

Developing Reading Skills through Task-based Activities at University level

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Abstract

Current research shows that reading is not passive skill but rather active one in which involves both human perceptions and thought. Reading skills needs more attention from learners' point of view and from teachers' point of view because of their academic purpose is concerned with the use of reading skills. The learners as well as teachers both have to read and understand the prescribed reading materials of their core subjects. The purpose of this research paper is to provide a research informed basis for introducing new ways of developing reading skills of the learners at Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur, Sindh (Pakistan). The existing method of teaching reading is not up to the mark and does not appear to be more effective in teaching and developing reading skills in the classroom. The main purpose of this research paper is therefore, to create an understanding of how to make an improvement in the existing teaching reading situation by investigating some significant features of the current teaching reading process in this context and comparing this with a research informed intervention, to increase the opportunities for learners to participate actively in their learning process particularly for developing their reading skills through text-based-task activities in the classroom.

Introduction

Reading proficiency plays a great vital role in understanding written materials accurately and efficiently. Reading plays a key role in every field of academic career. Today, we all are living in multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-reading world where it is difficult to survive

without reading. In Pakistan, the reading proficiency of the learners is not up to standard. It is not only in the area of reading, but our learners are not well proficient in other areas of learning as well. However, reading needs to be more attention from both the teachers and the learners' points of view, because of their academic needs underlying the use of reading skills. The main purpose of this paper is to develop reading skills of the learners through task-based activities in the classroom.

The existing teaching reading materials in prescribed syllabus at Shah Abdul Latif University are not learner-centered and less effective for learning and developing any skills of the learners. This is largely reflected in the poor performance of the learners both in their examinations and in their every day life situation. Precisely, they have no real contact with prescribed text books. They have a general fear of reading long reading text of their courses because of their deficiency in reading skills and lack of motivation in the classroom. In my view, the main possible cause of this passive response of the learners in their classrooms is due to the absence of the active role on the part of the learners and due to the use of the obsolete traditional teaching reading methods. Teaching method of the Universities is not learner-centered, so learners' involvement in learning through reading, through text-based-task activities, question and discussion are negligible. Even the physical condition of classrooms is not very much feasible for learners because:

- Shortage of furniture (mostly chairs).
- Small rooms in comparison to ever-increasing number of learners which normally is 50 to 70, and difficult to control. However, due to many such reasons the students fail to comprehend reading textbooks properly.

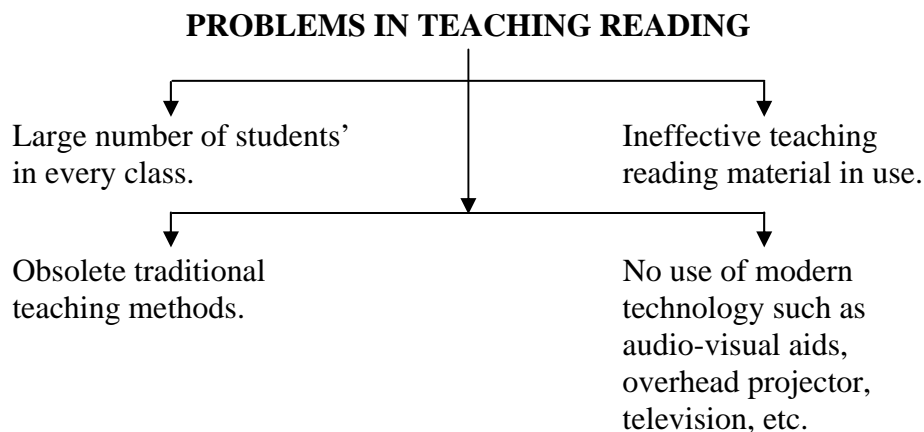


Figure # 1: Shows the problems in Teaching Reading in the classroom

Research Question

On the basis of the above facts, research question could be simply posted as:

How to teach and develop reading skills of the learners at university level?

Literature review

The Concept of Task

The concept of task has recognized an important element in classroom teaching and making learners' assessment and designing course syllabus. There are two types of tasks one is called *real world or target tasks*, and second is called *pedagogical tasks*. Real world or target task concern to uses of language in the world beyond the classroom. Pedagogical tasks are such tasks that occur in the classroom (Nunan, 2004).

Long (1985:89) formulates his approach to task-based language teaching in terms of target tasks, defining that a target task is:

“a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely for some reward. Thus examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes,

making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, weighting a patient, sorting letters, making a hotel reservation, writing a cheque, finding a street destination and helping someone across a road”.

In the light of above definition a task is a piece of work carried out by anybody, for anybody, either for free or for reward is called a task. For example, writing a paper, borrowing a book, typing a letter, booking a seat on train, ironing clothes, buying a pair of glasses, helping somebody to cross the road etc. In a way what we do in every day life can be termed as task. Nunan record his own reservations about this definition is that ‘it is non-technical and non-linguistic’ because it defines the sorts of items from above list that have non-linguistic outcomes e.g. a painted fence, taking driving licence, a room in a hotel, etc. When linguistics are transformed the tasks from real world to the classroom, tasks become pedagogical in nature (Nunan, 2004).

Richards et al. (1986:289) define pedagogical task in the following way:

“An activity or action which is carried out as a result of processing or understanding a language: (i.e. as a response) for example, drawing a map while listening to a tape, listening to an instruction and performing a command, may be referred to as task. Tasks may or may not involve the production of language. As tasks usually required the teacher to specify what would be regarded as successful completion of the task. The use of a variety of different kinds of tasks in language teaching is said to make language teaching more communicative. Since, it provides a purpose for a classroom activity which goes beyond the practice of the language for its own sake”.

In the light of above definition in which authors define a pedagogical aspect of tasks, where tasks are explained in terms of what the learners will do in the classroom rather than out side the classroom.

Breen (1987) define a pedagogical task in the following words:

“.....any structure language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task. ‘Task’ is therefore assumed to refer to a range of work plains which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning from the simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or stimulations and decision-making”.

Breen definition about task is very broad; it implies that whatever learners do in the classroom in order to learn a language is called a task.

Candlin (1987:10-11) defines language learning task as follows:

“One of a set of differentiated, sequence able, problem activities involving learners and teachers in some joint selection from a range of varied cognitive and communicative procedures applied to existing and new knowledge in the collective exploration and pursuance of foreseen or emergent goals within a social milieu. It would seem that specification of the following key features will be required in each case: input, roles, setting, actions, monitoring, outcomes, and feedback”.

The definitions above involve in it several characteristics. Such as, tasks as a set of activities, not a single activity. These activities which are in the form of a set have characteristics of their own. They are differentiated in meaning so that the activities that constitute tasks should cater for individual differences in learning by providing different types of activities for different learners. The activities of the task can also be sequenced and related to each other by certain focus. Meanwhile, the activities are problem-solving which means they present problems or stimulate problems to be discussed or solved.

Candlin in his definition of task also suggests that the learner and the teachers should negotiate and work collaboratively. This is aimed at selecting suitable procedures for each learner. This implies that various procedures could be selected which emphasis not only cognitive but also communicative aspects. This means that these procedures should involve learners in a kind of interactive process between their background knowledge and the new knowledge which is contained in the activities. The procedures are aimed at exploring and pursuing goals of language learning tasks. The goals are sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit. Candlin goes on to say that these goals can be found in a social milieu whether it is inside or outside the classroom. All these could be examined in terms of input, roles, setting, actions, monitoring, outcomes, and feedback. Candlin (1987: 11-12), however, elaborate each of these key features as follows:

- (a) **Input:** By input he means whatever data are presented and selected by the learners and teachers for work, in whatever the medium, media and associates with whatever personal experience of the participants. What resources are needed for the accomplishment of the task?
- (b) **Roles:** By roles he refers to the specification of roles of participants in relation to accomplishment of the task and their roles in respect of their relationship with each other. What do participants have to do and who assigns such duties? How are the participants to co-operate? What is to be their relative distance and relative powerfulness? Who acts and who monitors, who instructs and who guides?
- (c) **Setting:** By setting he means the classroom arrangements specified in the task. Does it choice among work setting is left to the participants or stipulated? What links are there between the overall classroom setting and out-of-class activity?
- (d) **Actions:** By actions he means that procedures to be followed in the understanding, execution and accomplishment of the task. How

are these set down? Is choice among them is left upon or fixed in advance? How is the work to be shared? What behaviours of various participants are expected, tolerated? Who does what with whom and how?

- (e) **Monitoring:** How is the selection of the input, the choice of role, the adaptation of setting and effectiveness of actions to be monitored? Who takes on this role? How is the monitoring to be done? How are changes of direction in terms of alternative input, setting, role or actions to be captured? What are the foci of monitoring, communication, learning, social behaviour?
- (f) **Outcomes:** Outcomes refers to the goals of the task. Are these to be prescribed or can they be discerned or reformulated? Are various outcomes possible, permitted? Can criteria for achievement be determined in the process by the participants? What connections are to be/ can be established with other task? In what terms are the various outcomes to be stated?
- (g) **Feedback:** Feedback means evaluation of the task, who gives this, and whom, at what stages? Is such feedback implicit in the task itself, for example, enabling other subsequent tasks to be accomplished, or is it self-contained? Does the feedback relate both to content and to the process of task? If so, how is the latter to be formulated? What are the connections between the task and the social and cognitive world of the learners? How can feedback be optimally related to the changes in the participants' behaviour?

The above mentioned key features provided by Candlin by give a kind of guideline for designing task will reflect the concept of task proposed by Candlin. Further Shavelson and Stern (1981 in Nunan 1989, 2004) suggest that while designing a task the following factors should be taken into consideration:

Content: By content they mean the subject matter that is to be taught to the learners.

Material: By material they mean the things provided to the learners for observation and manipulation.

Activities: By activities means the things learners and teachers are involved in during the lesson.

Learners: While designing any task students abilities, needs and interests should be given importance.

Social community: In the class students should be put like a social community which gives them a sense of group ness.

Nunan (ibid) comments that tasks are primarily aimed at helping learners to develop the skills which they will need to undertake in real-world communicative tasks beyond the classroom. Prabhu (1987) is the view that while designing communicative tasks linguistic forms need to be considered. He argues that involvement in communicative tasks is mainly concerned with developing competence in the second language.

Nunan (ibid) provides a framework for analyzing tasks; that framework consists on three components: *goals, input, and activities*. Nunan says that these three components imply certain roles such as: teacher role, setting etc.

Goals: Goals described by Nunan as 'vague general intention' behind any given learning task. Goals serve as a link between the narrow and the broader curriculum. If any teacher is asked a question why s/he is undertaking a certain task? The possible responses are as follows:

“I wanted to develop their confidence in speaking”

“I wanted to develop their personal writing skills”

“I wanted to encourage them to negotiate information between each other to develop their interaction skills”

“I wanted to develop their study skills” (Nunan 1989: 48, 2004:42).

Nunan (ibid) believes that goals can be related to a variety of general outcomes such as communicative, affective or cognitive. Goals can also describe directly teacher and learner behaviour. He further comments that sometimes goals can only be inferred by examining a task, because they are not always explicitly stated. He argues that it is not necessary that one task has one goal. There are some tasks which involve learners in several activities and contain several goals simultaneously. He gives an example of a small group discussion on a socio-cultural theme which relate to both communicative and socio-cultural goals.

Input: Input is the action of putting something in. In the context of language input means the amount of language activities we provide for learners. The data should include authentic material; the learners should be exposed to a wide variety of data rather than to restricted selection. Nunan (1989) is of the view that authenticity is justified on the grounds that authentic material is most effective way to develop a particular skill.

Activity: Nunan (1989) says that activity refers to what actually learners do in the classroom. He proposes three general ways of characterizing activities which are as follows:

- (1) rehearsal for the real world,
- (2) skills use,
- (3) and fluency/accuracy, Nunan (1989:59)

Again Willis (1996:23) define task in the following words “tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome”.

In the light of above definitions it is believed that tasks are primarily aimed involving learners in communicative language use where learners’ attention is focused on meaning rather than linguistics elements. Further, Ellis (2003:16) defines a pedagogical task in the following way:

“A task is a work plan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate prepositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills and also various cognitive processes”.

Finally, Nunan (2004) gives his own definition is that a pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work in which learners are involved to comprehend, manipulate, produce or interact in the target language where they concentrate on meaning rather than form. The task should also have sense of completeness, being able to recognize alone as communicative act in its own right with a beginning, middle and an end.

Nunan (2004) further states that pedagogical concerned with the following principles and practices:

- A needs-based approach to content selection.
- An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
- The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
- The provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language but also on the learning process itself.
- An enhancement of the learner’s own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- The linking of classroom language learning with language use outside the classroom (p.1).

After getting detail literature survey, the present study was planned to develop reading skills of the learners through text-based-

task activities in the classroom. The study was conducted in order to find out way how to develop reading skills of the learners especially for ESL learners, through text-based-task activities in English compulsory classes particularly at university level.

Participants

I have collected the required data of the present study and for this purpose from 10 graduate students of B.Sc (Hons) P-I of Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur, Sindh, was selected to represent the whole class of 50 students of graduate level of B.Sc (Hons) P-I. I carried out this study with 10 graduates of B.Sc (Hons) P-1 of Zoology department of Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur Sindh. The main purpose of conducting this study was to determine the reliability and over all quality of developing reading skills through text-based-task activities in the classroom.

Instruments

To achieve the objectives of the present study, following tools were used by the researcher: (a) Sample Text-based-task activities (b) Interviews of learners.

(a) Sample text-based task activities

Literature survey shows that text-based-task activities are best way to learn and develop reading skills of the learners, especially at university level because learners are required to take part in a number of meaningful activities with different task. Learners learn the target language more effectively when they are exposed to meaningful task-based activities (Willis 1996; Ellis 2003 and Nunan 2004, cited in Khand, 2008).

I personally exploited all these sampled text-based task reading activities in the classroom, with a view to find ways and means to develop their reading skills at University level (See Appendices1-7). For this purpose one essay, ‘Spoon Feeding’ was selected for reading and exploiting different text-based task-based activities in the

classroom from the text “Points of View”, prose work which is prescribed in their course for B.A/ B.Sc level.

Aim of these text-based task activities for developing reading skills:

- To make learners aware about reading as a skill.
- To make learners think about the process of developing reading skills through text-based task activities.

Tasks during activities:

- Warming-up discussion
- Input reading
- Exploratory tasks
- Integrated tasks (See Appendices 1-7).

We have followed three-phase framework of developing reading skills:

The phases of developing reading skills through text-based-task activities were broken down into the three phases, namely *pre-activity*, *while-activity* and *post-activity*:

Table 1.0

PHASE	ACTIVITY
• Pre-activity	Warm-up questions, Input-reading
• While-activity	Anticipating, Skimming and Scanning.
• Post activity	Inferencing, guessing and predicting, using contextual clues.

Findings of text-based task activities

Pre-task activities

Interpretation of data

The main purpose of exploiting these different sample text-based task activities (See Appendices 1-7) was simply to enhance learners reading skills and to develop their abilities particularly dealing with reading textbooks inside and outside the classroom.

I used the following materials for developing reading skills through text-based task activities: Handouts, Whiteboard, Marker pen, Overhead projector and transparencies in the classroom. All these sample text-based task activities were conducted in single sessions in the classroom where time was allotted 60 minutes. Only 5 to 10 minutes time period was allotted to the learners for each task-based activities in the classroom. First I read the guide lines for teachers in front of all learners for exploiting sample text-based-task activities and explained the purpose of each text-based task activity and after that read instructions of each activity in the classroom. I noted that learners took keen interest and did well all these different types of sample text-based task activities in the classroom with as a group work or as an individual work.

Nation and Newton (1997:244) stated that 'learners involved in group work activities can get help from each other. Through negotiation with each other, learners can continue to get additional information on an unfamiliar item until they are satisfied that they understand it'.

Interpretation of data of task-1

Learners first took part in a pre-task activities or warm-up discussion that introduces the topic. The main purpose of the task was to activate the learners' prior knowledge of the world, and to motivate them for particular studies, and to prepare them for the issues to be raised (See Appendix-3). All research Scholars agrees that learner's prior

knowledge of the world plays an important role in reading comprehension. In this task *input reading skill* involved with the aim to introduce relevant information and to create a solid foundation of critical thinking and discussions. Instructions for task one was given to the learners where learners were asked discuss the following questions with your group in the classroom and give answers of the same questions.

Table 1 Task 1. Frequency of learners' (n=10) of answering the warm-up questions.

TYPE: INPUT READING

Item	Successful (n) (%)	Unsuccessful (n) (%)
1. How old our civilization?	8 (80.0)	2 (20)
2. What aspects of our society have been changed The most during the past hundred years?	5 (50.0)	5 (50.0)
3. What are the main causes of social change?	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)
4. In what ways are our societies today better or Worse than they were last hundred years ago?	2 (20.0)	8 (80.0)

Interpretation of task-2

In task two, learners were instructed to read the text book 'Spoon feeding' and to write at least 10 words which they think will occur in the reading text. Learners were allowed to consult with dictionary. Learners did this task in as an individual work and time limit was allowed 5 minutes

Interpretation of task-3

In task-3 learners were asked to discuss within group of their written words choices which they thought occurred in the reading text. Time was allotted 5 minutes.

Interpretation of task-4

In task-4 learners were asked to read the text 'Spoon Feeding' quickly and confirmed their 10 words choices in the reading text. It is individual work and time was allowed 10 minutes.

Interpretation of task-5

In task-5 learners were asked to read the text 'Spoon Feeding' quickly and give answer of the following questions. It was group work and time was allowed 10 minutes. Skill involved such as anticipating, skimming and scanning.

Table 2

TYPE: WHILE READING

Item	Successful (n) (%)	Unsuccessful (n) (%)
1. Whom does the writer make responsible for appendicitis and diseases?	6 (60.0)	4 (40.0)
2. In what way have the roles of a labourer and a housewife changed?	3 (30.0)	7 (70.0)
3. Why do people not write with their own hands anymore?	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)
4. In what way has education become <i>Spoon Feeding</i> ?	8 (80.0)	2 (20.0)
5. How has the attitude of people towards life changed?	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)

Interpretation of task-6

In task-6 learners were given different statements and learners were asked to circle the following statements whether it's true or false. It was group work and time was allowed 10 minutes. Skills involved such as inferencing, guessing and predicting.

Table 3**TYPE: POST READING**

Item	Successful (n) (%)	Unsuccessful (n) (%)
1. In the reading text 'Spoon Feeding' the author is comparing new generation with old one.	8 (80.0)	2 (20.0)
2. Nature would give more and more talents to the younger generations even if they do not use them.	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)
3. Walking and riding would disappear after sometime.	9 (90.0)	1 (10.0)
4. A Housewife dos every thing by herself.	5 (50.0)	5 (50.0)
5. Instead of knife and fork people use their teeths.	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)
6. Our civilization is yet 300 hundred years old	3 (30.0)	7 (70.0)

Interpretation of task-7

In task-7 learners were given selected words from reading text and learners were asked to match words with their definitions. It was group work and time was allowed 10 minutes. Skills involved such as inferring meaning by making use of the contextual clues.

Table 4**TYPE: POST READING**

Item	Successful (n) (%)	Unsuccessful (n) (%)
A. Savage	6 (60.0)	4 (40.0)
B. Civilization	8 (80.0)	6 (20.0)
C. Pedestrians	9 (90.0)	1 (10.0)
D. Luxuriously	5 (50.0)	2 (50.0)
E. Grappling	6 (60.0)	4 (40.0)
F. Labyrinths	2 (20.0)	8 (80.0)
G. Masticate	3 (70.0)	7 (30.0)
H. Crib	2 (80.0)	8 (80.0)
I. Inevitable	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)
J. Advertiser	9 (90.0)	1 (10.0)

Findings of text-based-task activities

Above mentioned findings shows that learners were some extent successful for developing their reading skills through exploiting these different text-based-task activities in the classroom. Findings indicates

that overall, the rate of success was good and that success was related more to quality rather than quantity of the strategies used (See Appendices). Research has shown us is that successful learner using a wide variety of strategies at their disposal. Jones (1995) states that 'learners strategies have become recognized as a prime ingredient in language learning success'. Further Folse (2004:89) states, 'appropriate language learning strategies can result in improved proficiency and self-confidence among learners'.

(b) Interpretation of interview data of learners

Interviews play an important role in collecting qualitative data with help of participants' responses. Interviews help participants express themselves out. Tuckman (cited in Cohen et al. 2001) describes interview as exploring an interviewees' head in order to find out what is there in terms his/her choices, preferences, likes, and dislikes. Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) see interviews in a similar way saying interviews help obtain insights about somebody else's position.

In order to substantiate this data further, eight graduate students of B.Sc level of Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur were also interviewed to see their opinions about the traditional text reading i.e. *Spoon Feeding* and developing reading skills through text-based-task activities. The set of findings from the interview data is given below.

Learners' views about traditional text reading

This section starts with the brief explanation of the analysis of the interview data collected from eight graduate learners of B.Sc level of Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur, focusing on the process by which categories for the analysis were identified.

Data analysis: Identifying categories

We first read all the interviews and certain themes emerged; then divided each interview into sentences and attempted to group each

sentence within one of the categories. For example the following occurrences of ideas expressed by different learners in their interviews have been put under the category of 'role of teacher'.

Role of the teacher

Having gone through the responses of learners, different issues came to the surface. In traditional classes the lecture method of teaching provides fewer opportunities of developing reading skills to learners. The learners have expressed their desire for more interaction with the teacher, with the material.

The most important tool for developing reading skill is the text, use of which is restricted to the teacher; it is almost absent with hands of learners. If learners were required to read the text books by themselves, there could have been more opportunities for participation and interaction. (Interview 1)

The majority (eight) respondents were critically evaluated the role of the teacher in traditional classes for various reasons. For example five students did not like the existing method of the teaching reading skills because of teacher's dominant role.

The teacher is just giving his own explanation of the reading text. It means he is not worried about learners' understanding but he is concerned about his own understanding. These kinds of learners' response raises a lot of questions in terms of the way materials were designed, the materials do not engage learners in e text-based task activities. This further suggests that the existing materials and methods of teaching do not cater to the needs of learners in terms of developing their reading skills in the classroom. (Interview 5)

This has consequences for policy makers and planners to take into account the needs of learners and introduce text-based-task activities and materials for developing reading skills. Even some

students have given suggestions as how to develop reading skills. This is evident in the following interview response.

If the teacher asks learners to read the text themselves and then should ask learner, to use different strategies for developing effective reading skills through text-based-task activities in the classroom. (Interview 2)

The above responses show learners want to take part in the process with the help of the teacher.

Role of the text

The text is plays important role for developing reading skills of the learners. However, the data shows the way reading was carried out in the classroom where teacher ignored learners participation in the process. Learners in their responses have expressed their desire to use the text by themselves.

We want ourselves to do some reading inside the classroom and we should find out meaning of difficult words by ourselves. We want to present ourselves in the class. (Interview 3)

This further shows that the text remained under the control of the teacher, which left learners with no tasks to engage them and demanded no apparent effort from them that can push them to make any effort developing their reading skills in the classroom.

The majority of learners see the current teaching reading pattern as unhelpful for developing any skills, which suggests that learners should be given an opportunity for participation to actively take part in learning reading skills. This will help them take part in the process and interact with their fellows and with the teacher. The data further shows learners want to see change in the role of the teacher and in their roles too. Therefore in future the roles of these two parties should be redefined where the teacher's effort should be to make

learners direct their efforts to understand reading text by themselves not by the teacher alone. This implies that the teacher's role should be to create more opportunities of participation for developing their reading skills in which learners should be given maximum time to do things by themselves rather than being spoon fed by the teacher.

Interview data related to text- based task activities

Learners' views about the text- based task activities

In contrast to traditional method of teaching where the teacher read the text i.e. *Spoon Feeding*, the text- based task activities provided learners with active role of participation. Also the task-based activities provided more opportunities for participation and interaction with peers, material and the text, which was reportedly liked by learners. Learners liked the way activities were designed because they helped them invest their own efforts in developing reading skills.

These ideas show the importance of text-based-task activities in terms of teaching and learning reading skills. When learners are put together in groups, they learn from each other with the help of discussion. Different learners come up with different tasks as is expressed by learners in the following interview excerpts.

Actually students should discuss among themselves because for example if there is a difficult sentence, teacher says only two or three meanings but when there are ten students or five students there are different minds and definitely you know there would be collection of different ideas and there would be different interpretations. (Interview 6)

The interview data of eight learners has highlighted several important points regarding how students learn and develop their reading skills.

Majority of learners sees the text-based task activities for developing reading skills as a new experience and view them as helpful pattern of teaching. The respondents indicate that once they were given an opportunity for participation, they actively took part in it.

While taking part in the process they interacted with their fellows and with the teacher and discussed with them many problems in reading. One of the important aspects of new classes reported by learners was the role of the teacher.

Role of the teacher

The role of the teacher was to make learners direct their efforts to understand the reading materials through context, and easy accessibility of the teacher in the task-based activities also helped learners learn in the classroom.

The direct communication of teacher with students and the teacher takes opinions of every student and sir we get too many hints to guess the meaning of reading passage. (Interview 7)

In addition, the teacher's role was more concerned about creating opportunities for students to participate in the process of developing reading skills.

Most of the chance has been to the students to talk about reading skills. After that teacher talks and tell students that this should be the effective tasks. (Interview 8)

He did this by designing classroom activities accordingly.

The way in which our teacher he has presented the reading exercises, it was too much good. (Interview 7)

The overall picture presented by the data shows that teacher played a key role. He invested efforts in planning text-based-task activities and then facilitating them to learners. The teacher mainly

played a role in focusing and framing learners' attention to the task so that learners can carry out the reading tasks by themselves. He then made himself available for the help. This shows the structure of text-based task activities provided less overt role to the teacher in favour of an enhancement of the students' role.

Role of learners

The role of learners in task-based activities was active as compared to the traditional lessons in which they were restricted to listening to the teacher for most of the time.

*Every individual was given opportunity to discuss their confusions which were arising in his mind he was asking from teacher so I think this method new method of developing reading skill is much better for teaching reading skills get much chance to participate and discuss with groups.
(Interview 6)*

In addition, it is striking how often learners talk about learning from each other rather than increased attention from the teacher. The majority of learners said they like working in groups because it helps them share ideas, exchange their opinions, negotiate with each other and get and give help to each other.

*In group discussion we have discussed so many things and every one has given his own opinions about the things and we have and it has enlarged our knowledge and it has helped us in giving opinions more and more opinion about reading skills.
(Interview 8)*

This shows task-based activities for developing reading skills take into account the negotiation and sharing of ideas by providing various interaction opportunities to learners in a classroom. The

opportunities in turn encourage learners to share their concepts with each other. For example one of the learners said

In the task-based activities, what was happening [was] the students were discussing after a few moments. If a teacher asked all the students were just raising their hands so I think it is completely advantage for the students. (Interview 5)

Role of the text

The role of the text in task-based activities was different from the traditional ones. In the former case the teacher explained the new passage whereas in the latter case students' efforts were directed to investigate the whole passage by themselves. Eight students say the way activities were designed helped them understand the reading skills in a better way.

It is helpful for the students because we had to give full attention to the text and we had to put our mind in the text and in this way we guessed the meaning of difficult words from the text. (Interview 2)

The way materials were designed, engaged learners in the text as shown by the following data extract.

There were too many difficult passages but the thing is that we did not use dictionary or any sort of material but we have guessed from the text, we have gone through the sentences that what mean by the sentence, what the sentence wants to say and after that we got each and every thing through guessing we did not use dictionary in the class . (Interview 5)

Some students said that their level of concentration was very high while working with the task-based activities. For example one student says

The material which he is studying goes in his minds. (Interview 3)

The data shows the text played a central role in the task-based activities for developing reading skills. The learners were able to consult it, interrogate it, discuss it and then finally reach to any conclusion. The overall picture presented by these responses suggest that in one way or another most developing reading skills through text-based-task activities is helpful for learners as compared to the traditional lecture method.

Findings showed that traditional classes were simple in their structure because there were not many activities for learners to do except listening to the teacher most of the time. The aim of this study was to find out ways that can be helpful in developing reading skills of the learners' through text-based-task activities in the classroom. The traditional method of teaching may not be appropriate to serve this purpose as it rarely involves learners in learning any skills at all. In contrast, the findings showed that task-based activities provided a greater role to learners in terms of interaction with the text and with each other, and with the teacher. Also it involved them in an opportunity for independent learning. The teacher on the other hand remained as a co-participant of the activity. These all elements made the atmosphere of learning informal and collaborative.

Discussion

The study has investigated the problems with the teaching reading skills at Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur Sindh. The study was conducted to respond to the research question

1. How to teach and develop reading skills of the learners at University level?

As mentioned earlier, two sets of data have been analysed to address the research questions. The first set consists of text-based-task data, the second set consists of interview data of learners. These data

sets have been analysed to investigate the role of the teacher, role of learners, role of the text in learning process.

Role of the teacher

The teacher's role in new way of teaching lessons particularly through text-based task activities in the classroom is different from the traditional ones. The teacher uses his power to facilitate various tasks of the lesson activity: to monitor students' activities, to obtain feedback from them etc. Richard and Rodgers (2001) states that the teacher has played two main roles: the first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts. The second role of teacher is to act as an independent participant within the learning process. The teachers' role in traditional classes played an excessively dominant in the entire process of teaching and learning, which proved detrimental for learners.

Learners' role

Learners played entire different role in two formats of teaching reading. In traditional classes learners were only restricted to listening to the teacher most of the time. Conversely, in the new methods of teaching learners were involved in various reading, writing, speaking, and listening tasks most of the times.

Role of the text

In traditional classes the text remained under authority of the teacher. Learners' were not allowed to read the text themselves. In contrast, in the new methods learners were involved in the text-based-task activities in the classroom.

The overall picture that emerges from the discussion, suggests that traditional classes are handicapped in many ways because there were not many activities for learners to do except listening to the

teacher most of the time. In contrast, the findings showed that text-based-task activities provided a greater role to learners in terms of interaction with the text and with each other, and with the teacher.

Conclusion

Two data sets i.e. classroom data of text-based task activities, and interviews data of learners. The analysis of the data shows that traditional classes particularly the lecture method of teaching provides fewer opportunities of overt participation. Learners have expressed dissatisfaction and would like to play a more active role in the learning process. They have expressed their desire for more interaction with the teacher, with the text and with peers. The limited range of interaction of learners can be attributed to the absence of sufficient tools that ensure the interaction.

The most important tool is the text, if learners were required to process the textual input then there could have been more opportunities for participation and interaction.

In contrast, the text-based task activities provided learners with active role of participation as compared to the lecture method. The task-based activities provided more opportunities for participation and interaction with peers, material and the text, which was reportedly liked by learners. Learners liked the way to develop their reading skills through text-based-task were designed because they helped them invest their own efforts in the learning process.

The overall picture presented by two data sets show that learners' perceptions in general are in favour of intervention and the majority of learners would like to prefer developing their reading skills through text-based-task activities in the classroom.

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Appendix-1

General Guidelines for the teacher:

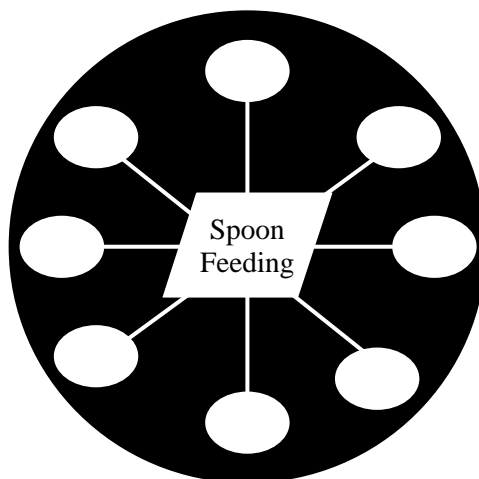
- The materials in your hand (See Appendices) have been designed for graduate students of B.Sc P-1 students with a purpose to develop their reading skills through text-based-task activities.
- In all, the appendices contain 7. Each appendix covers different task-based activities for developing reading skills of the learners and is related to the main topic of the text.
- Each task-based activity have been sequenced and graded according to the learners' level, their background knowledge and needs. However, the teacher may change the sequence of activities in order to fit in his/her situation in the classroom.
- Each appendix consists of guidelines for the teacher which would help him/her in the process of teaching.
- The teacher is advised to teach the learners in the designed classroom activities instruct them to work in individual, pairs/groups. Learners' discussion is necessary because in this way the learner will learn more and defend or criticize their answers and will be independent and responsible for their own learning.
- All the task are based on the reading text selected from learners course book- 'Points of View' Essays' prose work keeping in view learners background knowledge of the subject. However, it is suggested that the teacher should introduce the topic with the help of the pre-reading tasks.
- Where necessary instructions are given before to the learners before they do the task/s.
- Before the learners are engaged in a task, the teacher should ask them to read the instruction, "To the students" in the beginning of each task.
- All the following tasks aim at to develop their reading skills rather than to testing.

Appendix-2**SPOON FEEDING**

Paragraph No.

1. At the season when the British paterfamilias is sending his children on their Christmas visit to the dentist it must occur to him to wonder why the noble savage never has any trouble with his teeth. It is said that they are kept healthy by the hard work they have to do in tearing tough meat without the help of knife and fork. These implements and the art of cookery, are reducing man to a toothless animal, and are, perhaps, responsible for such evils as appendicitis and cancer, from which savages hardly suffer at all.
2. This is only a sample of what civilisation is doing to us, and civilisation for the majority in every nation, is not yet a hundred years old. Until quite lately the housewife used to bake her own bread, make her own jam, and offer her friends home brewed wine. Now she can do none of these things.
3. Every year we invent machines to do something new for us. Handwriting used to be an art, and a pretty one. Now an increasing number of people rely entirely on the typewriter, and advertisers assure us that 'you cannot afford to do your writing in the old way'. When the typewriter has been introduced into the schools we may have a generation who cannot write at all.
4. Walking and riding, two delightful and health giving exercises, are becoming extinct. Two hundred years ago the roads were full of riders, and pedestrians who thought nothing of thirty miles a day. The joys of a long journey walk, either solitary or a friend, are unknown to the younger generation, although there is no more delightful way of spending a spring or summer day.
5. Education, except where the pupils are encouraged to make things with their own hands, is mainly Spoon Feeding. Fifty years ago the editions of the classics were so bad that the student had to puzzle out difficulties for himself. Now he sits luxuriously before a crib, two commentaries and a book of lecture notes which have been slowly dictated in class. He need not use his brain at all.

6. Everywhere we find the same demand to make life easy, safe, and fool proof. All this may be right or it may be inevitable but do not let us deceive ourselves. Nature will make us pay for it. Nature takes away any faculty that is not used. She is taking away our natural defences, and has probably added nothing since the beginning of the historical period, to our mental powers. The powers of grappling with difficulties and finding our way out of labyrinths, will soon be lost if we no longer need it. And after any derangement of our social order we might come to need it very badly. Besides, can we look with satisfaction at the completed product of civilisation, a creature unable to masticate, to write, or to walk, a mere parasite on the machines that enable him to live? Many would prefer to be savages if they could have the magnificent physique of the Zulus or some South Sea Islanders.



Appendix-3

Class-room activities for developing reading Skills.

Level:	Advance Level
Time:	60 Minutes
Materials:	Handouts, White board, Marker, Overhead Projector, Transparencies.
No of Students:	10

Purpose of the Task: To activate the learner's background knowledge of the World, to motivate them for particular studies and to prepare them for the issues to be forthcoming.

Skills Involved: **Input reading** with the aim to introduce relevant information about reading text and to create a solid foundation for critical thinking and discussions.

Group work
Task-1

Time: 10 minutes

Instruction: Discuss the following questions with your group in the classroom

- How old our civilization?
- What aspects of our society have been changed the most during the past hundred years?
- What are the main causes of social change?
- In what ways are our societies today better or worse than they were last hundred years ago?
Discus with group and give some examples.

Appendix-4

Pre-reading tasks

Task-2

Purpose of the Task: To train the learner's to comprehend text by using their knowledge of the world and by using different skills.

To make the learners' conceptually aware about for upcoming reading text.

Skills Involved: Anticipating, using prior knowledge, Skimming and Scanning.

Individual work

Time: 5 minutes

Instruction: The text you are going to read is about ‘Spoon Feeding’ and relate as many concepts and words to it. Write down at least 10 words which you think will occur in the reading text. You are allowed to consult dictionary.

Task-3 After every learner is finished writing words, discuss in groups the reasons why you decided upon these choices

Group work

Time: 5 minutes

Appendix-5

While-reading tasks

Task-4

Purpose of the Task: To train the learner’s to comprehend text by using different skills.

Skills Involved: Anticipating, Skimming and Scanning.

Individual work

Time: 10 minutes

Instructions: Now read the text ‘Spoon Feeding’ quickly to confirm or reject your answers.

Task-5

Purpose of the Task: To prepare learners to skim the text by asking them to recognize the main information in the reading text.

Skills Involved: Anticipating, Skimming and Scanning.

Group work

Time: 10 minutes

Instructions: Now read the text again ‘Spoon Feeding’ quickly to answer the following questions:

- Whom does the writer make responsible for appendicitis and cancer diseases?
- In what way have the roles of a labourer and a housewife changed?
- Why do people not write with their own hands anymore?
- In what way has education become *Spoon Feeding*?
- How has the attitude of people towards life changed?

Appendix-6

Post-reading tasks

Task-6

Purpose of the Task: To encourage learners to process the text again, the more they process, the more they consolidate the ideas of the text.

Skills Involved: Inferencing, guessing and predicting.

Group work

Time: 5 minutes

Instructions: Circle the following statements as “true” T “false” F.

Statements	T F
1. In the reading text ‘Spoon Feeding’ the author is comparing new generation with old one.	T/F
2. Nature would give more and more talents to the younger generations even if they do not use them.	T/F
3. Walking and riding would disappear after sometime.	T/F
4. A Housewife dos every thing by herself.	T/F
5. Instead of knife and fork people use their teeths.	T/F
6. Our civilization is yet 300 hundred years old.	T/F

Appendix-7**Task-7**

Purpose of the Task: To train learners to recognize synonyms.

To the students: Synonyms are words having same (or very nearly same) meaning. For Example: blend/mixture, change/ alteration and so on.

Skills Involved: Inferring meaning by making use of the contextual clues.

Group work

Time: 10 minutes

Instruction: Match the following each word with its definition:

Word	Definition
A. Savage	1. A person walking in the street.
B. Civilization	2. To work hard and overcome a difficulty.
C. Pedestrians	3. member of a primitive tribe.
D. Luxuriously	4. A society, its culture and its way of life during a particular period of time.
E. Grappling	5. To chew food
F. Labyrinths	6. Comfortable
G. Masticate	7. A complicated path through which it is difficult to find one's
H. Crib	8. A person who makes publicity
I. Inevitable	9. Unavoidable
J. Advertiser	10. A thing used to help one understand or remember something e.g. translation of a foreign text

