CHAPTER –III

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3.1. INTRODUCTION

The present study was primarily designed to investigate the effects of different kinds of task-consciousness activities on the reading achievement of the Indian and Iranian students of English. This research presents the details about the participants in the study, the instruments and procedures used for the data collection, and descriptive and inferential analyses of the collected data. The present study involved three independent variables, namely task type treatment: conference, introspection and conference-introspection (written, oral and oral-written hereafter), nationality, and gender. The dependent variable was the reading achievement scores of the participants on an IELTS test. Regarding the nature of the research questions and the hypotheses, the most appropriate research design was quasi-experimental design since the researcher has treatment, pretest and posttest and has selected her sample randomly.

3.2. PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study included 1042 Indian male and female students (M=506 and F=536) from some Indian universities, namely Panjab University, DAV college, and Government College for Boys and 990 male and female Iranian students (M=480 and F=510) majoring in English at three Iranian universities, namely University of Tehran, Allameh Tabataba’i University, Tarbiat Moalem University, Islamic Azad University (Roudehen and North Branch). The age of all Indian and Iranian participants ranged from 17 to 28 years. They were Indian and Iranian students in the first and the second year of MA in English Language and Literature as well as bachelor students majoring in English Language and Literature.

3.3. INSTRUMENTS

A sample version of General Training test of IELTS6 (UCLES, 2007) was used as a proficiency test to determine the language proficiency of the participants.
The investigator wants to know whether the subjects belonged in the LL (Low language proficiency) group or the HL (High language proficiency) group. This test was taken from Cambridge Series of IELTS past exams, Volume 6 (2007), and all four sections of it, i.e. listening; speaking, reading, and writing were used in this study (see Appendix A). The reading module of the same test was used as the pre-test and post-test. However, to avoid memory effect, the test was reordered before using it as a post-test. That is, the different sections of the test were given to the participants in a different order. The reordered test was given to the students at the end of the 12 session treatment.

All candidates completed the three modules of Listening, Reading, and Writing on one day and took the speaking module test on the next day. All candidates from Iran and India took the same Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking Modules. The participants of this study took the General Training Module because they were majoring in English and the researcher wants to assess their level of General English language. All the skills were directly rated on a 40-point scale. Scoring is facilitated through the availability of answer keys for reading and listening indicating alternative words/phrases within an individual answer and the writing and speaking sections (see Appendix C) were rated directly on a 40 point scale by three independent raters as well. The whole IELTS test was rated based on IELTS criteria retrieved from WWW.IELTS.com.org. The total test duration was around 2 hours and 45 minutes for Listening, Reading and Writing modules. The details are as follows.

Listening: 40 minutes
30 minutes during which a recording was played by a tape recorder and an additional 10 minutes for transferring answers to answer sheets.

Reading: 60 minutes

Writing: 60 minutes

Speaking: 11-14 minutes
All modules - Listening, Reading, Writing and Reading - were completed in one day, and in fact were taken with no break in between, but speaking was taken next day. The tests were designed to cover the full range of ability from low language proficiency to high language proficiency users.

Another problem was that the subjects’ reading comprehension ability which was the main focus of the study. In other words, the job of the investigator was to identify the subjects’ reading ability. It was, therefore, decided that the reading IELTS (UCLES, 2000-2006) were administered to the students in 12 sessions in oral, written and oral-written group. They were Cambridge IELTS books (2-5). Each book has four tests that reading modules consisted of three sections, the researcher chose 3 sections from each test in the books.

3.4. MATERIALS

To come up with a clear picture and comprehensive specification of authentic and effective reading comprehension texts in terms of tasks, content, process and purposes, the researcher studied at least 17 IELTS books and 40 articles as well as 32 books and 90 articles on alternative or authentic assessment especially reading assessment. And finally Cambridge IELTS books (2-5) were chosen as materials in this study (see Appendix B). Thus, a complete sample version of the IELTS6 (UCLES, 2007) was used to assess the participants’ level of language proficiency (See Appendix A). The investigator wanted to know whether the subjects belonged in the LL (Low language proficiency) group or the HL (High language proficiency) group. Another problem was the subjects’ reading comprehension ability which was the main focus of the study. In other words, the job of the investigator was to identify the subjects’ reading comprehension ability. It was, therefore, decided that the reading IELTS (UCLES, 2000-2006) was administered to the students. They were Cambridge IELTS Cambridge book (1)’ IELTS (2)’ IELTS (3)’ and IELTS (5). Each book has four tests. Reading modules consisted of three sections. So, the researcher chose three sections from each test in the books. Thus, the passages were selected from Cambridge IELTS Books (volume two to six) (see Appendix B) for oral summarizing, written summarizing and oral-written summarizing treatment purposes in the study.
Therefore, students’ scores were identified on the basis of their performance on the IELTS. To this end, the general training reading module of the test was used. The justification for this choice lies in the “reliability and validity” claims for the IELTS made by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES). For more information, please visit (www.IELTS.com.org). Thus the researcher selected IELTS passages from Cambridge series due to the authenticity of texts are warranted and there is no need for modification as well. They were also chosen with various reading abilities in terms of lexical density, structural. The IELTS reading test contains three reading passages. Each of the reading passages is approximately 700 to 800 words in length. There are questions and tasks following each passage. There are 40 questions in total on the reading test. The reading passages are from different kinds of publications, such as newspapers, magazines and academic textbooks. At least one of the texts in each test argues a case about a controversial subject. Additionally, the test was approved to be unseen to the Indian and Iranian participants by their class teachers and students’ themselves. Since the participants needed to be trained for the treatment, the first passage was used to make them conscious about the tasks they do when they are engaged in reading texts.

3.5. PROCEDURES

Most Indian and Iranian students were able to finish the IELTS test within allotted time. Later, all the completed tests were examined; and after discarding unnamed or incomplete ones, totally 2032 valid tests were used for statistical analysis from both countries. The first step was to check the language proficiency of the two groups, i.e. Iranian and Indian participants. This, as mentioned above, was done with a General Training IELTS test. It is worth mentioning that the four modules of IELTS test were applied to classify the participants into two groups of low language proficiency and high language proficiency.

The IELTS listening test lasted for about 30 minutes. It consisted of four sections, played on a cassette tape, in order of increasing difficulty. The first section of the listening test was a conversation which happens between two speakers in a social context. The second section was a talk by a single speaker which happens in a
non-academic situation. The third part was a conversation among up to four speakers about an academic topic. And the last section was an academic talk or lecture. The tape was played only once, and the questions for each section were answered by the participants while they were listening, although enough time was given to them in order to transfer their answers to answer sheets afterwards. The reading module lasted for 60 minutes. The test consisted of three sections, and the sections were in order of increasing difficulty. The IELTS Writing module also lasts for 60 minutes. In this module, the students fulfilled two writing tasks, which required different styles of writing. The writing section was rated directly on a 40-point scale by three independent writers based on international IELTS writing criteria (Appendix C).IELTS Speaking test consisted of a one-to-one interview with trained examiners. The examiners led the candidate through the three parts of the test. An introduction, an individual long turn where the candidate speaks for one or two minutes on a particular topic, and a two-way discussion thematically linked to the individual long turn. This interview lasted for approximately 11-14 minutes, the speaking section was rated directly on a 40-point scale by three independent examiners based on international IELTS speaking criteria (See Appendix C).The second step was scoring the responses. Trained experts scored four sections of the IELTS 6 (2007) individually and their results were compared based on IELTS criteria for the language proficiency of the group to verify their level of language proficiency based on totals of 40 as IELTS raw scores.

The third step was considering only the scores of the reading comprehension section of the same battery of IELTS proficiency test as a reading pre-test before the treatment as well as reading post-test at the end of the 12 session treatment. The Reading comprehension section of the IELTS test comprised 40 items. Each correct answer was given one point. No penalty was given to wrong responses.

Following the third step, the Indian students learning English in India were randomly placed into three groups which would receive the oral, written and oral-written treatment. To collect the data required in this study, first all Indian students participated in IELTS (6) test (Listening-reading-written and speaking) to divide the participants to low language proficiency and high language proficiency. Second their
reading scores considers as a pre-reading test in this study. Third the Indian teachers were fully instructed to implement the consciousness- treatment in the classes before starting the treatment during 12 sessions. The time allotted for each session was 30 minutes, 20 minutes for reading comprehension and 10 minutes for doing related task. The first phase of the study in India started in the first half of academic year in August, 2008, and last for six weeks. Each Cambridge IELTS Book covered four complete IELTS test. On this reading test, there are 40 questions for the candidates to be answered within 60 minutes, following 3 sections of increasing difficulty containing texts taken from notices, advertisements, leaflets, newspapers, instruction manuals, books and magazines (www.IELTS.org). The researcher considered just three reading sections from each Cambridge IELTS Books (2-5) test. The researcher distributed only three sections of each test during one session .The Indian students divided into three groups, namely oral, written and oral-written. Then, students took one section of IELTS reading test each session and then the following treatments were applied to the students after completing reading tasks. In Group 1 the written treatment were applied. All the students were required to summarize the reading text after doing their exercises. While doing the written treatment, each student highlighted his or her weaknesses in the comprehending reading text each session in paper sheet. The teachers took the students’ assignments home, made comments on each student’s assignments and gave them back to the students the following session. And sometimes the teacher gave them oral comments in the class. The written treatment was done by the students every session.

In Group 2 the oral treatment were conducted after doing the activities, every student talked about the problems that he/she had on the reading text. More precisely, they summarized the reading texts orally. Then, their peers gave comments and helped them. At the end, the teacher gave them comments on their problems. These problems occurred mainly due to the students’ strategy use in doing the reading tasks and comprehending the reading texts. Every session, students had these informal discussions in their classes. Those of them needing more help had short discussions with their teachers after the class. In Group 3, the oral-written treatment was performed. In this treatment the students were supposed to write the reading text
summary and then summarize the reading text orally after completing reading text. They were required to clarify their strategies and reading problems on a piece of paper after doing their reading activities as well. Since the students were not clear about the kinds of the problems they might have, the teachers would give hints and oral comments to the students during the task and would make them task-consciousness. In this treatment, the teachers would gather all the assignments and would make comments on the papers as well. Finally, at the end of the course, as mentioned above, the sections of the reading pre-test were reordered and administered to all three groups as the post-test. In order to investigate the effects of the treatments on the Indian students’ reading proficiency, the groups mean scores on the pre-test and the post-test were computed and compared by subtracting the pretest scores from post test scores: Gain score= (Post-test score) - (Pre-test score). For example the gain score of the students who scored 30 on the post-test and 24 on the pre-test would be: Gain score=30-24=6. At the end, the students’ reading gain scores were computed by subtracting the pretest scores from post test scores. And the last step was to analyze the data using different inferential statistical methods like Factorial ANOVA and t-ratio after applying pre-reading, post-reading and gain scores. The same procedures were gone through for the Iranian students learning English in Iran. The second phase of the study in Iran started in the second half of academic year in September, 2009 and lasted for six weeks. The researcher started to run descriptive and inferential statistic procedures for the analyses in January, 2010.

3.6. DESIGN

The present research study employed a Quasi-experimental design and aimed at investigating the effect of the four independent variables, i.e. language proficiency (low and high), different conscious raising tasks (oral, written and oral-written), nationality (Indian and Iranian) and gender (male and female) on students’ reading abilities. Therefore, the sample groups was compared and statistically tested for their equivalence. The learning abilities of the postgraduate and the undergraduate students were measured as a general reading ability for all undergraduate and post-graduate students i.e. Pre-reading assessment, post-reading assessment and reading gain scores. It is also worth mentioning that this study has a factorial design. More precisely, it has
a 2X2 design for pre-treatment and post-treatment phases and a 2x2x2x3 design for the gain section. An experiment using factorial design allows researchers to examine simultaneously the effects of multiple independent variables and their degree of interaction. Factorial design was employed three times to study the reading ability of undergraduate and postgraduate students in respect of their nationality, language proficiency, gender and different task group in pre-reading, post-reading and reading gain scores. The schematic of the design has been given below:
Design: 2x2x2x 3 Factorial Designs for Reading Gain Scores

India (N=1042)

- HL
  - Male
    - O
    - O-W
  - Female
    - O
    - O-W

- LL
  - Male
    - O
    - O-W
  - Female
    - O
    - O-W

Iran (N=990)

- LL
  - Male
    - O
    - O-W
  - Female
    - O
    - O-W

3.7. Data Analysis

To answer the research question, the 17th version of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized. First, to ensure the language proficiency and reading ability of the samples, after calculating the mean and standard deviation of the participants' scores one complete version of IELTS Cambridge test book (6) as language proficiency into low and high level and the reading module of the General Training IELTS (6), only those scores which fell within one standard deviation from the mean were included in further data analysis. Totally, 2032 (India=1042 and Iran=990) participants met the score requirement at this stage. Then descriptive statistics of the test takers' performance on the reading IELTS test was calculated. Having obtained the scores, the researchers set off on the task of inferential statistics and testing the null hypotheses in the first, second and third section of next chapter

Analysis No.1

The descriptive statistics of the male and female students from India and Iran in pre-reading test were used.

Analysis No.2

The comparative study of the Indian and Iranian students' reading scores in relation to nationality, language proficiency, gender and group were conducted through t-test.

Analysis No.3

A 2x2 factorial ANOVA was run on the Indian and Iranian students' scores in relation to their nationality and gender in pre-treatment phase.

Analysis No.4

A 2x2 factorial ANOVA was run on the Indian and Iranian students' scores in relation to their nationality and gender in post-phase.

Analysis No.5

A 2x2x2x3 factorial ANOVA was run on the Indian and Iranian students' scores in relation to their nationality, gender, language proficiency and group in reading gain-scores.