ABSTRACT

This study attempted to determine the factors that motivate students to engage in English for academic purposes (EAP) reading activities. Keeping the objective in consideration, two teacher informants were invited to reflect on their own EAP reading experiences and discuss pedagogical situations in which their students were more willing to read. Then a questionnaire containing nine statements describing various situations was constructed based on interviews with the teacher informants and data were collected from forty teachers having experience in teaching reading EAP. The data obtained were analyzed quantitatively. The results showed that learners were motivated to read under four circumstances namely when 1) key points were highlighted while teaching, 2) the teacher explained everything to them and used some Nepali to explain basic concepts, 3) the exams were directly based on classroom teaching 4) there were clear graphs, tables, and illustrations in the texts. It was also found from the study that the higher the involvement in the tasks, the lower the motivation on the part of students.

Keywords: EFL motivation; English for academic purposes (EAP); EFL reading; EFL pedagogy

1. Introduction

Motivation has been a topic of interest for educational psychologists since the early 1990s. Although researchers have defined and described the concept of motivation in a wide range of ways there is a common consensus among them that the core of motivation describes why a person selects one action over another with great energy or frequency (Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2012; Touré-Tillery & Fishbach, 2014). For instance, a motivated student often persists in the face of challenging problems, intensely focuses on the task at hand, and often concerns oneself about ways to make things better without becoming distracted by other activities.

Other than English majors at Tribhuvan University, Nepal, most students do not have to take English courses after the freshman year. Once they enter campus, they find their curricula centering on the content area in which they specialize. We do not find English as a subject in the curricula except for those majoring English. The importance of English study may seem to gradually fade away in the curriculum, but in fact it influences students’ academic success even more critically in almost all other non-language related courses. The real situation is that in many specialized courses, English textbooks designed for native English speakers are recommended for students and teachers teach those subjects using students’ first language. Thus, lengthy English texts become the learners’ major source of input for important concepts and theories. This is the major challenge that Nepalese undergraduates face immediately after they start their university life. Only highly motivated learners gradually acquire advanced-level reading abilities in spite of the fact that they do not speak or write English fluently.

Other students, in the middle of their long and lonely endeavor, lose confidence, interest, and the momentum to keep up, and eventually turn to translated versions of their texts, bazaar notes, guides and exam oriented tablet like booklets for exams and assignments. Their English proficiency therefore deteriorates, albeit part of the reason for content-area teachers to require students to read English texts is to improve their EFL reading ability as a byproduct.

The present study attempted to find out factors that help learners to engage themselves in spontaneous EAP reading. This study by identifying these conditions will be able to provide pedagogical assistance and create a more positive learning environment. In the following subsections, a review of the literature will firstly be made on EAP reading. The focus will then be directed to motivational studies in foreign/second language (L2) learning.

1.1. EAP Reading

English for Academic Purposes can be defined quite simply as “teaching of English with the specific aim of helping learners to study, conduct research or teach in that language” (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 8). EAP encompasses not only different domains, practices and study-skills teaching but also a great deal of characteristics and principles of general English. In fact, “EAP has emerged out of the broader field of ESP, a theoretically and pedagogically eclectic parent, but one committed to tailoring instruction to specific rather than general purposes” (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p. 2). The main goal of EAP is
to enable students to communicate effectively in academic environments. For this reason, they need to know what the communicative requirements in these environments are. EAP stands for language research and instruction that lays emphasis on the specific communicative needs and practices of particular groups in academic contexts. This encourages practitioners to equipping students with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic and cultural contexts.

EAP has grown out of the larger field of English for Specific Purposes as the academic ‘home’ of scholars who do not research in or teach other ‘SPs’, but whose focus is wholly on academic contexts (although we must not forget that there are also scholars and teachers who continue to engage in both ESP and EAP). The modern-day field of EAP addresses the teaching of English in the academy at all age and proficiency levels, and it draws on a range of interdisciplinary influences for its research methods, theories and practices. It seeks to provide insights into the structures and meanings of academic texts, into the demands placed by academic contexts on communicative behaviours, and into the pedagogic practices by which these behaviours can be developed (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002).

EAP is thought to be one of two branches of English for Specific Purpose (ESP) and the other being English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Each of these branches can be subdivided according to the disciplines or occupations with which it is concerned. Thus EAP may be separated into English for Mathematics, English for Business, English for Pilots, English for Economics, English for Bank Managers, etc.

In most classroom studies on reading and EAP (English for academic purposes) reading, the major focus has been on reading skill development. Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) presented a number of macro- and micro-reading skills that EAP students need to develop. The macro-skills include the ability to make use of learners’ existing knowledge to make sense of new material and fit new knowledge into their schema. Important microskills include recognizing logical relationships, definitions, generalizations, examples, explanations and predictions, and distinguishing fact from opinion. All these capabilities require lots of practice in reading which, in turn, needs strong motivation to be sustained.

Focusing on the textual portions, instead of on readers in L2 reading, Hauptman (2000) stated that the traditional view that holds language (including grammar and vocabulary) and text length as major determinants for the ease and difficulty of L2 reading texts is insufficient.

The literature of applied linguistics has given due importance to the issue of EAP reading motivation. Educational psychologists and ELT practitioners have strongly emphasized the importance of motivation in L2 EAP reading. As Eskey (1986) states:

For any approach to teaching to succeed, no matter how true to the latest “scientific principles,” it must take into account the real needs and desires of learners – that rather loosely defined cluster of goals, inclinations, and biases which we call “motivation”– and we must therefore give some thought to what motivates people to read, or not to read, anything. (p. 3)

Although learners may be motivated to read for very different reasons, in the learning situation level they may have similar learning needs that should be satisfied in order for them to sustain the learning effort, i.e., reading. It would be meaningful to inquire regarding learners’ perspectives – how they thought they would be more willing to engage in EAP reading.

1.2. L2 Motivation

Motivation is defined as "some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something" (Harmer, 2007, p. 51). For Brown (1994), motivation is "a term that is used to define the success or the failure of any complex task" (p.152). Motivation is thought to be responsible for "why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity and how hard they are going to pursue it" (Dömyei, 2001, p.8). Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 54) state that "to be motivated means to be moved to do something". Unlike unmotivated people who have lost impetus and inspiration to act, motivated people are energized and activated to the end of a task. According to Williams and Burden (1997, p. 111), "Interest, curiosity, or a desire to achieve" are the key factors that compose motivated people. However, they believe that arousing interest is not enough to be motivated. This interest should be sustained. In addition to this, time and energy should be invested and the effect which is required needs to be sustained so as to reach the aim.

Motivation has been considered one of the most important factors affecting L2 learning. Most L2 motivation studies before the 1990s were influenced by Gardner’s socio-educational theory (1985) and his distinction between integrative and
instrumental orientation, with the former believed to be a more powerful factor than the latter in predicting L2 achievement. Nowadays, motivation researches in the field of applied linguistics had reached a consensus that it should be redirected to include considerations for other social milieus as well as situational characteristics pertinent to L2 classrooms (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dornyei, 1994, 2001; Gardner & Tremblay, 1994; Oxford, 1994) so that theories may account for different social contexts and be more educationally friendly and meaningful to L2 classroom teachers.

In their study, Warden and Lin (2000) employed the traditional socio-educational approach and provided data from an Asian EFL context. Over 2000 non-English-major college students from Taiwan took part in the study. The study was based on a survey design and it was found from the study that these EFL learners possess instrumental motivation and another type of motivation they termed “required”, but the integrative motivation much emphasized on bilingual contexts was absent in this student population. They called for a better understanding of exactly what motivates EFL students as it could make our education more effective and decrease frustration for both teachers and students.

As for considerations of classroom characteristics related to L2 motivation, Crookes and Schmidt (1991) were pioneers in this respect. They introduced theories from educational psychology and analyzed learner motivation from four levels: micro, classroom, syllabus, and the out-of-class, long-term level. Similarly, Dornyei (1990, 1994) extended the concept of L2 motivation beyond the language level to include a learner level and a learning situation level. He postulated that these three levels reflect the three different aspects of language, i.e., the social, personal, and educational subject matter dimensions. Most recently, language teaching experts are pursuing a series of studies situating L2 motivation under the task-based paradigm (Dornyei, 2002).

2. The study

Motivation plays an integral role in the process of learning to read and reading to learn since the absence of students’ willingness to read makes any reading instruction almost ineffective. Although the more influential language-level and learner-level motivation is mostly pre-determined and less susceptible to change, there should be things a teacher can do in the learning situation level to support students in this process. This study explored teacher perspectives on situational factors that may motivate their students to read EAP texts. Thus, the objective of the study was to find out the factors that motivate learners to read EAP texts.

2.1. Methodology

2.2.1 Instruments and Elicitation Procedures

Two English teachers from Shankar Dev Campus, Tribhuvan University (TU), Patalisadak, Kathmandu experienced in teaching reading English content-area textbooks were invited to individually talk about their own EAP teaching reading experiences in semi-structured interviews. The interviews were audio recorded and listened to repeatedly for information regarding what made the interviewees sustain their efforts under pedagogical settings. Based on these interview data, the researcher constructed nine statements to describe on a series of studies situating L2 motivation under the task-based research paradigm. Their findings (Domyei & Kormos, 2000) confirmed the assumption that situation-specific motives, rather than the general motives, have stronger impact on learners’ task engagement. Motivation in second or foreign language acquisition may be thought as the incentive, the need, or the desire that the learner feels to learn the second language. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) distinguish three kinds of motivation that affect language acquisition namely a) integrative motivation b) instrumental motivation, and c) social group identification.

For Gardner (2001, p. 5), the notion of ‘integrativeness’—a desire to learn a language in order to “come closer to the other language community” (as cited in Lamb, 2004)—has been a central concept in language learner motivation for several decades now, influential not just in theory and research but in teaching methodology and materials (Harmer, 2007). Dornyei (1990, 1994) extended the concept of L2 motivation beyond the language level to include a learner level and a learning situation level. He postulated that these three levels reflect the three different aspects of language, i.e., the social, personal, and educational subject matter dimensions. Most recently, language teaching experts are pursuing a series of studies situating L2 motivation under the task-based paradigm (Dornyei, 2002).
learning situations in which learners may be more motivated to engage in EAP reading.

The questionnaire consisted of nine statements (see appendix). The participants were required to rate these 9 items using 5 point Likert scale: Very willing to read (5), Willing to read (4), Neutral (3), Unwilling to read (2) and Very unwilling to read (1). They were required to choose one of the alternatives. The data gathered were analyzed quantitatively using simple statistical tool of percentage and frequency and mean.

2.2.2 Participants
The questionnaire was distributed to 50 English teachers from different campuses of Tribhuvan university (TU) having experience in teaching EAP reading. With an 80% response rate, 40 data sets were obtained. That is, forty teacher participants took part in the study. They were in the age group 25-59 years.

3. Analysis and Discussion of Results
The table (1) below summarizes the responses made by the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary statistics of motivation question</th>
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<td><strong>Table 1</strong></td>
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<table>
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<th>Situations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. There are clear graphs, tables, and illustrations in the texts.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The organization and layout of the books are easy to follow.</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The sentence structures and grammar are explained.</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. All language skills are-listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and strategies are taught.</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. There are new / specialized vocabularies in the texts.</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The teacher explains everything to them and uses some Nepali to explain basic concepts</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Key points are highlighted while teaching.</td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. They are required to involve in the tasks.</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The exams are directly based on classroom teaching.</td>
<td>4.46</td>
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</table>

The table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the nine situations. It demonstrates that the items with the four highest average scores are teachers’ explanation of everything to the students with the use some Nepali to explain basic concepts (M= 4.66), key point highlights while teaching (M= 4.53 ), exam-based classroom teaching (M= 4.46) and clear graphs, tables, and illustrations in the texts (M= 4.2).

Item “h” (They are required to involve in the tasks) stood out from others with the lowest mean (1.86). Involvement in the tasks on the part of students will lower their normal willingness to read.

Other items with mean scores lower than 4.0 on a scale of 5 include teaching of all language skills (M=3.86), the organization and layout of the books (M=3.53), the availability of specialized vocabularies in the texts (M=3.53), and explanation of sentence structures and grammar (M=3.13). All these items, however, have mean scores above an average of 3.0.
Teachers indicated stronger motivation on the part of students to read when key points were highlighted while teaching (M = 4.53), the teacher explains everything to them and uses some Nepali to explain basic concepts (M = 4.66), the exams are directly based on classroom teaching (M = 4.46) and clear graphs, tables, and illustrations are embedded in the texts (M = 4.2).

Compared to the various types of situations mentioned, students’ involvement in the tasks has the least effect in motivating students to read. This item is situation specific and it is the area where the teacher can work on. The finding partly support the Dornyei and Kormos’s (2000) claim on the strong impact of situation-specific motives and give more promise to teacher intervention. However, all items except this (item h) were rated between means of 3.13 and 4.66 out of the highest possible score of 5.0.

Conclusions

Motivation has been a central concept in teacher education for many decades now. Its importance has been acknowledged not just in theory and research but in teaching methodology and materials. Although learners may be motivated to read for many different reasons, in the learning situation level they may have similar learning needs that should be satisfied in order for them to sustain the learning effort, i.e., reading. Motivation is “the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained” (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002, p. 4). Crookes and Schmidt (1991, p. 480) wrote “. . . teachers would describe a student as motivated if he or she becomes productively engaged in learning tasks, and sustains that engagement, without the need for continual encouragement or direction.” The study showed that learners would be willing to read under mainly four circumstances: when 1) key points were highlighted while teaching, 2) the teacher explained everything to them and used some Nepali to explain basic concepts, 3) the exams were directly based on classroom teaching 4) there were clear graphs, tables, and illustrations in the texts.

References


**Appendix: Questionnaire for English Teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (optional):</th>
<th>Nationality:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>Age:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex:</td>
<td>Qualification:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Designation:</td>
<td>Name of the campus:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience:</td>
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</table>

Please rate your students’ willingness to read the English under the following situations using scales: **Very willing to read** (5), **willing to read** (4), **neutral** (3), **unwilling to read** (2), and **very unwilling to read** (1).

- a. There are clear graphs, tables, and illustrations in the texts.
- b. The organization and layout of the books are easy to follow.
- c. The sentence structures and grammar are explained.
- d. All language skills are-listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and strategies are taught.
- e. There are new / specialized vocabularies in the texts.
- f. The teacher explains everything to them and uses some Nepali to explain basic concepts.
- g. Key points are highlighted while teaching.
- h. They are required to involve in the tasks.
- i. The exams are directly based on classroom teaching.