

The Correlation Between the Number of Hours Spent on Reading and Language Competence Gained?

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Abstract *In academia, there is a sort of hidden argument about the factors which shape effective reading and the amount of language competence gained through reading. In this regard, few believe that the number of the hours spent daily on reading different sources will lead to effective reading and high language competence regardless of the fact that how this amount of time is spent. On the contrary, some believe that the number of hours has nothing to do with effective reading and this time measurement criterion has no validity in relation to effective reading and the development of specialized language competence. Accordingly, the present paper tried to consider the essential factors which lead to effective reading and the development of specialized competence. Moreover, it aimed at providing evidence of the fact that high specialized language competence is basically the result of effective reading rather than the number of hours spent on reading something.*

Keywords: *Effective reading, Factors, Time measurement, Criterion*

1. Introduction

In academia, reading comprehension is one of the most fundamental skills to be developed in a significant way to end into high specialized language competence. Generally speaking, reading skill is defined and considered as the ability to read and comprehend a given text (Williams, 1989; Lewis and Reinders, 2003). In this regard, many different factors such as jargon familiarity, text familiarity, and genre familiarity play an essential role in effective reading and the necessary competence gained through reading. Regarding the factors which affect effective reading, few has been said directly (Williams, 1989; Lewis and Reinders, 2003; Berg, 1998; Lowes et al., 2004; Fairbairn and Fairbairn, 2001).

However, the important issue which the present study has focused on is that the number of hours spend on reading has a little or nothing to do with effective reading and the development of the specialized language competence. In other words, those who claim that if one person spends more hours behind his/her chair reading; s/he develops more specialized competence than those who spend fewer hours. This claim is nonsense if we ignore the quality of reading. Actually, one can develop his/her specialized language competence while spending fewer amount of time than others. The correlation between the number of hours spent on reading and language competence gained is something which has not been referred to by any scholar including the above-mentioned researchers. In academia, few believe that the more time you spend on reading a text, simply because you cannot comprehend it by the first time, means that you are learning more than those who spend less time on the same text! This claim is made based on no rational. However, this research strongly disagrees with this justification. To put this simple, for example, spending 10 hours on reading different books does not reflect the fact that you learn more and develop a better competence than another proficient reader who spends 5 hours. Later, I will discuss that this 5 hours more time spent may go for checking the meaning of unfamiliar jargon or lack of comprehension by the first time reading.

Accordingly, the present research takes the view that the more time you spend on reading something daily does not necessarily mean that you are increasing your specialized language competence.

2. Some Factors Which Lead to Slow Reading and Comprehension

In this part some critical issues which lead to slow reading will be considered. It should be mentioned that these few factors mentioned here cause language learners spend more time on a piece of work which can be covered in no time by proficient readers.

2.1. *Puzzling Over Unfamiliar Words and Jargon*

Some language learners puzzle over every unfamiliar word or jargon they encounter during reading a piece of work. In order to find the meaning of those unfamiliar words, they may immediately refer to their dictionaries which may hinder the speed of reading. This happens while at the beginning levels of reading comprehension courses it has always been said not to seek help from the dictionary all the time. However, the amount of time spent on looking up a word in the dictionary does not lead to effective reading although it is integrated in the reading process!

2.2. *Repeatedly Going Back Over What has Just Been Read to Check Understanding*

Some proficient readers can comprehend what they read by the first time whereas some other readers may have to read the same text more than one time in order to make sure they have fully comprehended it. This will cause the slow readers to spend more time on the same piece of work. Consequently, it is transparent that they have to spend more hours on reading the same materials than what I call proficient readers.

2.3. *Reading Out Loud or Under the Breath*

Generally, reading loud aims at improving pronunciation. It is believed that reading loud reduces the reading speed. Accordingly, in order to minimize the amount of time spent on a reading text, silent reading should be put into consideration.

3. Some Factors Which Lead to Smart Reading and Comprehension

If you have come up with the idea to join those who believe that spending many hours on reading does not guarantee that you have more competence than those who spend less hours, the following suggestions can aid you save up your time and spend it on other language skills, for example, speaking proficiency.

3.1. *Reading the Introduction and Conclusions*

Reading the introductions or conclusions of chapters or articles first to gain an overview of a chapter or even a book itself. This may be enough to give you the key points that you need for 'reveal' reading purposes.

For other reading purposes, this initial review of introductions or conclusions will help you to gain an overall sense of the main points made by the author.

3.2. *Find the Main Idea*

As known, most books, articles and other well-written sources are broken up into paragraphs or sections. Within each paragraph or section you can try and identify the key point, which is the sentence or sentences upon which the others are built.

3.3. *Reduce Anxiety*

Anxiety can cause language learners to re-read sentences to reassure themselves that they have understood. This can slow the reading process down and lead to frustration at the slow progress made.

Moreover, it causes the language learner to spend more time with little output.

3.4. *Guess the Meaning of Unfamiliar Jargon*

As was mentioned earlier, some readers spend much of their time on what they claim to be effective reading on looking up the unfamiliar jargons in their dictionaries! This is a common reading habit that can also slow the reading process. Many students who encounter unfamiliar or difficult words stop reading at that point and check the meaning of the word in a dictionary. However, it is often better to keep reading, as you can often gain more information later from the text, which can then clarify the points you did not initially understand. You could always underline words you did not immediately understand and if their meaning does not become clear from continued reading, you can check later. This technique will lead you spend less time on reading a text.

As emphasized earlier, an essential skill in reading is the ability to identify key points or ideas and primary words in reading. If you can try and isolate first the main points in any section of text, you can then try and pick out the words that support the main points and try and give less attention to the rest. This can speed your reading and help you gain a sense of the subject matter more quickly without having to spend many hours struggling with few pages.

3.5. *Note Making not Note Taking*

Smart reader is about becoming more involved with what you read. One important way of getting involved is by making notes. Making notes is different from taking notes. As the matter of fact, note making becomes a more active experience when you have to select what you think is relevant and important. This is opposed to note taking, when you just copy down what you read in a book in an unselective way. Note making means summarizing or highlighting what you feel is important or relevant to note.

4. A Survey Regarding Factors Affecting Slow Reading

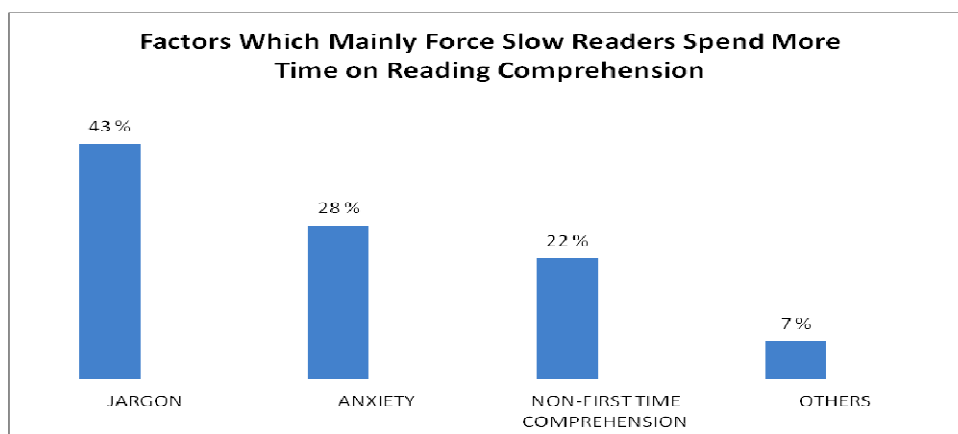
Regarding the above-mentioned factors which affect slow reading or smart reading, a questionnaire consisting of some yes/no questions was utilized. Accordingly, the questionnaire was prepared and given to 20 senior lectures. The questionnaire mainly aimed at targeting the following questions through some subset questions:

- Is there a significant one to one relationship between the number of hours spent on reading daily and language competence gained?
- Is it true to say the more time you spend on reading than other language learners means that you are developing a better specialized language competence?
- What factors mostly lead to slow reading?

5. Results and Discussion

The results of the survey indicated that 43% of the participants agreed that unfamiliarity of the readers with the specialized jargon makes them spend more time than they should on looking up the meaning of the unfamiliar vocabulary in their dictionaries. 28% considered anxiety as the second factor which makes a reader spends more time on a piece of work. 22% have to spend more time because they do not comprehend what they read by the first time. This also piles up the number of hours spent on reading. 7% considered other factors such as the quality of the materials as a factor which makes someone spends more time on reading.

Figure 1. The statistical analysis of the answers:



The ultimate aim of the present paper was to investigate the correlation between the number of hours spend on reading and the amount of language competence gained. Accordingly, the results obtained from the questionnaire were indicative of the fact that the number of hours spent on reading does not necessarily lead to effective reading and more language competence.

The findings of the present study shed more light to the studies conducted by many scholars (Williams, 1989; Lewis and Reinders, 2003; Berg, 1998; Lowes et al., 2004; Fairbairn and Fairbairn, 2001) in relation to factors which affect the speed of reading and the amount of time spent on comprehending any given texts. Accordingly, jargon familiarity, text familiarity, and genre familiarity have an essential role in effective reading and the necessary competence gained through reading.

In this study, it was found out that anxiety as an important factor has a lot to do with effective reading. This can be related to the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1981) which highlights the fact that a number of affective factors play a facilitative role in language learning. These factors are: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety.

Krashen claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to 'raise' the affective filter and form a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, a high affective filter inhibits acquisition, whereas a low affective filter promotes it. In the same line, language learners with high affective filter may have to spend more time comprehending the language input than those who have low affective filter.

The clinical implication of the present study is that the factors such as Reading the introduction and conclusions, finding the main idea, reducing anxiety, and guessing the meaning of unfamiliar jargon which lead to smart reading should be considered more by those slow readers. Accordingly, much time can be saved up and spent on boosting other language skills in general or specialized competence in particular.

However, other factors such as background knowledge and the age of the language learner which may boost or hinder the speed of comprehension and language learning should also be taken into consideration in future studies.

6. Conclusion

In academia, there are two viewpoints regarding the number of hours spent on reading and effective reading which leads to the development of the specialized language competence. Few believe that the number of the hours spent daily on reading different sources will lead to the development of the specialized language competence regardless of whether that reading which they refer to is effective or not. On the contrary, some believe that the number of hours has nothing or very few to do with the effective reading which leads to the enhancement of the specialized language competence. According to this point of view, this time measurement criterion has no validity in relation to effective reading. In other words, spending 10 hours on reading different books does not guarantee that you learn more than another reader who spends 5 hours or less.

Accordingly, the present paper tried to consider the essential factors which lead to effective reading and the development of language competence. Moreover, it aimed at providing evidence of the fact that the high specialized language competence is basically the result of effective reading rather than the number of hours spent on reading something.

To sum up, unfamiliarity with different jargons, anxiety and lack of comprehending any texts by the first time reading are among the most important factors which may force the language learner spends more time on reading and comprehending something. So this more spent time does not mean it has been spent effectively.

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