THE ROLE OF TEACHING READING ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

Today, in teaching of English as a foreign language in our country, the appropriate texts must be selected considering the students' vocabulary knowledge, grammar levels, interests and needs in multi-level reading instruction like in other levels, reading instructions in multi-level, determined by the criteria established by the Common European Framework, can include texts with events mentioned in personal letters, texts about feelings and thoughts and texts with words used frequently in work or daily life. In this study reading texts used in multi-level English language teaching will be exemplified. Literature review will be used in this study. For example, reading texts with the topics such as work life, an article from Latest UK news newspaper, airport security and film review can be used in the reading instruction. The type of questions that can be asked and how the texts can be examined during the teaching of these texts are explained.

KEYWORDS: *Teaching English, Multi-Level, Reading Studies, Reading Activities, Teaching Reading.*

INTRODUCTION

A good deal of the current research in the field of EFL reading is embedded in a Psycholinguistics framework (Goodman, 1970, Coady, 1979). In this view, the reader is seen as an active processor of information, one who selects only the most productive cues from the printed page. One way of facilitating a reader's interaction with a text for triggering and building background knowledge is through pre-reading activities (Hudson, 1982). Pre-reading activities provide orientation to content and context. They vary with the nature of the text, the reader's purpose and context of situation (Wallace, 1992).

Importance of Reading

Most scholars would agree that reading is one of the most important skills for educational and professional success (Alderson, 1984). In highlighting the importance of reading comprehension Rivers (1981:147) stated that " reading is the most important activity in any language class, not only as a source of information and a pleasurable activity, but also as a means of consolidating and extending one" s which are knowledge of the language".

Reading reinforces the learner's other language skills. Krashen (1981) confirms that those who read more, have larger vocabularies, do better on test of grammar and write better (Kim &Krashen, 1997). Chastian (1988:218) while accepting the significance of reading for meaning claimed that all reading activities serve to facilitate communication fluency in each of the other language skills.
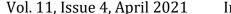
According to Eskey (1988), in advanced levels of second language the ability to read the written language at a reasonable rate and with good comprehension has long been recognized to be as oral skills if not more important.

In an early study on reading strategies, Hosenfield (1977) used a think aloud procedure to identify relations between certain types of reading strategies and successful or unsuccessful second language reading. The successful readers, for example, kept the meaning of the passage in mind while reading, read it in broad phrases, skipped inconsequential or less important words, and had a positive self-concept as a reader. The unsuccessful reader, on the other hand, lost the meaning of the sentences when decoded, read in short phrases, pondered over inconsequential words, seldom skipped words as unimportant, and had a negative self-concept.

In their study involving good and poor readers, Hopkins and Mackay (1997) found that good readers often have more ready access to a variety of purposeful reading strategies to undertake reading tasks successfully and that they use them with greater frequency and flexibility. They are active in making inferences and using dictionaries to resolve uncertainty about the meanings of words or larger units of discourse.

In another empirical study, Song (1998) studied 68 first year tertiary students majoring in Archeology, Esthetics, and religion at a university in Korea to investigate the impact of strategy training on the reading ability of EFL university students. He also aimed to obtain answers for the differentiated effect of the strategy training on students' reading proficiency level and types of reading comprehension questions. The findings of the study showed that the reading strategy training does improve EFL college students reading proficiency. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that less able readers might benefit from the training more than more able readers. Finally the study revealed that the students' ability of grasping main ideas and of making inferences from the given passages was significantly enhanced.

The findings of Song's (1998) study is confirmed by the results of Salataci and Akeyl's (2002) study who investigated the reading strategies of Turkish EFL students in Turkish and English possible effects of reading instruction on reading in Turkish and English. Salataci and Akeyl tried to find out whether strategy instruction in EFL reading affect EFL reading strategies and reading comprehension in English. Moreover, they investigated if strategy training in EFL reading affects reading strategies in Turkish. Their participants were 8 Turkish students enrolled in a pre-intermediate level class of a one-year intensive English course offered at a Turkish-

medium technical university. The data in their study come from think-aloud protocols, observation, a background questionnaire, a semi-structured interview and the reading component of PET (the Preliminary English Test).The results indicated that strategy instruction had a positive effect on both Turkish and English reading strategies and reading comprehension in English. This finding is in accordance with Falk and Wehby's (2007) study findings who investigated the impact of explicit reading instruction on students' with emotional/behavioral disorders. Their findings suggest that direct instruction offers a promising approach to increasing the reading achievement – and potentially the behavioral outcomes- of students with emotional behavioral disorders. Reading strategy instruction has also received some attention in Iran (Barati, 1992, Sedighi, 1998, Shirazi,1999). In his study on the effect of reading strategies on recall and retention of Iranian EFL learners, Barati(1992) considered two reading strategies: underlining and note-taking. Through analyzing the subjects 'performance on factual and conceptual questions, he concluded that in both experiments note-takers could significantly outperform underliners on factual questions; but with reference to conceptual questions there was no significant difference between the two strategies.

In another study, Sedighi (1998) studied the effects of training in the use of reading strategies on the improvement of reading comprehension of 110 students at Allameh Tabatabaei University and Islamic Azad University, Iran. His study consisted of three phases. In the first phase, he conducted a descriptive research to investigate the strategies reading teachers use to teach reading comprehension in EFL classes in Iran. In this phase, he found that teachers in Iran still use traditional method of language teaching without enough strategic content. In the second phase, he conducted a survey study to describe the strategies good readers and poor

readers use in reading their EFL reading assignments. Finally in the third phase which was the experimental one, he investigated the effects of training in the use of reading strategies on the improvement of reading comprehension. It was revealed that reading strategy instruction enhances comprehension ability of the students.

It was also shown that low ability comprehenders benefited from strategy instruction more than middle and high ability comprehenders.

While lots of studies on reading strategy instruction have been done in EFL and ESL context, few studieshave been conducted on the impact of strategy training on ESP readers. In Iran, Shirazi (1999) conducted aresearch in order to determine the impact of pre-reading strategy instruction on the reading comprehension of Iranian ESP readers. The results of his study indicated that efficient comprehension requires effective activating of the learner's background knowledge. In other words, the readers' schemata should be tapped on prior to the reading. He concluded that if the pre-reading activities are employed efficiently, learning how to read is quiteeasy.

There is little evidence to show that whether ESP students can benefit from reading strategy training as much as EFL learners. Therefore, the findings of the present experimental study can shed more light on the issue of teaching reading strategies and it will set the ground for a comparison between the effectiveness of reading strategy instruction versus traditional teaching of reading comprehension.   Moreover, this study has got the purpose of discovering students from which proficiency level all more likely to benefit most from strategy training. While Shirazi (1999) only focused on the instruction of a few pre-reading strategies, the present study intends

to investigate the effect of all pre-reading, during-reading, and post- reading strategy instruction on reading ability of ESP readers.

Interactive View of Reading and its Relationship with ESP

A significant body of literature posits that reading is an interactive process (Carrell, Devine &Eskey 1988; Grabbe, 1991; Rumelhart &Ortony 1977). According to Grabbe (1991:385) the notion of reading as an interactive process refers to "a kind of dialogue between the reader and the text" The notion of reading as an interactive process evolved from the schema theory and is often termed top-down approach to reading. Carrell (1983) distinguishes between formal schemata the reader's knowledge of formal, rhetorical structure of the texts and content schemata – previous knowledge which the reader posses.

In an interactive model, the reader is not seen to progress in just one direction (bottom-up or top-down) in understanding the text, but as being able to alternate approaches as necessary (Barnett, 1989). The reader is seen as able to draw simultaneously from a variety of sources to understand the text such as lexical, orthographic, schematic, semantic, syntactical, and visual (Davies, 1995). Thus reading is seen as a simultaneous perceptual and cognitive process (Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977). Interactive model of reading comprehension not only acknowledges the role of background knowledge, but also it stresses the significance of processing actual words of the texts. Goodman (1981:137) maintains that, " … the goal of reading is constructing meaning in response to text. It requires interactive use of graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cues to construct meaning." Although he is often referred to as a leading advocate of the top –down approach, his model by his own admission is interactive.

An interactive model of reading posited by Grabbe (1991) usually refers to interplay of both bottom-up and top-down reading strategies (Block, 1992). Bottom-up strategies include decoding graphic features and grammatical characteristics, while top-down strategies include predicting, applying background knowledge and recognizing global text structure. The notion of top-down strategies is usually used in the literature to include both global strategies for processing the text as well as activating conceptual knowledge of the world (Carrell, 1985 Shih, 1992).

According to Dubin and Bycina (1991), the interactive modal entails the reading processes to be as such that the visual data are transmitted to brain where they are matched with existing knowledge. Then on the basis of this experience, predictions are made about the content of the text, upon which, further sampling of the data are either confirmed or revised.

Anderson (1999) claims that "many teachers now accept the view that reading is the result of a two way communication between the reader and the text, achieved through simultaneous processing (which involves word recognition, sound/spelling correspondence etc.) and top-down processing (which involves skills like predication, inference etc.)

How do the above notions relate to ESP reading pedagogy? Grabbe's (1991) notion of reading as an interactive process implies that the ESP reader most probably has more limited content and formal schemata as well as less knowledge of language used in the text than the author has, thus, while an ESP reading course usually emphasizes building up student's knowledge of rhetorical structures and improving their knowledge of the target language. The gap in content schemata should not be ignored. The issue of ESP reading instructor as a content specialists raised in ESP literature (e.g. Robbinson, 1991). Grabbe's interactive model of reading dictates that ESP

instruction should focus both on decoding language and on global reading strategies which (Duffy, 1988:763) defined them as "plans for solving problems, encountered in constructing meaning". They can be taught to students and when taught strategies help student's performance on tests of comprehension and recall.

General Views on Pre-reading Activities

The goals of Pre-reading stage are to activate the student's knowledge of the subject, to provide any language preparation that might be needed for coping with the passage and, finally to motivate the learners to want to read the text (Celce-Murcia, 1991). Tudor (1989) call pre-reading activities "enabling activities" because they provide a reader with the necessary background to organize activity and to comprehend the material (these experiences involve understanding the purpose (S) for reading and building a knowledge base necessary for dealing with the content and the structure of the material). They say that pre-reading activities elicit prior knowledge, and focus attention. Various techniques have been suggested by some authors (e.g. Greenall & Swan, 1986) to mobilize existing knowledge including the use of pictures, movies and even role – plays. Research has not determined which of these is the most effective. So teachers are free to experiment according to the nature of reading material and inclinations of their classes (Carrell &Eisterhold, 1983). In an academic setting, however, more formal techniques might be appropriate, of course different scholars listed different types of pre-reading activities, (Celce-Murcia, 1991:225) suggests, Word Association,

Discussion and Text Surveys

Word association tasks generally involve eliciting from the students as many ideas as they can offer regarding the announced subject of the text. Normally their suggestions are written on the board and sometimes arranged into semantic map or "graphic organizer" which indicates how concepts are related to each other.

Discussions have also been found to activate what students know and through the exchange of information, to enhance their knowledge of the subject. Discussions can be initiated by simply posing questions about the content of the text or by using "anticipation guide" which is a series of statements often provocative in nature, which are intended to challenge student"s knowledge and beliefs about the content of the passage (Celce-Murcia, 1991:225).

Nuttal (1982) claims that discussion promotes the active struggle with the text and students learn the processes of critical thinking that good readers use. Group work is ideal, because in small groups, even the weaker students should be active and learning. The procedure works in almost every level, and discussion can be in L1, if students cannot manage it in the FL.

Text Survey is often, but not exclusively, used with longer stretches of discourse, such as chapter from a textbook, the purpose of this activity is to quickly determine the structure of the piece and to identify the key ideas (Celce-Murcia, 1991).

Tudor (1989) gives five other categories of Content-related pre-reading activities (a) pre questions to be answered after reading the text; (b) pre questions to activate the reader's knowledge about the topic; (c) content organizers (e.g., summaries); (d) predictions based on the title, subheadings, illustrations, or skim reading of the text; and (e) integrated reading preparation (combining the above). Taglieber (1988) found the last two activity-types (viz. Using

illustrations to make predictions, and formulating questions) to be more effective in facilitating EFL student‟s comprehension than vocabulary pre-teaching. This result is interesting, since it indicates that heightened background knowledge can enable students to use contextual clues to overcome specific vocabulary deficiencies.

Taglieber (1988) has indicated three major problems that interfere with reader's comprehension.

1. Lack of vocabulary.

2. Difficulty in using language cues to meaning.

3. Lack of conceptual knowledge.

She claimed that the following practical preceding activities may help address these problems:

1. Pictorial context

2. Pre-questioning

3. Vocabulary Pre-teaching

Pictorial Context

Illustrations can be an integral part of ESP courses. The justification is that they make ESP courses more tangible and understandable. Robinson (1991:62) asserted, " as well as print material … one would expect that for teaching ESP there would be a rich supply of authentic visual and mechanical material"; however, he believed that there is not a great deal of discussion of this in the literature.

In this regard, Wilson (1986) refereed to visual support for the avoidance of problems in the comprehension. She also suggested that visual aids may be exploited as a kind of elicitation strategy.
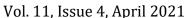
Furthermore, she favored a classroom in which students use illustrations to fulfill a specific task.

Ellis (1993:26) stated, " visual stimuli, like verbal stimuli, are organized in comprehension and memory" He further added that the organization for visual stimuli is a consequence of perceptual processing, which is bottom -up, or data-driven, in its earlier stage, but top-down processing is affected by conceptual knowledge later on.

As a supporting basis for teaching through illustration, Paivio (1971) proposed the dual coding theory of learning from words and pictures. The theory proposes that learners can construct three types of connections when they are presented with verbal and visual material. McDaniel and Waddill (1994) conducted a research to find out the extent to which pictures can enhance recall of textually presented information, particularly item specific (detailed) information and relational information. They concluded that providing readers with the requisite comprehension abilities to begin with, pictures enable the extraction and under ordinary circumstances do not encode effectively.

Pre-questioning

The questions we are discussing here in pre-reading stage are not intended to test. Their purpose is to make students aware of the way language is used to convey meaning, the questions are not necessarily different from questions in tests, but their purpose and the way they are used is quite

different. Nuttal (1982:160) suggests signpost questions would be of great help in pre-questioning. A signpost stands at a crossroads to show travelers the way.

In using signpost questions in pre-reading stage Nuttal (1982) states that you can ask an easy SPQ on the whole text, as an initial top-down activity; and / or you can ask one for each section. Write the SPQ on the board and ask class to read the text silently and find answer. After silent reading, perhaps followed by group discussion check whether they have been able to do this. If a fair number have not, leave it open and explain that you will return to it later avoid giving an answer yourself if you possibly can. Pre-questioning is taught by having the instructor ask questions about a passage and the students answer the questions, through pre-questioning students set purposes for reading, the method is supported by (Johnson, 1981).

CONCLUSION

Finally, results of this study further show that although a great majority of the participants favor the effectiveness of using activities in teaching reading, they do not use activities as frequently as expected. Most of the participants express that this is because of the crowded classroom environments and the heavy load of the curriculum. With accurate planning and information passed onto the teachers, this problem should be dealt with to secure the benefits of activities in the foreign language classroom.

Lastly, in course-books and materials, the use of activities can be emphasized and by presenting alternative activities, foreign language teaching can be enriched so that primary school students enjoy learning English in a robust manner.

In a nutshell, this paper has presented a review and analysis of the literature on teaching English reading encompassing an overview of activities, classifications of activities in teaching reading, and the influence of using activities on the language learners' performance. Prior researches on using English reading activities have been included as well.

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