Reading Abilities among Adolescent Second Language Readers: Theoretical, Cultural and Educational Implications

Dennis Relojo
South Essex College, Learning Support Advisor, Essex, United Kingdom

Rona dela Rosa
Mariano Quinto Alarilla Polytechnic University, Instructor, Bulacan, Philippines

Sonia Janice Pilao
Centro Escolar University, Assistant Professor, Manila, Philippines

Abstract

The ability to read is especially crucial among adolescents. The present study assessed the reading difficulties experienced by 150 Filipino university students in reference to vocabulary, grammar usage, as well as paragraph analysis and paragraph organisation. It has been discussed that an analysis of reading abilities among second language readers will provide a deeper understanding of the reading process as language-dependent rather than as universal. Furthermore, the study has also provided implications on the nature of second language reading, the database in second language reading, text- and knowledge-driven operations in second language reading, and second language reading classroom factors. Assessment of comprehension is briefly reviewed, and recommendations are provided for theoretical, cultural and educational implications.

Key Words: Adoloscents, reading, reading abilities, second language, second language readers.

Introduction: The importance of being able to decode the printed words cannot be overemphasised since most of the man's ideas, findings and knowledge are passed on through time and across continents are recorded on the printed page. Moreover, reading is the most widely used tool for learning. It is an activity that can aid students in a multitude of situations throughout their lives.

The ability to read is especially crucial in the present times, which is characterised by knowledge explosion and rapid changes brought by technology. Literacy has in fact come to be considered as one of the indices of the state of development of a country and its people. To address this issue expressive writing (EW) could be considered. For instance, two strong conclusions were drawn with regard to the benefit of EW. Firstly, drawing on the literature, EW may result in a host of health benefits. The results of this study offer insights into what factors contribute to ensure the efficacy of EW as an intervention tool. This may be attributable to the fact that EW affects people on a number of aspects—biological, cognitive, emotional and social – making a single explanatory theory unlikely. Secondly, a variety of mechanisms can be posited as to ensure its efficacy. Needless to say, future research should further explore its boundary conditions, y including potential moderating variables. In addition to addressing theory-relevant questions, researchers and therapists must now address how, when and with whom this form of therapy is most beneficial and, at the same time, further evaluate how and why this intervention produces positive outcomes (Relojo, 2015a).

Unfortunately, a large number of students have not learned to apply their reading skills in areas where they are most needed. The state of reading in many institutions has been aptly described by Richard Bamberger in this paradoxical statement: 'Many children do not read books because they cannot read well enough. They cannot read well because they do not read books.' Earlier studies suggest that there is an increasing interest from therapists and researchers in children's wordfinding difficulties (WFDs). Word finding difficulties are usually considered to be present when children are able to identify a referent from a set of exemplars, but have difficulty producing the target word when shown a picture or in conversation (Dockrell, Messer, George, & Wilson, 1998).

Furthermore, teachers' experiences also play a pivotal role in this. Although teaching has been characterised as a profound emotional activity, little is known about the link between emotional quotient of educators and their work attitude behaviour (Relojo, Pilao, & Dela Rosa, 2015). As a result of this personal attributes of teachers have been explored. In one study (Relojo, 2012), it has been observed that Filipino educators have high level of Adversity Quotient (AQ), moderate level of Spirituality Quotient (SQ). But it is interesting to note that findings have also revealed that there is no significant relationship between AQ and teaching performance while there is no significant relationship between SQ and teaching performance.

There is no doubt that effective reading has become a perennial concern for both teachers and students, the reading classroom has become a source of frustrations to both language learners and their teachers. Many students become confused, distressed or even bored with the demands of their reading assignments; teachers seem equally confused on how to provide positive impact on students' reading performance and to motivate them towards learning and to love to read. Such a scenario becomes even more problematic especially to those with learning difficulties such as Alzheimer's disease (AD) and Parkinson's disease (PD). For instance, it has been observed that as the most common neurodegenerative disease, AD accounts for about two thirds of cases of dementia – ranging in various studies from 42 to 81 per cent of all dementia – with vascular causes and other neurodegenerative diseases such as Pick's disease and diffuse Lewy-body disease constituting the majority of the remaining cases. Meanwhile, it has been identified that PD is the second most common neurodegenerative disorder, after AD. The cause of PD remains unknown, but epidemiological studies suggest an association with pesticides and other environmental toxins, and biochemical studies implicate a systemic defect in mitochondrial complex (Relojo, 2015b).

However, this problem could be addressed by looking for interdisciplinary collaborations through academic social networking services (ASNS). Relojo and Pilao (2016) have asserted that with the emergence of ASNS, the landscape of academic networking has been dramatically revolutionised in the past decade. However, to date, there is a scarcity of literatures that offer a general overview of the services available to researchers.

If it is agreed that teachers must teach the student the process of changing their behaviours and attitudes toward reading and eventually that teaching will create condition for such change to take place. Then, there is a need to re-examine the materials that teachers use as well as methods they employ in teaching reading; for the students' success or failure in learning to read, to a large extent depend on the teachers, their methods and materials. An effective teacher creates an environment that challenges the potential of each student and gives opportunities for optimum learning through a variety of materials suited to the needs, interests and ability of students. The classroom thus becomes an ideal setting for the development of reading skills.

Conceptual Model: The development of complementary materials is the definitive aim of the researcher and to come across solutions to the problems on the difficulties on reading of the students are projected to be achieved.
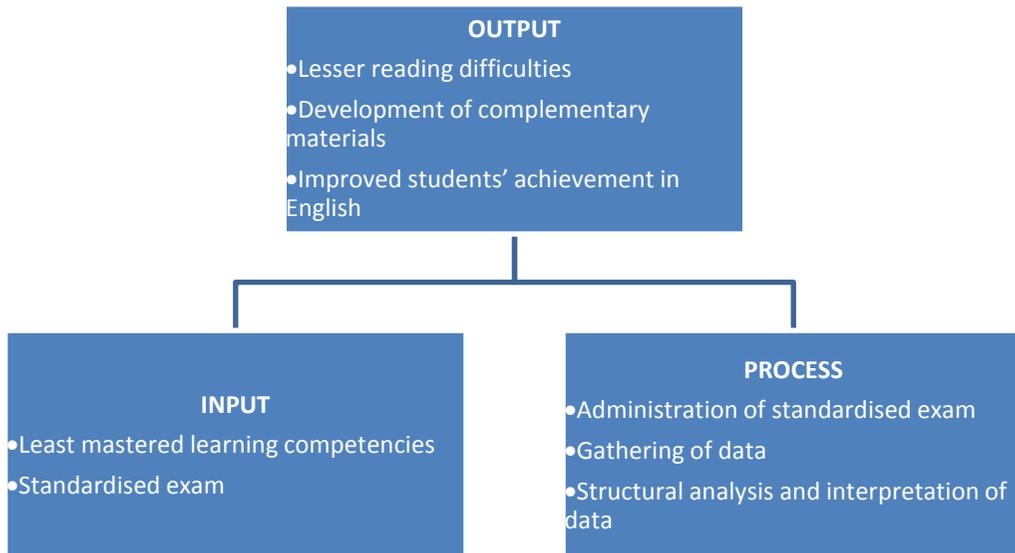
OUTPUT
- Lesser reading difficulties
- Development of complementary materials
- Improved students' achievement in English

INPUT
- Least mastered learning competencies
- Standardised exam

PROCESS
- Administration of standardised exam
- Gathering of data
- Structural analysis and interpretation of data

Figure 1. Conceptual model of reading abilities in a second language.

Figure 1 above shows that the study dealt about the problems encountered by university students in reading comprehension, the least mastered skills according to their learning competencies and the development of complementary materials to improve reading comprehension abilities. This also shows the gathering of data through documentary analysis and the tabulation of results in standardised exam. Finding and recommendations were based on statistical analysis and interpretation of data to help improve the students' achievement in English.

This study aimed to find out the reading difficulties of university students in Technological Institute of the Philippines (TIP). Specifically, the study explored the following:

1. What are the reading difficulties encountered by students in TIP as revealed by pre-test and post-test? in terms of: a.) vocabulary; b.) grammar usage; c.) paragraph analysis, and d.) paragraph organisation
2. What reading competencies were identified to be the least mastered skills as revealed in pre-test and post-test?
3. How significant is the difference in the reading difficulties encountered by the respondents in the pre-test and post-test?
4. What implications may be consequential from the findings of the study relative to decisions on: a.) What to emphasise in teaching English to university students? and, b.) What supplementary materials in English need to be developed?

Review of Related Studies: Reading is a basic competence that students have to master to be successful. Despite this fact, recent studies show that there may be a significant decline in the reading abilities of university students, one of the most educated segments of any population. This work is a prospecting study regarding the assessment of reading abilities of university students, namely in the context of Engineering education. Based on an existing screening test for assessing

reading difficulties of children and teenagers, this work presents the results obtained by administrating that test to students at a top engineering institution in Portugal. An outcome of this study is the determination of a time range suitable for a massive, time limited, use of the previously mentioned test to assess university students, thus enabling a basic tool that will permit, in future works, to screen reading abilities in wider university populations. This work also shows evidence that ca. 20 per cent of university students present a poor reading performance, revealing a strong need for monitoring university students' reading abilities along different generations (Sucena, Falcão Carneiro, & Gomes de Almeida, 2014).

In one recent study (Franceschini, Gori, Ruffino, Pedrolli, & Facoetti, 2012), it was revealed that poor readers show impaired visual search and spatial cueing when pre readers. About 60 per cent of poor readers displayed visual-attention deficit when pre readers. Visual attention in preschoolers specifically predicts future reading acquisition. Efficient visual-attention is crucial for learning to read independently of phonology.

Our current understanding of reading acquisition and achievement isn't complete, and recent research in the areas of higher-level cognitive processing may be considered predictors contributing to individual differences in reading ability. Moreover, the sub-components of higher-level cognitive processing warrant consideration in the learning process related to reading performance. The paper begins with a brief overview of higher-level cognitive processing, the reading development process, and a review of the literature highlighting the connection between the cognitive processes related to reading development, and future research considerations (Chan, 2015).

The National Benchmark Tests Project (NBTP) was commissioned by Higher Education South Africa and became operational in 2009. One of the main aims of the NBTP is to assess the extent to which entry-level students might be said to be ready to cope with the conventional demands of academic study in three key areas: academic literacy; quantitative literacy; and mathematics. This paper presents an analysis of the academic literacy readiness of a sample of registered students as reflected in their performance on the NBT in Academic Literacy, a standardised assessment developed in the context of the wider project. The paper presents a theoretical analysis of the construct of academic literacy as operationalised in the test. This is followed by a categorised empirical analysis of test-takers' performance on the test, in which the levels of academic readiness of these test-takers are presented and discussed. The argument presented highlights the diverse range of academic literacy levels of entry-level students, as well as implying the teaching and learning interventions that might be necessary to improve readiness. Concluding comments argue that some groups of students may be unable to cope with conventional academic literacy demands in the absence of explicit intervention (Cliff, 2014).

Materials and Methods:

Participants. There were 150 university students from different programmes of TIP such as Accountancy, Engineering and Marine Engineering.

Research Instruments. The researchers used reading comprehension test that served as a pre-test of the study and composed of four parts such as vocabulary, grammar usage, and paragraph analysis and paragraph organisation. The reading comprehension test was adapted from the book of *Reviewing and Testing English Skills.*

Ethical Clearance. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Technological Institute of the Philippines.

Results: To facilitate the identification of the important features of the data gathered, they were summarised and tabulated. Statistical tools were applied for analysis and interpretation.

Table 1. Frequency of Correct Responses (pre-test).

Vocabulary		Grammar Usage		Paragraph Analysis		Paragraph Organisation	
Pre	*Post*	*Pre*	*Post*	*Pre*	*Post*	*Pre*	*Post*
73	78	120	125	115	93	105	123
68	73	82	101	123	114	73	89
66	87	130	86	n/a	n/a	88	132
60	84	63	123	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
64	70	140	126	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
74	75	138	140	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
78	73	142	125	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
83	120	73	111	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
85	128	85	80	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
79	103	113	79	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Results have shown that through proper support all aspects of reading abilities have improved. These results support previous studies which suggest that with proper support from the teachers students are likely to benefit from these.

Conclusion and Implication: The ability to ready sufficiently and proficiently is the best way students can acquire various skills and knowledge, thus, reading is taught since the beginning of education both formal and informal. Unfortunately, even in the university level there are still students who fail to develop sufficiently in one or more skills involved in effective reading. This problem rocks not only the Philippines' educational system but other countries as well, thus, many educators, local and foreign alike, emphasise that reading and literacy instruction must be properly addressed through appropriate reading instructional materials.

On the other hand, the reading background provided by the name is a potent factor in determining how well the student will succeed academically. When parents show an enthusiastic interest in their children's reading, when they read stories to them, they are laying strong foundations for pleasurable, independent reading. The presence in the home of a variety of attractive, appealing books for children is particularly important. A reasonably comfortable place for reading also helps the child to enjoy reading. Those who came from impoverished or unpromising home environments never become excellent readers. Noisy surroundings, inadequate lighting, very high or very low temperatures, and distracting surroundings may interfere with comprehension. As a rule, when children come from unfavourable home environment, there is likely to be unsatisfactory progress in reading comprehension.

As noted by Hoff (2013) that on average, children from low socioeconomic status (SES) homes and children from homes in which a language other than English is spoken have language development trajectories that are different from those of children from middle-class, monolingual English-speaking homes. Children from low-SES and language minority homes have unique linguistic strengths, but many reach school age with lower levels of English language skill than do middle-class, monolingual children. Because early differences in English oral language skill have consequences for academic achievement, low levels of English language skill constitute a deficit for

children about to enter school in the United States. Declaring all developmental trajectories to be equally valid would not change the robust relation between English oral language skills and academic achievement and would not help children with poor English skills to be successful in school. Remedies aimed at supporting the development of the English skills required for academic success need not and should not entail devaluing or diminishing children's other language skills.

Moreover, Fluent reading depends on a complex set of cognitive processes that must work together in perfect concert. Rapid automatised naming (RAN) tasks provide insight into this system, acting as a microcosm of the processes involved in reading. In this review, we examine both RAN and reading fluency and how each has shaped our understanding of reading disabilities. We explore the research that led to our current understanding of the relationships between RAN and reading and what makes RAN unique as a cognitive measure. We explore how the automaticity that supports RAN affects reading across development, reading abilities, and languages, and the biological bases of these processes. Finally, we bring these converging areas of knowledge together by examining what the collective studies of RAN and reading fluency contribute to our goals of creating optimal assessments and interventions that help every child become a fluent, comprehending reader (Norton & Wolf, 2012).

As reading shifts from the page to the screen, research focuses primarily upon the nature and effects of hypertextual reading. However, many of the texts that university students read for academic purposes are digitised texts that begin life as paper-based books and papers and are read on-screen. Applying the principles and practices of hermeneutic phenomenology, this study sought to gain insight into university students' experiences of reading digitised texts such as e-books and PDF files (Rose, 2011).

The results of this study would be beneficial to the school administrators, English educators, school librarians, curriculum designers, university students and future researchers. Specifically, the present study will allow school administrators to allocate more funds in providing additional supplemental materials like books and educational magazines for the students to read and for the teachers to attend more seminars and trainings for their enhancement and effectiveness in teaching. For the educators, this will further allow them to be more aware on the needs of the students especially in terms of comprehension and to enhance their teaching efficiency. School librarians will come into realisation on the importance of their jobs: that they could provide guidance and advice for each student in the selection of reading materials. Meanwhile, curriculum designers will have guides in evaluating language programmes and curriculum, thus, coming up with functional devices so that student will effectively acquire a second language. The prime beneficiaries of this study are the students, as their chances of improving their reading comprehension skills will still take time. This study will help the students in various issues relating to different aspects of study habits and engage them more in reading. Lastly, the finding of this study would serve as a concrete knowledge for future researchers to expand this field of knowledge.

References:

1. Chan, J. (2015, February 11). Unpacking the role of higher-level processing abilities in reading achievement: A review of the literature. Queen's Research & Learning Repository. Retrieved April 3, 2016, from http://qspace.library.queensu.ca/handle/1974/12746

2. Cliff, A. (2014). Entry-level students' reading abilities and what these abilities might mean for academic readiness. *Language Matters*, *45*(3), 313-324.

3. Dockrell, J., Messer, D., George, R., & Gillie, W. (1998). Notes and discussion: children with word-finding difficulties-prevalence, presentation and naming problems. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, *33*(4), 445-454.

4. Franceschini, S., Gori, S., Ruffino, M., Pedrolli, K., & Facoetti, A. (2012). A causal link between visual spatial attention and reading acquisition. *Current Biology*, *22*(9), 814-819.

5. Hoff, E. (2013). Interpreting the early language trajectories of children from low-SES and language minority homes: implications for closing achievement gaps. *Developmental psychology*, *49*(1), 4.

6. Norton, E. S., & Wolf, M. (2012). Rapid automatized naming (RAN) and reading fluency: Implications for understanding and treatment of reading disabilities. *Annual review of Psychology*, *63*, 427-452.

7. Relojo, D., & Pilao, S.J. (2016). Key contributions and future directions of academic social networking services for the digital academic. *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies, 2*(5), 94-101.

8. Relojo, D., Pilao, S. J., & dela Rosa, R. (2015). From passion to emotion: emotional quotient as predictor of work attitude behaviour among faculty members. *i-manager's Journal on Educational Psychology*, *8*(4), 1-10.

9. Relojo, D. (2012). Adversity quotient and spiritual quotient and their impact to teaching performance evaluations. *CEU School of Science and Technology Research Journal, 9,* 62-69.

10. Relojo, D. (2015a). A randomised controlled trial on brief expressive writing as an intervention tool on exposure to thin-ideal images. *Journal on Innovation in Psychology, Education and Didactics, 19*(2), 295-306.

11. Relojo, D. (2015b). On the road to therapeutics: biological mechanisms of Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's disease. *i-manager's Journal on Nursing*, *5*(3), 1-8.

12. Rose, E. (2011). The phenomenology of on-screen reading: University students' lived experience of digitised text. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, *42*(3), 515-526.

13. Sucena, A., Falcão Carneiro, J., & Gomes de Almeida, F. (2014). Assessing reading abilities of mechanical engineering university students: a prospecting study. *International Journal of Engineering Education*, *30*, 378-387.