

EFL STUDENTS' PERSONAL EPISTEMOLOGIES AND THEIR READING ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Reading tasks at tertiary levels require deeper processing and more reading engagement compared to school-level ones. A question that remains unanswered in pertinent literature, at least partially, is what makes some EFL tertiary students more engaged in reading tasks and show more tendency towards adopting deeper level processing techniques and strategies when handling reading tasks in EFL classes. Literature on reading instruction provides a multiplicity of reasons such as student goal orientations, motivational factors, language proficiency levels, familiarity with reading topics ...etc. One of the possible answers that have not yet been explored in reading literature pertains to the epistemic stances that EFL students tend to adopt in EFL contexts. In this regard, epistemic stances refer to beliefs that EFL students hold about the nature of knowledge, where it resides, how it can be constructed and evaluated, and how knowing occurs (citation). Related research literature shows that these epistemic positions are domain-specific and culture-bound (citation). Different cultural contexts and educational environments might activate epistemic positions reflective of cultural norms and traditions, which in turn would affect ways and strategies of information processing and levels of cognitive engagement in foreign language learning situations; reading may be no exception. Hence, the current study is an investigation of the nature of epistemic positions of EFL students in the Emirati tertiary context of foreign language instruction on the one hand, and the relationships between these epistemic stances and the level of their cognitive engagement and information processing in reading tasks, on the other hand. Description of the Epistemological Beliefs Questionnaire (EBQ) and the reading tasks used is presented. Results are discussed in the light of the cultural specificity of personal epistemologies in the Emirati EFL context. Implications for foreign language education in general and reading instruction in particular are presented along with suggestions for further research.

Biographical data

Abdullah Ammar is an associate professor of TEFL at Abu Dhabi University. He served as a visiting scholar to the University of Pittsburgh from 1999 to 2001. He was a co-winner of the European Union award for a higher education enhancement project. Current research interests include epistemological beliefs, self-regulated language learning, and CALL.