

Selecting Reading Texts for University Iranian EFL Students

Maryam Rezaei Ghahroudi^{1*}, Ebrahim Sheikhzadeh²

¹Faculty of Foreign Languages, Department of Foreign Languages, Damavand Science and Research branch, Islamic Azad University, Damavand, Iran; ²Department of Foreign Languages, Damavand Science and Research branch, Islamic Azad University, Damavand, Iran

*Email: rezaei_m53@yahoo.com

Received for publication: 14 February 2017.

Accepted for publication: 02 May 2017.

Abstract

Selecting appropriate reading texts is very important and teachers shouldn't do it randomly. This research examined the importance of criteria involved in selecting reading texts and the extent these criteria used in Iran universities. The sample consisted of 82 male and female university Iranian EFL students from some governmental and nongovernmental universities in Tehran. This procedure was adopted due to the accessibility of the participants. For the sake of the best answers from students, a questionnaire was constructed. The analysis of the data revealed that the students' interests, topic, appearance of the text, students' needs, exploitability, and relevance are the most important criteria involved in selecting reading texts. However, teachers do not consider some of these criteria while selecting reading texts. The findings imply that for effective academic reading course, process of text selection needs some changes. If teachers consider all of these criteria and select an appropriate reading text fit for the readers, reading courses in Iran universities will improve significantly.

Keywords: Text selection, Reading text, University Iranian EFL students

Introduction

In many countries there are many EFL students who have never had the opportunity to converse with any native speakers even though they have access to different types of materials written in English language. Therefore, the need for reading and extracting information from these texts seems to be vital and the success of obtaining information depends on the reading materials (Jalilehvand, 2012).

In most EFL situations, the ability to read in a foreign language is one of the most important goals for many students (Richards and Renandya, 2002, cited in Jalilehvand, 2012) which resulted in a growing demand for reading courses in universities (Karbalaee, 2009).

For effective academic reading, students need to have access to appropriate texts (Grabe & Stoller, 1999). However, selecting appropriate reading text is a complex task (Day, 1994) and it is difficult to select an appropriate text fit for the readers (Rahman, 2004).

Many researchers such as Melvin and Stout (1987), Fox (1989), Gebhard (1989), Arias (2007), Rahman (2004), Hetherington (1985), and Khemlani and Norazit (2004) believed that selecting reading texts must be a thoughtful process and it shouldn't be done randomly. However, they have reported that text selection can be made easier if certain criteria are taken into account while selecting reading texts for EFL/ESL students.

To the best of the researcher knowledge, finding showed that no study had been conducted to examine academic reading texts for university Iranian EFL students. As a result, the researcher

conducted a survey on "selecting reading texts for university Iranian EFL students" to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the most important criteria involved in selecting reading texts?
- 2) To what extent these criteria are considered while teachers selecting academic reading texts?

Review of the related Literature

Many researchers have introduced criteria involved in selecting reading texts. Literature shows that these criteria are of two types: criteria related to the students and criteria related to the texts. In this study, the researcher has been outlined and reviewed some of these criteria briefly in table1.

Factors directly related to the students

There are some factors such as students' level, interests, purpose for reading, needs, and background knowledge (Arias, 2007) related to the students that should be considered while selecting reading texts for EFL/ESL classes.

Students' level: The present linguistic level of the students and their level of content and cultural schemata should be considered while selecting reading texts for them (Shahidullah, 1995, cited in Rahman 2004).

Students' interests: Texts that are interesting to the students (Shoebottom, 2013) and are self-selected by them (Carrell 1984, cited in Day, 1994) should be selected.

Students' purpose for reading: The students' purpose and reasons for reading a text should be recognized to determine the type of the texts which are suitable for them (Shoebottom, 2013).

Students' needs: Both the students' common needs and their individual needs should be considered while selecting reading texts for them (Arias, 2007).

Students' background knowledge: The knowledge the students bring to bear on the text in the reading process should be considered (Khemlani & Norazit, 2000) to assure a fit between the selected text and several learners and to provide learners with appropriate and necessary background information before they are asked to read the text (Hetherington, 1985).

Aspects related to the texts

There are some factors such as relevance, the content of the passage, exploitability, suitability, readability, topic, political appropriateness, cultural suitability, and appearance (Hetherington, 1985) related to the texts that should be considered while selecting reading texts for EFL/ESL classes.

Relevance: The reading text should be relevant for the students' professional lives. It should be related to the students' real world reading purposes (Arias, 2007).

The content of the passage: The content of the text should be useful, meaningful, and interesting for the students (Kitao, 1997). The text should be semantically and conceptually complete (Clarke and Silberstein, 1977, cited in Hetherington, 1985).

Exploitability: The reading text should allow teachers to accomplish the objectives of the reading lesson (Nuttall 1982, cited in Day, 1994). It should be exploitable due to its thematic, lexical, and

Suitability: The reading text that fits or matches with the readers should be selected (Hetherington, 1985). It should interest students and preferably enthrall and delight them (Nuttall, 1996, cited in Rahman, 2004).

Readability: While selecting reading text, syntactic appropriateness of the text, logical or rhetorical ordering of ideas, textual phenomena at the discourse level, lexical appropriateness, and background knowledge of the reader should be examined. (Carrell 1987b, cited in Day, 1994)

Lexical knowledge: The number of unfamiliar lexical items in a text should be based on the students reading abilities, the goals of the reading course, and the objectives of the particular lesson (Day, 1994).

Syntactic appropriateness: The syntax of the text should be appropriate (Hetherington, 1985). The reading text should contain grammatical constructions that are familiar to the students (Day, 1994).

Organization: The organization of the text should be coherent and clear (Nuttall 1996, cited in Day, 1994). It should be in a way that students do not become confused by the features of different genres (Grabe and Stoller, 1999).

Discourse phenomena: The arrangement of the topics, comments, and cohesiveness and coherencies should be correct in a reading text (Day, 1994); the major points should be clearly stated; introductions and conclusions should be clear and recognizable (Hetherington, 1985); cohesion markers and transition devices should be within the linguistic competence of the learners; learners should be able to handle the presentation of ideas and arguments and follow the line of reasoning utilized by the writer of the text (Day, 1994).

Length of passage : The reading text with appropriate length which is based on the objectives of the reading lesson should be selected (Day, 1994).

Topic : Different text types with variety of topics should be selected according to the students' needs and their interests (Hamer, 2001; Nuttal, 1996, cited in Guler, 2007).

Political appropriateness: Certain politically sensitive issues in a text shouldn't be ignored while selecting reading texts for ESL/EFL classes (Day, 1994, cited in Guler, 2007).

Cultural familiarization: Certain culturally sensitive issues in the reading text shouldn't be ignored (Day, 1994, cited in Guler, 2007). Cultural norms in the text should be suited with the students' prior cultural experiences (Alptekin, 2006; Joag-Dev, Anderson, & Steffensen 1979, cited in Erten & Razi, 2009).

Appearance: The text's layout, print, and type size should be considered while selecting reading text for students (Day, 1994).

Methodology

Participants

Eighty two male and female university Iranian EFL students from some governmental and nongovernmental universities in Tehran participated in this study. Due to the accessibility of the participants, the sample collected through convenience procedure.

Instrument

According to the necessity and purpose of the study a questionnaire was designed and constructed. The questionnaire consists of two major sections. The first section features personal details of the respondents and the second section consists of 13 criteria involved in selecting reading texts. Thirty-eight items are written in the questionnaire which are related to all criteria. The questionnaire consists of two columns; one of them related to the importance of criteria involved in selecting reading text and the other one related to the extent these criteria are considered in selection of academic reading texts. The language of the questions is Farsi. Rating scale is also Likert type of response categories.

Procedure

Before administering the questionnaire survey, a pilot study conducted in order to develop the standard of the questionnaire. There was a need to investigate the reliability of the questionnaire to show the internal consistency of it. The reliability of the questionnaire evaluated by Cronbach's Alpha. The methods of administrating the questionnaire were face to face method and Email.

Openly accessible at <http://www.european-science.com/jaelt>

Students were given time to answer the questionnaire and asked them to fill the questionnaire based on their attitudes toward the importance of criteria involved in selecting reading texts and the extent these criteria are considered in selection of academic reading texts.

Results and discussion

The overall results of the questionnaire on the importance of criteria involved in selecting reading texts and the extent criteria are considered in academic reading texts are presented in table below, in terms of Mean and standard deviation. As shown in table below, criteria 1 to 8 are related to the texts and criteria 9 to 13 are related to the students. The importance of all criteria is shown in one column and the extent these criteria are considered in academic reading texts is presented in another column. The gap between the current state and ideal state of the most important criteria is also calculated and presented in table below.

The analysis of data revealed that criteria such as the students' interests, topic, appearance of the text, students' needs, exploitability and relevance are the most important one involved in selecting reading texts since the mean scores of these criteria are more than the mean scores of the other one. However, the extent these criteria are considered in academic reading text is not satisfied and the gap between the current state and ideal state of the most important criteria is high.

Table 1. Criterion Statistical Analysis

Category	Criteria	Items	Importance		Current state		Gap Analysis	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Ideal state	Gap %
Criteria Related to the Texts	Relevance	1–3	4.03	2.509	2.49	2.765	5	50.2
	The content of the passage	4–8	3.90	4.006	3.21	4.155	5	35.8
	Exploitability	9–11	4.05	2.467	2.79	2.595	5	44.2
	Topic	12	4.18	.818	2.38	.764	5	52.4
	Political appropriateness	13–14	3.59	2.039	3.11	2.167	5	37.8
	Cultural suitability	15–16	3.91	1.821	3.08	2.138	5	38.4
	Appearance	17	4.17	.814	2.66	.919	5	46.8
Readability	18–29	3.97	10.403	3.00	11.856	5	40	
Criteria Related to the Students	Students' level	30–32	3.95	2.76	2.62	3.061	5	47.6
	Students' interests	33	4.34	.789	2.18	.833	5	56.4
	Students' purpose for reading	34	3.94	1.023	2.34	.997	5	53.2
	Students' needs	35	4.11	.832	2.37	.923	5	52.6
	Students' background knowledge	36–38	3.53	3.488	2.66	3.212	5	46.8

Conclusion

Since selection of appropriate reading texts is very important in the country, the present study aims to explore most important criteria involved in selecting reading text and the extent these

criteria are considered while teachers selecting academic reading text. The results revealed that students' interests, topic, appearance, students' needs, exploitability and relevance are the most important criteria from the student's point of view. However, the extent these criteria are considered in academic reading texts is not satisfied and the gap between the current state and ideal state is high.

The findings imply that pedagogical approaches to selecting reading texts for university Iranian EFL students need special attention and some changes is required to ensure that reading texts are selected appropriately. Such study will have clear pedagogical implications in the EFL fields. Although it is not possible to have a reading text with readings appropriate for all learners in all contexts, factors involved in selecting reading texts can be of some help in the process of texts selection. This study shed more light on some important factors involved in reading texts selection process for university Iranian EFL students and some other aspects may be ignored. It is suggested for further research to search for other factors and aspects which probably are being ignored in this study.

The implications of the findings of this study should be taken into careful considerations and steps should be taken to implement the recommendation made in this study and if implemented, the state of selecting reading text for university Iranian EFL students in the country will be improved significantly.

References

- Alyousef, H. S. (2005). Teaching reading comprehension to ESL/EFL learners. *The Reading Matrix*, 5(2), 143-154.
- Arias, I. J. (2007). Selecting reading materials wisely. *LETRAS*, 1(41), 131-151.
- Cherry, K. (2014). What is a survey? Retrieved from <http://psychology.about.com/bio/Kendra-Cherry-17268.htm>.
- Day, R. R. (1994). Selecting a passage for the EFL reading class, 32(1), 20. Retrieved from <http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia/E-USIA/forum/vols/vol32/no1/p20.htm>.
- Erten, I. H., & Razi, S. (2009). The effects of cultural familiarity on reading comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 21(1), 60-77.
- Grabe, W., & Stoller, F.L. (2001). Reading for academic purposes: Guidelines for the ESL/ EFL teacher. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (187-203). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Guler, H. (2007). Non-native EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching reading.
- Hale, J.(2011). The 3 Basic Types of Descriptive Research Methods. *Psych Central*. Retrieved from <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2011/09/27/the-3-basic-types-of-descriptive-research-methods/>
- Hetherington, A. (1985). Assessing the suitability of reading materials for ESL students. *TESLCanada Journal*, 3(1), 37-52.
- Jalilehvand, M. (2012). The Effects of text length and picture on reading comprehension of Iranian EFL students. *Asian Social Science*, 8(3), 329-337. doi:10.5539/ass.v8n3p329.
- Karbalaei, A. (2009). Iranian EFL and Indian ESL college students' beliefs about reading strategies in L2. *Profile Issues in Teachers' professional Development*, 12 (2), 51-68.
- Khemlani, D., & Norazit, L. (2004). Selection of reading texts: Moving beyond content schema. *Literacy Across Cultures*, 4(1).
- Kitao, K. (1997). Selecting and developing teaching/learning materials. *The Internet TESL Journal*, IV (4). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Kitao-Materials.html>.

- Levine, A., Ferenz, O., & Reves, T. (2000). EFL academic reading and modern technology: How can we turn our students into independent critical readers? *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language*, 4(4) .
- Marzke, N. (2012). Reading for academic purposes: Guidelines for the ESL/EFL teacher. Retrieved from <http://prezi.com/kcvp7rjporvt/reading-for-academic-purposes-guidelines-for-the-eslefl-teacher/>
- Noora, A. (2008). Iranian undergraduates' non-English majors' language learning preferences. *GEMA: Online Journal of Language Studies*, 8(2).
- Rahman, H. (2004). An evaluation of the teaching of reading skills of English in Bangladesh. Retrieved from <http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/Thesis/Thesis-Rahman.pdf>.
- Sasson, D. (2007). How to motivate ESL/EFL students to read? Retrieved from <http://voices.yahoo.com/how-motivate-esl-efl-students-read-330328.html>.
- Shoebottom, P. (2013). Helping ESL students understand written texts. <http://esl.fis.edu/teachers/support/commun.htm>.
- Vičič, P. (2011). Preparing materials for ESP teaching. *Inter Alia*, 2, 107-120.