

## CHALLENGES IN TEACHING READING

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### ABSTRACT

It is in consideration to this that the aim of this investigation is to identify the problems of teaching reading in a non native speaking classroom and the way in which these skills are developed for students of English as a foreign language. The author analyses the problem considering the issues of developing students' reading skills and the challenges that the learners encounter in reading process. The aim of this article is not only considering the problem above-mentioned but to give some recommendations concerning the issue as well.

**Keywords:** teaching reading, reading skills, reading strategies, learners' problems.

### INTRODUCTION

Teaching reading to students, especially in a technical university is challenging for teachers of a foreign language. Reading in the own language is very different from reading in a foreign language, because the mother tongue has different ways of reading depending on what is being read and why. To use students' background knowledge of certain topic could help to predict the content of a text and also to understand it easily because students already know how different texts are structured.

Harmer (2007) states that there are two types of reading: **extensive** and **intensive** reading. The first term refers to the reading that students often do for pleasure. This is better when students have the opportunity to choose what they want to read. As extensive reading is very important, teachers need to have a programme which includes materials, guidance, tasks and libraries.

On the other hand, intensive reading is the detailed focus of reading text, complemented with study activities, such as, uses of grammar and vocabulary. In this kind of reading, teachers have to motivate students to read intensively, engaging them with the topics and tasks. There are further roles teachers need to adopt when asking students to read intensively: organizer, observer and feedback organizer. Besides, when reading intensively, it is necessary that teachers find some accommodation between the desire of having students with a development of understanding a general message

without considering every detail and the students' natural desire to understand the meaning of every single detail or word. If students and teachers want to get the maximum benefit from reading, learners need to be involved in both.

### **HOW TO DEVELOP READING SKILLS**

To develop reading skills, teachers play a crucial role. They should help students to focus their reading, in that way they read for meaning instead of getting involved on individual words or unimportant details and losing the main meaning of a text. Also, teachers need to help them to read in diverse ways and use sub-skills that will help them to improve and understand what are they reading efficiently. (H

According to Harmer (2007) to understand reading texts students need to do some activities or use some strategies, called Reading Skills. First, students need to be able to scan the text, which means reading quickly while looking for specific information. On the other hand, students also need to be able to skim, which is used to quickly identify the general idea of a text, readers are focused briefly on a few words per line, headings or the first and last sentence in a paragraph.

Hadfield (2008) says that reading for a gist is another strategy that implies reading with a purpose in mind. Also, reading for detail is considered as a strategy. Sometimes, students need to read carefully, because it is necessary to pay attention to all the sentences to get the meaning of the whole text.

Hadfield (2008) also talks about sub skills. These are three: Activating Background knowledge, Predicting and Linkers:

Activating Background Knowledge helps learners to understand a text by discussing the topic before reading. Brainstorming and Mind-Mapping are useful techniques to do this. The first one means to think quickly of anything related to the topic and the second one tries to order the ideas, for example in separate categories. These two activities help to activate vocabulary learners already have.

Predicting can be done by looking at titles, pictures or words from the text.

The last sub-skill is using **Linkers**. Linkers are words that act as signals that show the structure of a text and help to understand when a new piece of information is coming. The use of these sub skills can be very helpful in the development of reading skills.

### **SELECTING TASKS**

Hadfield (2008) mentions three important aspects to consider when teachers choose texts for classroom use:

One of them is that texts should be interesting and motivating. It is obvious that learners will learn better if the reading material engages their interest. Being appropriate to learners' level is another aspect. In general the intensive reading texts worked on in

class should be slightly above learners' level. If everything is easy for them, they will not be practising reading skills. On the other hand, extensive texts should be slightly below learners' level so that they can read fluently, for pleasure. Finally, to have a variety of different text types is also an aspect to consider when selecting reading tasks. Some students need to have a range of different kinds of texts and it is a good idea that teachers include some authentic texts.

### LEARNERS' PROBLEMS

There may be some problems that learners may face when they are working on reading activities. Among these problems, I would like to highlight **Language**, which may be difficult for students to understand, depending on the kind of text they are working. Another problem is the one concerning the **Content** of a text, which means that the text could be too difficult as long as the content is too far removed from the knowledge and experience of the learners. A third problem is **Speed**, which means that the reading could be slow because the reader does not have a large "vocabulary" so it is difficult for him/her to understand the text. Another problem to consider is **Attention** that appears when the reader pays the same amount of attention to all parts of the text. A fifth problem is **Incomprehensible Vocabulary**. In this case the reader cannot tolerate incomprehensible vocabulary items: stops to look every one up in a dictionary, and feels discouraged from trying to comprehend the text as a whole. **Prediction** is the sixth aspect and its inefficiency lies on the fact that the reader does not think ahead but deals with the text as it comes. Background information is also important. The reader does not have or use background information. **Motivation** is the seventh problem which affects reader's particular interest in reading. Another problem is the one related to purpose, in which the student does not have a clear idea of what he is supposed to achieve through reading.

The last, but not the least, problem is the one concerning **Strategies**, in which the reader could use the same strategy for all texts not considering the difference on the type of texts he might read.

### CONCLUSION

So, there are some solutions for learner's problems. The advice for teachers is to make sure their students get a lot of successful reading experience: through encouraging them to choose their own simplified readers, for example, and giving them time to read what they choose. Teachers also should make sure that most of the vocabulary in reading texts is familiar to students, and that words that are unknown can be either easily guessed or safely ignored.

The next is to give interesting tasks before asking learners to read, so that they have a clear purpose and motivating challenge, or using texts that are interesting

enough to provide their own motivation. Making sure that the tasks encourage selective, intelligent reading for the main meaning, and do not just test understanding of trivial details is also important.

Teachers should also allow, and even encourage students to manage without understanding every word: by the use of scanning tasks, for example, that require them to focus on limited items of information. Finally, providing as wide a variety of texts and tasks as possible in order to give learners practice in different kinds of reading is another important piece of advice so that teachers can avoid learner's problem when they are working on reading activities.

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