experience of peer students to other students who are in need for the development of new and novelty ideas.

The ESP texts should be within student's ability to meet challenges in vocabulary, structures, ideas and novelty deduction. (Yoiro, 1971:114). Also, they have to be varied in style and content and appropriate for oral expression. They can, than, be interesting and stimulating and hence highly related to BS as a teaching technique of ESP reading. It is worthy to note that the ESP reading texts that contain only factual observations and thoughts are brainstormed in form of explicit demonstration with some change in vocabulary, structures or style. However, students can give their points of view on some events as the kind of historical consequences of certain events. This denotes that in such texts, students are brainstormed at both literal and inferential levels of reading skills thought the former ones are the most dominant. Texts that elicit diversion of thoughts, comments, questions, solutions, etc. are better brainstormed for the improvement of students in the reading skills at both literal and inferential levels of ESP reading.

Difficulties with using ETL

ESP students find difficulties in using English for expressing themselves on the ideas related to the texts of their specialization. Such difficulties can be attributed to the following reasons:

- 1- Students are demotivated towards EFL owing to past failure.
- 2- The standards of English in the relatively large classes of specialization other than English are very variable.
- 3- There is a lack of time for ESP on the timetable.
- 4- ESP students care more about their specialty than EFL. They should have satisfaction in ESP.
- 5- English as a non-departmental topic is dealt with in most Jordanian colleges and institutes as part of other scientific and humanity subjects, i.e. ESP is not taught as an independent topic in the syllabus.
- 6- ESP is only taught whenever there is a necessity to refer to some specialized vocabulary, idioms or expressions in the foreign language.
- 7- Most ESP students lack the ability of self-expression in English owing to their low competence and demotivation resulting from absence of enough encouragement concerning using the foreign language. (Higgins, 1967:31 and Tyler 1969:53).

The Skilled Brainstormer in ESP

The BS teacher of ESP reading always gives his students high doses of motivation when expressing themselves on a given text. He has the ability to stimulate them to produce as many thoughts as possible. In this regard, Higgins (Ibid: 53) stipulates that: "students should be given enough opportunity to become acquainted with the concepts and potentialities of modern science and technology in the foreign language. Any deficiency in this will impair the teacher's normal teaching efficiency'.

Accordingly, the ESP teacher should have good mastery over the terms, expressions, and concepts used in a certain specialty; otherwise, cannot achieve the required interaction that leads to an effective BS session. However, the skilled brainstormer does not need to learn specialist subject knowledge. Instead, he should have the capacity to:

- 1- Create the positive attitude towards ESP content.
- 2- Demonstrate the proper background knowledge relevant to the subject area he is brainstorming.
- 3- Master all the requirements of the BS session.
- 4- Provide the positive and permissive atmosphere that encourages idea generation, discussion and invention.
- 5- Provide student with novelty ideas and situations and to motivate them to generate novelty ones.
- 6- Reflect his satisfactory command of scientific and technological English.
- 7- Initiate activities which instill in students interests, comments, questions. Etc.
- 8- Appreciate the scientific point of view and the role of science and technology in modern society.
- 9- Master the linguistic, technical and psychological aspects of ESP teaching and learning.

All the above capabilities can carefully be exploited for improving the level of comprehension of students in ESP reading. (Hutchinson and waters, 1987:162f).

BS Requirements and techniques for ESP Reading Instruction

It is the task of the ESP teacher to use the BS requirements for stimulating his student to express themselves verbally with ease for the improvement of their comprehension level of various reading texts.

These requirements are:

- 1- Permissive atmosphere. The teacher induces his students to generate free associations of ideas without fear of failure, criticism, evaluation, looking funny, etc. (Petrovesky and Yaroshevesky, 1987:40).
- 2- Deferment of Judgment. Any judgment or evaluation of thoughts is deferred till the end of the BS session lest it should obstruct student's flow of ideas. At any rate, BS proves to be a very useful teaching device since the difficulty with some specialized terms and expressing requires the RC teacher to let student free while expressing themselves in the foreign language.
- 3- Idea Generation. Dozens of suggestions, facts, questions, solutions, etc. are provided in each BS session.
- 4- Self-Expression. Whenever students of ESP feel free, safe and stimulating, their ideas come fluently.
- 5- Interaction. Effective interaction in class can be secured since the teacher helps his students to attend to a given text and cooperatively and make their own interpretations, not to impose his own.
- 6- Self-Confidence. Opportunities of success such as being encouraging rather than censuring constitute the proper means of building confidence in ESP students for better participation and completion in the foreign language. (Harmer, 1986:24).
- 7- Attention. Student's attention is attracted through variety of activities practiced during the BS sessions.
- 8- Peer Teaching. Students learn from each other's specialized knowledge and skills.
- 9- Creativity. Some novelty ideas are made by students as a result of the free production of ideas. (Miller, 1972:77).
- 10- Problem-solving. Students are allowed to give many solutions to a given problem.

- 11- Image-Building. When students see their ideas listed, their image increases accordingly.
- 12- Repetition. Shy and weak students have the chance to feel success through repetition of some technical terms, idioms, ideas, etc. in the foreign language.
- 13- Questioning. Making various question structures is actively practiced in every BS session.
- 14- Background knowledge. Students' background knowledge that gleans through verbal discussions assists a lot in the generation of various responses.
- 15- Integration of foreign language skills. All members of the BS session pre-read the given text, take or make the written notes

related to it, listen to each others' ideas and verbally respond to them.

As to the techniques of BS instruction in ESP, students are first exposed to a detailed and clear explanation of the requirements of the BS session. Then, they are divided into small groups and asked to participate cooperatively and effectively for producing more ideas on any given ESP text. In this regard, the following activities are used:

Pre-Reading Activities

A number of pre-reading activities gives students some reasons for reading and some information that helps them to communicate and improve their comprehension level. (Doff, 1988:172). Some of these activities are:

- Question-and-answer technique.
- Completion items.
- Cloze procedure technique.
- Multiple-choice items.
- Student's-initiated questions.
- Teacher's-initiated questions.
- Ideas suggested by the teacher or students.
- Making a comparison of two or more thoughts.
- Drawing a diagram with some deleted words or ideas.
- Suggesting wrong ideas, etc.

While-Reading Activities

The BS teachers of ESP reading can then read the given text, focus on the pronunciation of some words, and explain some meanings. Evaluation of the thoughts brainstormed during the BS session is practiced at this time.

Post-Reading Activities

Such activities require the BS teacher of ESP to explain some idioms, expressions, thoughts or structures relating to the reading text.

BS Duration in ESP Courses

Concerning the time allotted for the ESP material in the syllabus, Higgins (1967:31) asserts that "there is alack of time for English on the time table". Therefore, one can suggest that the operational time for each BS session between (25-35) minutes of the whole (50) minutes' period of each lesson. Since students of ESP have difficulties with using English, they need enough time to exchange them orally and freely and then

comprehend the ideas related to a given text. Furthermore, such sessions are better conducted in the first morning lessons, for student during this period are fresh and ready to various ESP texts. (Dirkes, 1981:71). As to the number of ESP hours in the syllabus, it can be suggested that ESP students need to use English daily, i.e. (5-6) hours are allotted weekly.

Summary

This study has illustrated the fact that the conventional teaching techniques of reading have not succeeded yet in making students of specialties other than English read and have better comprehension of ESP reading texts. Accordingly, ESP students necessarily require BS as the most preferable teaching techniques that provide them with effective learning opportunities as the stimulating and permissive atmosphere. Such atmosphere lets them read, discuss and better comprehend the literal and inferential levels of the reading skills before the reading activity starts in the classroom.

Also the paper draws attention to the role of the ESP teacher, as a skilled brainstormer, in using effective devices that enable students to generate various suggestions, comments, questions, novelty ideas, etc. relating to a given specialized text. Thus, he should always have enough knowledge on every ESP text he is brainstorming. Then, while novelty thoughts are desirable, familiar vocabulary and expressions guarantee student's effective participation and comprehension. Any difficulty with meaning and structures may partially or fully block student's generation of ideas in ESP. Last, the ESP textbooks should be of high selection, i.e. they should be interesting and stimulating.

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