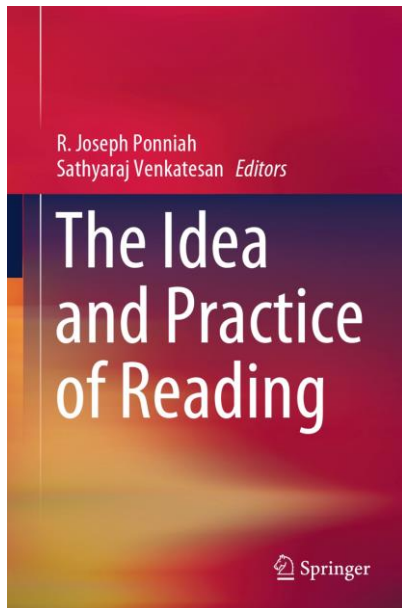




Book Review



The Idea and Practice of Reading, by R. Joseph Ponniah and Sathyaraj Venkatesan (Eds.), Singapore, Springer, 2018, 190 pp., 114.39 € (Hardcover), ISBN 978-3-030-01255-7

The Idea and Practice of Reading (2018) is an edited volume containing a variety of articles that examine the intricate relationship between reading and language acquisition. The introductory chapter highlights the pragmatic, cognitive, practical, analytical, and genetic factors connected to reading practice. While the editors aim to provide language educators with evidence of the importance of reading instruction, the collection appears to be more suitable for graduate students and researchers due to the complex scientific terminology used in some articles.

Chapter 2 argues that multimodality is actively re-shaping academic and professional learning materials in Hong Kong, thus increasing demands on students and curriculum planners.

Reviewing the recent publications concerning academic curricula, students' literacy views, and the impact of technology on literacy, L.W. Hazel Chui emphasizes the need for balance between existing academic standards and emerging digital literacy expectations. Specific directions for curriculum developers are suggested for further research.

Drawing upon Krashen's (1987) theory of comprehensible input, Chapter 3 explores the correlation between reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge. Arguing for implicit vocabulary learning through extensive reading, Nina Daskalovska conducted a thorough review of research on first language (L1) and second language (L2) vocabulary acquisition. Taking a balanced stance, the author stresses the use of extensive reading in addition to reading strategy instruction. The chapter outlines the characteristics of extensive reading programmes and provides advice on the selection of reading materials.

Aligned with the findings of Grabe & Kaplan (1996), Chapter 4 by J. Mary Jennifer and R. Joseph Ponniah suggests that a systematic reading practice can increase self-efficacy and positively affect the writing scores of college students. While the study can have important implications, the lack of details leaves the reader wondering, for instance, whether the post-test used the pre-test materials to collect data. If so, it could skew the results due to the learners' familiarity with the questions. In addition, it is not specified whether L1 was used in the reading discussions, which could have affected reading comprehension.

The empirical study in Chapter 5 combines cognitive and socio-constructive approaches to foster the habit of reading in adult ESL learners. Advocating for the development of autonomous and adaptable readers, Kshema Jose creates and tests a strategy training program using a variety of tools such as SILL, "think alouds", retrospective and introspective interviews, and teacher consultations. The researcher noted the improvement in learners' reading comprehension, confidence, and independence as they gained familiarity with their own reading process and adopted new strategies from peers.



The observational research presented in Chapter 6 provides an insight into the emerging area of L1 skill transfer in bilingual education. By introducing parallel reading tasks in English and Assamese, Mahananda Pathak successfully scaffolded such strategies as inferring word meaning from the context, applying background knowledge to enhance comprehension, and working with the text structure and reference words to locate information. The acknowledged limitations of the study lie in the lack of an outside observer and proper testing methods. Some practical teaching ideas such as the use of bilingual word cards and texts are suggested.

Underpinned by Krashen's (1993; 2004) pleasure hypothesis and comprehensible input theory, and Cummins' (1991) conceptual L1 knowledge transfer, Chapter 7 reports a study on the effects of pleasure reading in L2 on language acquisition. Working with an unmotivated L2 reader, Ponniah achieved a break-through by switching to the texts of the reader's personal interest. The student reported decreased reading apprehension and transfer of existing L1 reading habits to L2 reading. While insightful, the article lacks the support of measurable metrics, which could improve the validity of the study.

Chapter 8 by Radhakrishnan Sriganesh, D.R. Rahul, and R. Joseph Ponniah stresses the relationship between human genetics, emotion, cognition, and reading aptitude. As emotion directly affects cognition, and both significantly depend on the student's genetics, the authors propose a shift towards individualized learning using genetic neuromarkers of individuals to determine an optimal personalized learning environment. While thought-provoking, compartmentalization of learners based on their genetic makeup could potentially prevent them from realizing their full potential.

Chapter 9 discusses possible applications of cognitive semantics to L2 reading instruction by demonstrating the connections between language and cognition. N.P. Sudharshana argues that all linguistic elements are related to common, interrelated mental concepts that often go beyond basic dictionary definitions, and that explicit inferencing instruction is needed to help students understand figurative uses of language. An example is given to illustrate how the principles can be applied in the ESL teaching context.

Chapter 10 hypothesizes that reading any content can enhance one's ability to comprehend diverse materials by improving the reader's aptitude for building cognitive models and abstractions. C.E. Veni Madhavan and C.N. Ajit propose a framework of reading experiments in which the difficulty of a given text for a particular reader is estimated in order to establish a correlation between the readability of side materials and the understanding of the main material. The article seems to diverge along several (admittedly interesting) tangents. However, no experiments are mentioned to support the viability of the authors' models.

The final chapter argues against the simultaneous multimodality in the presentation of reading materials, comparing the effect of reading-only and combined reading-listening L2 materials on text comprehension. As single-mode texts positively affected reading comprehension of Argentinean middle school students, Carlos Machado and Pedro Luis Luchini call for a cognitive load reduction, such as eliminating the reading aloud of instructions. Although the interpretations of the statistical results of the study at times seem unclear, the conclusions are largely valid.

To summarise, the strength of this volume lies in its refreshing perspective on the importance of reading in second language acquisition, and in showcasing the latest research. However, the book is not without its limitations as the quality of studies varies across the volume. In addition, greater unity and coherence could have been achieved by having the topics organized thematically. Moreover, the lack of a strong focus on practical instructional applications and the elaborate academic terminology used in some articles may discourage some teachers from perusing this volume.

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