

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Students' Approaches to Learning in Responding to an Annotation Task

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Abstract

In reading, students should pay close attention to the purpose of reading because this will help them to identify appropriate strategies. Similarly, students in the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom should know why and how to read, as academic reading goes beyond simply understanding a text. Hence, understanding students' approaches to learning in the EAP classroom is important because it provides insights to instructors on their motives for learning and the strategies they use to learn. This study used the qualitative method to explore students' approaches to learning in responding to an annotation task in the EAP classroom. A delayed stimulated recall interview and students' written samples were used for data acquisition. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings showed how the students read, made sense of reading materials, and responded to the task. Moreover, the findings also showed that the students adopted a surface motive in learning and a mix of surface and deep strategies in responding to the task.

Keywords: English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Academic Reading, Approaches to Learning, Annotation

Introduction

Being able to read academically is one of the most important skills that tertiary students should master (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Reading skills are important because students at the tertiary level have to do academic-related tasks (Grabe & Stoller, 2011), such as reading lecture notes for the examination, reading to identify information for an assignment, conducting small-scale research or writing proposals, etc. Similarly, Anderson (2015) stated that faculties at tertiary institutions expect their students to be able to read a considerable number of materials besides employing pertinent academic reading skills to meet the expectations. This shows that students will have to develop the ability to read academically to perform well in their studies.

Realising the importance of mastering reading skills, many tertiary institutions in Malaysia offer reading courses. These courses are usually incorporated into the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. In academic reading courses, students are often introduced to various strategies to read critically. They are taught to “remember points of comparison or opposition, assess the relative importance of the information, and construct a framework in which the information will be organised” (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, p.6). However, students often face difficulties in employing strategies they have learned in their reading lessons (Vijayan, 2019). This is probably because academic reading is more discipline-specific, which makes reading these types of texts more challenging. Nonetheless, prior to reading discipline-specific texts, learners need to be well accustomed to the reading strategies.

Despite the studies on reading strategies employed by Malaysian tertiary students (Abd Hamid et al., 2020; Edward et al., 2020; Abdul Rahim, 2017), only a few explored Malaysian tertiary students’ approaches to learning when engaged in reading tasks. It is important to get an insight into students’ understanding of the reading tasks and the approaches they use to respond to the tasks, as it will relay a deeper comprehension of the challenges they face and whether they can overcome them. Hence, it will be interesting to explore how tertiary students engage and respond to the reading tasks given in the EAP classroom. Moreover, there is insufficient information on how EAP is taught in the classrooms and how students comprehend the lessons (Bell, 2022). Thus, this study will be useful for educators to better understand how students respond to tasks and allow them to tailor suitable activities in the class.

Students’ approaches to learning concepts are used as the underlying framework for this study, as they explore students’ motives for learning and the strategies used to respond to learning activities. Using this concept, this study explores the approaches EAP students used to engage in a reading task and their challenges in responding to the task. The findings from this study will assist educators in understanding how students comprehend a reading task and the process they go through in responding to reading tasks. Moreover, educators will also be aware of the instances where students may require guidance in completing reading tasks.

Literature Review

Using Annotation in Reading Tasks

Annotating text assists learners in comprehending what they read. There are various ways to annotate depending on the learners’ purpose for annotating the texts. According to LeVan and King (2017), to aid understanding, readers annotate texts by making comments and writing explanations or evaluations in the margin of the text. Moreover, the annotation strategy is a form of active reading that helps learners to engage deeply with texts (Porter-O’Donnell, 2004). Engaging deeply in reading materials allows learners to understand the content better. Likewise, annotation assists learners in understanding the organisation of texts, analysing the author’s ideas, making meaning, and relaying their understanding of texts (Zywica & Gomez, 2008).

Several reading strategies can be used to annotate texts. Porter-O’Donnell (2004) stated that learners can use before-, during-, and after-reading stages to annotate. She continued that at the before-reading stage, readers use pre-reading strategies where they prepare themselves to read by looking at the title, examining the print, and examining the organisation of the text, while the during-reading stage is the action of annotating. Here, readers mark the texts by highlighting and using symbols to identify the characters, the settings, etc. The readers simultaneously write on the margin by summarising, making predictions, providing opinions,

making connections, analysing, and reflecting on the information. Finally, in the after-reading stage, the readers revise their annotation; they reread, form a conclusion, try to construct something new from the reading, identify meaning from the patterns, etc.

Similar to the description given by Porter-O'Donnell (2004); Devine (1993) in an earlier study mentioned that annotation can be viewed from both cognitive and metacognitive levels. Using annotation at a cognition level is when readers identify main ideas, supporting details, key terms, and many more (Zywica & Gomez, 2008), which helps to make sense of the text. Meanwhile, the metacognitive level indicates a much more critical view of a text, where readers reflect on what they read, provide opinions, and others (Feito & Donahue, 2008). These are considered metacognitive levels of thinking because readers evaluate, monitor, and think about what they have read.

Annotating texts can influence learners into having a surface understanding of the text or provide an in-depth understanding by making readers reflect deeply on what the author is saying in the text. This was highlighted by Liu (2006), who explored participants' annotation notes and questionnaire to study their metacognition when employing annotation skills. She categorised undergraduate students' annotating styles into two, i.e., poor annotation styles (classified as surface approaches) and skilful annotation styles (identified as deep approaches). Poor annotation styles include minimum comments in the margin or questions with fewer highlighted parts or long highlighted parts, which shows less critical reading taking place. On the contrary, skilful annotation styles include purposeful highlighted texts, questions on highlighted parts, circles that specify key terms or ideas, and symbols that indicate the connection of ideas. The findings showed that of 40 participants, 27 passed the final exam, 7 failed, 3 withdrew, and 3 were absent. Those who passed the exam had employed a skilful approach, consistently using it in the tasks and the final exam. Meanwhile, of the seven participants who failed, five had used a poor approach, where they were unable to extract pertinent information from texts and produce critical and analytical essays.

Studies also show that educators often use annotations as a pedagogical approach to help students comprehend reading (Damayanti, 2020; Feito & Donahue, 2008; Liu, 2006; Lloyd et al., 2022). Feito and Donahue (2008) explored the types of annotation that undergraduate students used in understanding a literary text. They revealed that students used four types of textual annotations – tracking, identification of gaps, individual repertoire, and literary repertoire, in reading and understanding the play. The findings also discovered that the students realised they had to comprehend what they read because not all the information was presented in the text. This made them annotate their thoughts to fill in the gap in the text. In another study, Lloyd et al (2022) investigated the effectiveness of annotation strategy on students' academic achievement in a social studies class. The researcher conducted a pre- and post-test on the control and experiment groups to assess their achievement. The findings showed that students who had participated in the intervention did better than those in the control group. Moreover, the findings also showed that learners were actively engaged in the tasks when employing the annotation strategy. Damayanti (2020) conducted a study on how first-semester students in a teaching college in Indonesia employed annotation in a narrative text. She used an observation checklist to observe how the annotation activity was conducted in the class, a summarisation test to summarise the information annotated, and an attitude scale to explore students' responses to the annotation method. The findings revealed that students reacted positively to the annotation method, and the summarisation test showed a high mean score of 82.3. It indicates that the students found annotating texts beneficial, as proven by their ability to extract information and produce a summary of the text.

Annotating texts assists readers in understanding what they read. It helps break information into smaller parts to allow easier comprehension of the texts. Many ways are available to annotate a text, depending on the purpose of annotation. These purposes will guide the students in choosing how they annotate reading materials.

Students' Approaches to Learning

In learning, students are influenced by their motives for learning and the learning strategies used to suit their motives to respond to the learning activities (Biggs, 1987, 2001, 2003; Biggs et al., 2001). Students' approaches to learning can be viewed in two ways: learners' immediate approach to a task at hand and learners' preferred approaches in responding to tasks (Biggs et al., 2001). Immediate approaches to tasks refer to selecting approaches to engage with specific learning activities. An immediate approach to learning provides information on how students handle a task (Biggs et al., 2001). This includes the strategies they used to complete the task. Meanwhile, the preferred approaches to learning represent learners' preference in using particular approaches in the learning process.

Approaches to learning can be categorised into deep and surface approaches. Biggs had initially included the "achieving" approach to learning but had reconceptualised this to surface and deep approaches in a later study because the former can be included as part of the latter two approaches (Biggs et al., 2001). A surface approach to learning comprises surface motives, where the learners aim to find an easier way to do a task, and surface strategies, where the learners identify a strategy that does not require much cognition. In other words, a surface approach to learning means using minimal initiative to complete a task while meeting its requirement (Biggs & Tang, 2011). The surface approaches to learning include rote learning instead of focusing on understanding the content, repeating ideas or words to meet requirements, stating ideas instead of being critical, and using secondary sources rather than primary ones (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Meanwhile, a deep approach to learning entails deep motives and strategies. Learners with deep motives for learning have an intrinsic liking for what they learn (Biggs, 1987; Biggs et al., 2001). Deep strategies focus on strategies that learners use to understand what they learn (Biggs et al., 2001). Hence, a deep approach can be defined as students' need to respond to tasks meaningfully using the suitable skills needed (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Some of the deep approaches that learners use are attempting to find the in-depth meaning of ideas, understanding the bigger picture, building on their prior knowledge, conceptualising ideas, and making connections (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Approaches to learning are important because it indicates how students engage with the learning content and how they process the information they learn. Hence, how students approach learning influences their academic achievement. Moreover, many factors influence students' approaches to learning. Some factors that impact students' orientation to learning are discussed below.

Factors that Influence Learning

Various factors influence students' learning process. These factors impact how students engage in the learning process and why they engage as such. Some factors commonly related to learning approaches are motives for learning, learners' interest, prior knowledge, and anxiety in learning.

Motives for learning refer to the "value" of learning that students observe and their belief that they will be able to attain "success" (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 35). Students' motives for

learning are closely related to their motivation for learning which could be viewed as intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation denotes students' willingness to learn to gain material recognition such as acknowledgement for being able to complete a task while intrinsic motivation focuses on students' personal interest in learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Hence, learners' interest in learning and their purposes for learning a course are interrelated (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Kember et al., 2008). This interrelation is similar in any educational programme however the way to go about accomplishing learning differ. Accordingly, Entwistle et al (2001) argued that motives for deep and surface approaches to learning are similar in all areas of education. However, the strategies used differ according to the specific discipline. For example, memorisation may not be essential for academic English courses, as these courses predominantly emphasise applications of skills and understanding of the content. Similarly, Rao and Liu (2011) also revealed that science and social science students learning English preferred to use different strategies in their learning. In a study on students' preferred learning strategies, Rao and Liu (2011) found that social science students' learning is more favourable towards learning English, and they are more flexible in choosing strategies than science students. One of the reasons for this could be the influence of the discipline of the students.

Another factor influencing approaches to learning is learners' interest in the content. Ashwin and Trigwell (2012) stated that students who employ deep approaches to learning are interested in acquiring new knowledge and are motivated to succeed in their learning. When students are motivated, they will be willing to make an effort to learn. Hence, learning will not become a chore that they have to accomplish. Moreover, Holmes (2018) and Kember et al. (2010) mentioned that when students are interested in the content, they adopt a deep approach to learning because they have an invested interest in learning, which motivates them to find suitable learning strategies.

Learners with sufficient prior knowledge can understand the content being taught, and they will also be intrinsically motivated to be engaged in the learning activity (Biggs & Tang, 2011). This is because they can associate what they know with the content they learn. Having this understanding will assist learners in choosing appropriate approaches to respond to the activities (Biggs, 2003; Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Proficiency level is another factor that influences learning. In the student's approaches to the learning field, this could be classified as anxiety in learning. The reasons learners face anxiety in learning vary, such as uncertainty in the teaching approach (Balasooriya et al., 2009; Papinczak, 2009), test anxiety (Cipra & Muller-Hilke, 2019), and low level of language proficiency (Horwitz et al., 1986; Rasool et al., 2023). These reasons for anxiety can lead learners to choose a surface approach to learning (Balasooriya et al., 2009; Papinczak, 2009). Similarly, in learning English, students' low level of proficiency affects their engagement in learning (Cao, 2011; Delaney, 2008; Liao & Wang, 2015). For example, due to low language proficiency, students tend to use simple vocabulary to avoid making mistakes in tasks. When students face difficulties in responding to tasks because of their level of proficiency, they lose interest in continuing the learning activity (Cao, 2011).

Thus, factors in learning are an essential aspect that influences learning. Despite educators aiming to promote deep approaches to learning, the influence of the learning factors plays a crucial role in how and why students adopt certain approaches to learning.

Research Methodology

The research questions for this study are as follows

- 1) What approaches to learning do Malaysian tertiary students use in an annotation task?
- 2) What are the challenges faced in responding to the annotation task?

To address the research questions, an explanatory case study design was used to explore the student's engagement with the reading task. Researchers use explanatory case study design to explain how and why a phenomenon occurs (Yin, 2014). Similarly, this design was used to explore how the EAP students respond to the reading task given to them.

This study was conducted at a public university in Malaysia. The participants for this study were Civil Engineering students enrolled in the EAP course. The said EAP course focused mainly on reading skills. Each EAP lesson was held for about three hours a week. Prior to data collection, the researcher briefed the students about the study and obtained their consent. All the students and lecturers were invited to participate in the study, and those interested were selected. The researcher approached the lecturers first to get their consent before approaching the students. In total, four students from one EAP classroom participated in this study.

The reading task that was selected for this study was annotating a reading passage. A reading passage on 'intelligence' from the coursebook was used for the annotation task. This task was part of the EAP lessons and was given by the respective instructor. The students were asked to annotate each paragraph in the passage. The annotation method was taught in previous lessons by the instructor before the activity was given.

The researcher provided an audio recorder to the students while doing the tasks in the classroom to capture their thoughts or any discussions they had with their peers in responding to the passage. A delayed stimulated recall interview was also used to collect the data. A stimulated recall interview was used to collect the data to assist the researcher in exploring deeper what the participants were thinking and the reasons behind their actions (Mackey & Gass, 2016). In this study, the participants' written work samples were used as a stimulus to assist them in recalling the process and decisions made during the annotation of the passage. This study attempts to classify learners' reading strategies into surface and deep approaches to learning. This attempt is to show how learners engage with annotation task and their ability to use surface and deep approaches to engage with this task. The data from this study were analysed using thematic analysis.

Findings and Analysis

The findings showed the various reading strategies participants used to annotate the text and the challenges they faced in responding to the task.

Reading strategies used to annotate the passage

Using pre-reading strategies to make sense of a passage

The participants used pre-reading strategies, such as looking at the title and bolded words, to get a general understanding of what the passage was about.

First, of course, I see, what, I read the title first and try to make sense. And then, because of some parts here, where they were bold, I think I, I read ... the sentences with bold first.

Because they were bold or something like that. like, eye-catching so, I ok *lah*, I should just read this first, maybe that might be the ideas... ideas.

(Satish, stimulated recall)

Satish skimmed the passage by reading the title to understand the passage. He also looked at the bolded words to identify important information in the passage.

If like this, I would think why it's bolded. Hah, bolded means it is important. An important idea.

So, I'll have to understand why it is bolded.

(Azrina, stimulated recall)

Similarly, Azrina mentioned that she, too, looked at the bolded words to identify the pertinent ideas in the passage. From the participants' responses, it could be deduced that they are aware of the usefulness of using pre-reading strategies to get a basic understanding of the passage.

Linking information within the passage

All participants can link information from one paragraph to another to show the connections. They created sub-ideas for each main idea to make the connections between these ideas.

Uh, the big heading is intelligence. Then it's connected to cognitive ability. Then, what is cognitive ability, I just described it this way. Like the big heading then I explained what it is, then, this explained about this, the meaning of this is this. Then I did this in a similar way.

(Azrina, stimulated recall)

For example, Azrina mentioned that the paragraph discussed intelligence. She then linked intelligence to the sub-ideas within the paragraph.

Paragraph one is about the differences between heredity and environment. So, I extracted information on heredity and environment. Then these led to a few things. Uh, this one, led to concept how to manage (measure) intelligence. Uh, information from this first paragraph led to the concept of 'g', the existence of IQ test.

(Najla, stimulated recall)

In this excerpt, Najla stated that she had annotated paragraph 1 by showing how intelligence can be explained from heredity and environmental perspectives. She then linked these two ideas to paragraph 2, where the authors discussed how intelligence could be measured with the IQ test.

In addition, the participants also mentioned that they used other means, such as using signal words and arrows to connect with the information from various paragraphs.

Ah! *This word here*. 'Rest on several assumption' then I, I thought that ok, this 1, 2 and 3 is the assumption. And then from this word "these assumption" is referring to this 1, 2 and 3" (Satish, stimulated recall)

Satish described that paragraph 3 discussed assumptions on intelligence. Using the phrase 'these assumptions' from paragraph 4, he was able to link paragraphs 3 and 4. This enabled him to understand them better.

In the excerpt below, Ezadura stated that she used arrows to link the information in the passage. She used arrows to explain the concept in paragraph 2.

This arrow is, what I understand is that, it's the concept. So, I divided it into two. I listed the concept. If it is about reasons, then I will extract the reasons, how many reasons, maybe three, so I will draw three reasons, then write it.

(Ezadura, stimulated recall)

Using arrows to annotate probably assisted the participants to visualise how the information was connected in the passage.

Classifying Ideas

Some of the paragraphs in the passage showed a comparison of the influence of heredity and environment on intelligence. Seeing these comparisons, the participants attempted to classify the information in the passage.

I've differentiated heredity and environment. Then I looked for nature and nurture. Like what I did here. I separated nature to this and nurture to this.

(Azrina, stimulated recall)

Azrina mentioned that she had identified the differences between the influence of heredity and environment on intelligence first. Then, she grouped ideas accordingly into two groups, heredity and environment.

Like this discusses the contrast. So, compare and contrast.

Hah! Compare and contrast. Show the differences between the two... so those are the points that he wants to bring across.

(Ezadura, stimulated recall)

Ezadura, too, could compare and contrast the ideas presented in the passage. She claimed she annotated the ideas in two groups to show the differences.

Oh, because the lecturer said that first and second paragraphs are linked to each other. Also, the thing that relates both is the similarity and difference that makes the second paragraph.

(Najla, stimulated recall)

On the contrary, Najla had a little difficulty understanding the passage. She had received some assistance from the instructor, who mentioned that paragraphs 1 and 2 are connected. Reading both paragraphs helped her understand what the authors were trying to convey, besides classifying the ideas by identifying the similarities and differences.

The participants annotated the paragraphs that showed compare and contrast of ideas by grouping the ideas accordingly.

Relating ideas to formulate opinions

Upon reading the passage, most participants could formulate opinions regarding the writing pattern of the passage and the author's views on the topic. Although these opinions were not annotated in the written work, they are considered part of the findings. This is because the topic of the passage, participants' annotations, and the stimulated recall interviews enabled them to develop these opinions.

Two participants could relate ideas from the text to their observations of the environment.

Because I just got to know intelligence has two, nature and nurture. I realised that if the family is smart, the child will be smart too. It was also stated here (indicating to the article) that a child can still be smart even if the parents are average. Then, I thought to myself, yeah, it's true because my mother is kind of average but my elder sister is smart.

(Azrina, stimulated recall)

Azrina mentioned that she could relate to her family members' attributes with the information she read. She concluded that intelligence could be inherited while at the same time being influenced by the environment.

It discussed heredity and environment, heredity is like when the family (refers to parents) are smart, the child is smart. But in reality, it's not same when both parents are smart and they have a smart child. Sometimes the child is not smart like his/ her parents.

(Najla, stimulated recall)

While Azrina's response was based on her observations of her family members, Najla's response was most likely based on her observation of her surroundings. She stated that intelligence is not necessarily hereditary, as smart parents may have below-average children. The remaining two participants claimed they could not relate the information in the passage to their experiences. Both Ezadura and Satish stated that they could not associate the ideas described in the passage with any aspects of their lives. This could be because both participants were disinterested in the topic of the passage.

In terms of identifying the author's views on the topic, only one participant could provide them.

Yes, weighing both sides whether it's a what we call whether it's intelligence or the other one.

(Satish, stimulated recall) Satish stated that the authors were merely discussing both sides of the argument on the influence of heredity and the environment on intelligence. The other participants were unable to gauge the authors' stance.

Questioning

The participants used the questioning technique to comprehend the passage. This could be seen in two aspects: questioning the structure of the text and questioning the content.

Azrina claimed she was questioning the writing pattern the authors used for the passage.

Sometimes I get confused. Like if this is cause and effect or problem solutions or just a structure. I was confused, so I couldn't find the solution.

(Azrina, stimulated recall)

Ezadura used the questioning technique to understand the structure of the text. She tried to connect the bolded words to the topic and the influence of nature and nurture on intelligence.

Are the bolded words related with the verbs? Are they connected to the subject?
Something like that.

(Ezadura, stimulated recall)

Najla, on the other hand, used the questioning method to relate the information she read from the passage. She attempted to question the connection between both nature and nurture with intelligence.

Hah, like it was mentioned about intelligence is influenced by heredity or environment. So like why do people relate it to heredity or why relate it to the environment.

(Najla, stimulated recall)

Challenges faced in responding to the reading task

The participants also faced various challenges in responding to the reading task, e.g., the level of difficulty in reading passages, disinterest in the reading task, and low proficiency in English.

The difficulty level of reading passage

The participants claimed that the reading passage was difficult to comprehend. Azrina stated that she found difficulty identifying information and had to seek help from her friend.

Sometimes I'll ask my friend. Because my friend's English is ok. So I'll ask her how to do this. How does she know this is the point? How does she know this is cause and effect.

(Azzina, stimulated recall)

For example, correlate ... correlate highly with measures of general intelligence.' What he was trying to say about it. The sentence was confusing, 'correlate highly'.

(Ezadura, stimulated recall). Ezadura further stated that the information given in the passage was also difficult to understand.

Because paragraph five looked difficult. Like what you said, it was a bit challenging. So I stopped.

(Najla, stimulated recall)

Najla also found the information in the reading passage difficult to decipher, leading her to stop responding to the task.

Satish, on the other hand, stated that he had to read the passage a few times to understand it.

Yeah, at first glance when you read it, you don't understand what the uh, the passage is trying to say. After that, going through, quite a number of times, like a few weeks. Finally, we manage to get what it means.

(Satish, stimulated recall)

The comments from the four participants indicate that they were struggling to understand the information in the passage.

Facing difficulties in engaging with the reading task

Participants had trouble engaging actively with the task. Ezadura stated that she found it hard to respond to the task because she did not have sufficient background knowledge on the topic. She stated that:

Difficult to understand because I didn't know about it.

(Ezadura, stimulated recall)

This made it difficult for her to comprehend the information presented in the passage. She further noted that she had initially responded wrongly to the task and was asked to refer to a fellow peer by the lecturer.

Both Satish and Najla mentioned that the topic of the reading did not interest them. This could be because the topic was related to academics. For example, Satish claimed he had difficulty relating the information in the passage.

No, I didn't connect it.

(Satish, stimulated recall)

This is probably because Satish was not familiar with the content of the passage.

Language Barrier

The language barrier is another challenge faced by some participants. Najla mentioned that she was not interested in the English language. Moreover, she claimed she had difficulties understanding the text because of its vocabulary.

Because I don't like English actually.

The article had both high level and low level. So, when I didn't understand the high level (indicate language) I would refer to the next sentences to understand. The whole story was not all that difficult but since it was in English, it was difficult.

(Najla, stimulated recall)

This could be one of the reasons she faced difficulties in responding to the task. Similarly, Azrina, too, stated she did not understand the meaning of some words.

Hmm, linguistic, I didn't understand what it means, uh, sometimes I don't understand the word.

(Azrina, stimulated recall)

Ezadura, too, had the same view as Najla and Azrina. She said although she wanted to understand the text, she tended to misinterpret the meaning due to her low English proficiency.

I wanted to understand it. What the content is. Sometimes, what I understand and the actual meaning differs. It takes time for me to understand if it's in English.

(Ezadura, stimulated recall)

Discussion

Employing surface and deep strategies in responding to the Annotation Task

Based on the findings, the reading strategies used to annotate can be divided into surface and deep reading strategies. Below is a summary of the strategies used in the annotation task.

Table 1

Surface and deep strategies used in annotating the passage

| Surface strategies | Deep strategies |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using pre-reading strategies to make sense of the passage • Making connections of information within the passage • Classifying ideas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulating opinions • Questioning |

The students used pre-reading strategies when responding to the reading task. Pre-reading strategies, such as looking at the title, finding bolded words, and skimming, are considered basic reading strategies. The participants used these strategies to get a general understanding of the passage. These basic strategies are essential to make sense of the text (Porter-O'Donnell, 2004), but they do not require students to think deeply.

Next, the students used the "making connection of information within the passage" strategy when annotating the passage. This strategy does not require much cognition as it connects various ideas mentioned in the text. The participants linked information they read in different parts of the passage together. The participants used symbols and signal words to make associations with various parts of the passage. This was done to get a better understanding of the passage. It is considered a surface strategy because learners who employ surface strategies state existing ideas in the content (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Another surface strategy that the participants used to annotate is classifying ideas. This strategy was utilised to compare the two main ideas presented in the passage. Similar to making connections, classifying ideas requires the participants to extract pertinent information from the text. Hence, these strategies were categorised as surface strategies because the participants merely connected existing ideas in the text.

The participants also used strategies such as formulating opinions upon reading the passage and questioning the content and the structure of the text. Both these strategies require students to reflect on their reading and evaluate the information at the metacognition level (Devine, 1993). For example, formulating opinions after reading the passage focuses on the participants thinking over the authors' views and intentions, and relating their experiences with the content involves higher-level thinking. This is because readers can evaluate and be critical of the content they read, and at the same time, they should be able to make connections with their prior knowledge (Biggs & Tang, 2011). In other words, these strategies can be considered deep strategies that require learners to think deeply when engaging with the content (Biggs et al., 2001).

However, as mentioned in the findings section, the deep strategies did not appear in the annotated text but were only apparent during the stimulated recall interview. This could be because the participants were too focused on identifying the information in the passage than being critical of the information they read. Also, not all participants could employ these deep strategies. Their struggle to formulate opinions on the passage showed that they were unable to think deeply.

Approaches to Learning in Responding to Annotation Task

Approaches to learning consist of motives for learning and the strategies learners use to achieve their motives. In this study, learners struggled to understand the text due to various reasons, such as the difficulty level of the passage, participants' level of language proficiency, their disinterest in the topics, and their lack of prior knowledge of the topic, which probably influenced their motives in annotating the text.

Having sufficient prior knowledge and interest in the topic impacts motives for learning. As Biggs and Tang (2011) mentioned, learners with sufficient prior knowledge and a high interest in learning will have a better understanding. This enables them to engage actively in the classroom, eventually encouraging deeper learning motives. Moreover, studies on interest in learning show that students opt for deeper approaches to learning when they are interested in what they learn (Ashwin & Trigwell, 2012; Holmes, 2018; Kember et al., 2010). In line with

this, the lack of prior knowledge and disinterest in the topic in the present study led to a surface motive for learning.

In addition, the difficulty level of the passage and the participants' low level of proficiency are other reasons for them having surface motives for learning. This was observed when some participants mentioned they could not comprehend the information in the text. This could be because the information in the text is an excerpt from a sociology book, which probably made understanding the information difficult, as the participants were engineering students. Simultaneously, it could be because they could not relate the information to prior knowledge. Moreover, the students' low language proficiency made it difficult for them to be engaged in the task (Cao, 2011; Delaney, 2008; Liao & Wang, 2015). Some participants struggled to figure out the meaning of some words in the passage.

The findings from the present study showed that the participants were more inclined to the surface motive for learning, leading to a moderate level of engagement in the task. As mentioned earlier, the reason for this is that they wanted to complete the task rather than learn the information in the reading text. This finding contradicts the studies by Llyod (2022) and Damayanti (2020), who found that the students were actively engaged in the annotation tasks given to them. One possible reason is the struggles the students in the present study faced, which eventually led to their motive to complete the task without concern for knowledge acquisition. This made the participants opt for a more surface approach than a deep approach in learning to do the task.

Moreover, selecting approaches to learning can be based on the requirement of the learning activities (Biggs et al., 2001). The approaches to learning the reading task can be seen as a continuum, where some participants shifted from adopting the surface strategy to the deep strategy in doing the task with a little probing from the researcher. It indicates that the participants struggled to move from a surface to a deep strategy. Combined with most of the participants' surface motives in responding to the task, it could be concluded that most of them adopted surface motives and surface strategies to learn. Nonetheless, some of them employed a deep strategy in responding to the task.

Conclusion and Implications

The overall purpose of the study is to identify the approaches that the students used in responding to the annotation task. Learning, in general, is complex, and there are rare occasions where a clear picture of the learning process is portrayed. Similarly, the findings of this study show that learning in a second language EAP classroom is rather complex. The complexity of learning can be seen from the learners' challenges in completing the task and the strategies they used to complete the task. Moreover, the various factors that influence how students learn add to the complex nature of learning in the EAP classroom. These factors affect the students' approaches to learning and can be seen in the learners' motives for learning and the strategies used in the task.

This study has provided some useful information regarding students' approaches to learning. It must also be acknowledged that the study has several limitations. Firstly, the number of participants who participated in the study is small; therefore, having more participants will provide much more in-depth findings and might be able to support the current findings. Also, it will be good to have more than one data collection method, such as a written task as a follow-up, to assist researchers in ensuring consistency in the findings.

Despite the limitations, the present study contributes to the design of the EAP course content and provides an opportunity for second-language EAP practitioners to reflect on their own

teaching. Instructors could reflect on what works and what does not work in their classes and improvise their teaching to help learners adopt deep approaches to learning. Moreover, being aware of the struggles second language EAP students face in learning could help EAP instructors identify ways to assist them in overcoming the struggles. Also, the findings show that the learners have surface motives in responding to the task, which should be considered when designing the EAP course content. This is because identifying students' motives for learning is important, as having deep motives for learning will make students critical of what they learn and be committed to gaining knowledge. Hence, it is also essential for instructors to select suitable reading materials that further promote deep approaches to learning.

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