

Reading Wants and Needs in EFL: Learners' and Teachers' Perceptions

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This study quantifies a sample of Spanish teachers' and students' perceptions of the students' reading wants and needs in English. The results show that in many cases the teachers do not credit their students with much interest in English. Partly as a result of this and perhaps due to the teachers' own experiences of English, the perceptions of students and teachers diverge considerably. The article concludes with a discussion of the results with respect to needs analysis in course design.

INTRODUCTION

Carrell (1988) has observed that for ESL and EFL students reading may be the most important of the four skills. In a preliminary study among secondary school students in the Seville province of Spain, reading preceded speaking, listening and writing in that order, on a rank scale of 1-4 for preferences between the four skills. In the same study, we used a seven point bipolar scale for students' views about the skills, using symbols only (--- / -- / - / 0 / + / ++ / +++). The results here showed a bunching for reading around the positive end of the scale (++) , while, for example, speaking produced a double hump around the negative (--) and the positive (++) ends. As a result, we decided to focus on reading in English.

However, before focusing on the more specific variables affecting the local Spanish learners' ability to read in English, it seemed logical to consider the learners' perceptions of their reading requirements in English. As any book on ESP (e.g. Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) will testify, the issue of needs and wants is a thorny one, and even more so if the teacher's perceptions are included (McDonough, 1984). It seems that with respect to EFL reading the relevance of needs and wants in the selection of reading material for developing reading abilities is crucial (Nuttall, 1982) and yet surprisingly little research seems to have been published on the issue (William & Moran, 1989).

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