CAN READING BE TAUGHT MORE EFFECTIVELY IN AN EFL CLASS?

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Özet*: Okuma/Okuduğunu anlama, okuyucunun metinle kurduğu iletişim sonucu ortaya çıkan bir üründür. İngilizce ders kitaplarında sunulan metinlerin genellikle hedef dilin konuşulduğu toplumun sosyo-kültürel yapısını yansıttığı görülmektedir. Metinler akademik veya özel amaçlı İngilizce'yi öğretmeyi hedefliyorsa, öğrencinin hem metnin kültürel yapısında hem de akademik konularda gerekli ön bilgisinin olması gerekmektedir. Öğrencinin alan bilgisinin yetersiz, sözcük bilgisinin sınırlı ve metnin gramer yapısının karmaşık olması durumunda, okuma-anlamada sorunlar ortaya çıkacaktır. Bu olumsuzluklarla birlikte, öğretmenin uyguladığı yöntemin de yetersiz olması durumunda, öğrencinin okuma becerisinin gelişmesi zorlaşacaktır. Bu makalede öğretim dili İngilizce olan üniversitelerde çok önemli görülen okuma-anlama becerisinin geliştirilmesine yönelik ders planı yapılmış ve etkin bir okuma-anlama için öğretmenin izleyebileceği yollar önerilmiştir.*

Abstract: *Reading is described as a psychological process by which the reader constructs a message encoded by a writer. Reading is a matter of decoding the message in the text. The socio-cultural aspects, vocabulary difficulty level and the structure of the text have a large effect on the learners' reading comprehension. If the learner has limited background knowledge about the text, he/she will inevitably have problems in reading comprehension. The purpose of this article is to design a lesson plan and suggest some procedures for efficient reading. It is believed that if the instructor follows the guidelines with the lesson plan, he/she will be able to teach reading skill more effectively.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a receptive and complex skill, which comprises psychological and social factors. Reading is not only deriving meaning from the context but it is a process of decoding the messages the author conveys to the reader by using the reader's and the writer's life expectations and thoughts.

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Goodman (1968) defines reading as a long cycle of thought between the author and the reader; it is also an important interaction between thought and language.

Widdowson (1979) defines reading as a communication process which involves gaining insight into culture of the target language. According to Widdowson, reading embraces issues of cognitive psychology, educational psychology and socio-linguistics.

Carton (1986) makes an operational definition of reading proficiency and states that in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning, reading is a complex and absolute concept which includes the reader's various cognitive and perceptive skills. Reading comprehension is connected with the structure of the text and other linguistic characteristics in terms of the functional angle.

The reader's deficiency in background knowledge and limited foundation about the world may cause difficulties in reading comprehension. The student's acquisition of reading skill in EFL plays an important role in his/her academic and professional life. However, most English programs are designed to improve the students' commumucative ability and thus reading is given less emphasis. Some textbooks are grammar-oriented and the teacher emphasizes grammar in class neglecting reading comprehension.

The main pourpose of English programs in English-medium universities in Turkey, is to teach English to the students so that they can read subject-specific textbooks, understand lectures in their own disciplines. Many researchers maintain that most students experince problems with reading.

Carrel (1984) identifies the weaknesses and problems the students experience in their learning process as follows:

a. The students may experience difficulties in reading comprehension if he/she has not gained the background knowledge necessary for his/her making correct predictions and finding clues in the context. For instance, if the context is technical, the students without any background knowledge will have difficulties in comprehending it no matter how simple the language of the text is.
b. If he has limited vocabulary and structural information, he will again have problems in his full comprehension.

Mei-Yun (1989) finds out five similar major problems in connection with reading comprehension.

a. Reading word by word, relying too heavily on visual information, which greatly impedes reading speed, hampers comprehension.
b. Focusing too much attention on form at the expense of meaning.

c.   Paying too much attention to details, with the results that readers often miss the main idea and see the trees of the forest.

d.   A limited vocabulary, and thus heavy reiance on the use of the dictionary for word meaning.

e.   Limited background knowledge.

II. PLANNING OF READING COMPREHENSION

1.   State the lesson objectives. These depend on what the passage or text has to offer. Decide which reading skills to be taught.

. Do you want your students to recognise words or phrases?

. Do you want them to retrieve information from the passage?

. Do you want them to discuss the main ideas?

. Do you want them to understand the meaning and implications of grammatical structure ?

. Do you want them to extract specific information for summary and note taking?

. Do you want them to skim the text for the gist?

. Do you want them to know how to use an index, a table of contents,etc?. This is a very important skill for ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students. For full comprehension of the passage, the teacher can follow these steps.

2.   Ask the students a few warm–up questions about the topic of the passage. If there is a picture(s) about the passage, you can use it as a reference. Or else you can prepare a relevant visual aid.

3.   Decide which words are vital to preteach. These are the keywords and essential to comprehension. Decide which words are not essential to comprehension and can be guessed from the context or can be inferred by the students.

4.   Make up two or three sign-post questions so that the students read the passage with a purpose. Write the question on the board.

5.   Give them a suitable time for their silent reading. If the passage is too long, divide it into paragraphs.

6.   Prepare some general comprehension questions and a few questions for more intensive reading. And check the answers. (This may be oral or written)

7.   Decide on patterns of students-teacher interaction and how to vary the lesson. Is there an opportunity for pair-work or role-play?

8.   Decide a follow-up activity. Summary. Text-mapping. Composition writing. Cloze test and jumbled key sentences to arrange etc.

III. **LESSON PLAN**
Learning Stage of the class: post-intermediate
Class: Senior year economics students at Çağ University.
Number of students: 25
Reading to be covered: Inequality in the world.
Class period: Two class periods.
Overall objectives of the lesson:
a: understand the concept of inequality
b: get a general idea about the facts of inequality in the world.
Behavioural objectives of the lesson:
At the end of the lesson the students will be able to:
a: recognise "keywords" and basic concepts in Economics such as global integration,open markets, capitalism.
b: make text-mapping
c: make inferences

IV. INEQUALITY IN THE WORLD

Ironically, inequality is growing at a time when the triumph of the technological revolution and open markets was supposed to usher in a new age of freedom and opportunity (Dyer and Bushel, 2003).

In the United States, where the impact of global integration and the information revolution is probably the most widespread, the facts are sobering. Income inequality there is increasing, not only because of gains at the top, but more disturbingly, because of losses at the bottom. The average wage of white male high school graduates fell 15 percent from 1973 to 1993, and the number of men aged 25 to 54 years earning less than $10.000 a year grew. Possibly for the first time in the nation's history, educational gains may be reinforcing rather than offsetting income inequality: Higher education has become a prerequisite for economic success, but because access to it can depend on family income, the poor are at a distinct disadvantage. Elsewhere, the forces of change–whether the spread of capitalism and global integration, or simply the march of technological progress, have at best reinforced, or at worst, made the situation even more grim. In Latin America, the ratio of income of the top 20 is percent of earners to the bottom is about 16 to 1 , compared with about 10 to 1 in the United States and about 5 to 1 in Western Europe. The wage gap between the skilled and the unskilled increased by more than 30 percent in Peru, 20 percent in Colombia, nearly 25 percent in Mexico during the 1990s. Ironically, these were the countries with the greatest wage increases.

The situation is less clear but no more heartening in other parts of the world. In China, the liberalization of agriculture and other market reforms has stimulated growth, yet large segments of population have been left behind. In the affluent countries of northern Europe, increases in poor immigrant population, growing unemployment, and economic restrictions are undermining the historic commitment of these nations to address inequality. Economic growth (or in some countries lack of growth) has seemed everywhere to be accompanied by persistent, often high, and sometimes worsening, inequality within countries.

1. Warm-up questions to get an idea of what the passage is about.
What do you think the passage is about?
Do you believe that the world is divided into between the rich and the poor?
Is inequality growing in the world? Why?

2. Look at the board and study the meaning of the key words and concepts.
    Prerequisite (adj.)
    Affluent (adj.)
    Undermine (v)
    Digital divide (n)
    Global integration (n)
    Offsetting (n)
Guess the following words from the context.
    Grim (adj.)
    Sobering (adj.)
    Heartening (adj.)
    Segment (n)

3. Read the signpost questions on the board first, then read the passage silently scanning the passage to find the answers. (You may write the answers in your note-book)
a. Why is income inequality increasing in the world?
b. Why are the poor disadvantaged in their access to higher education?
c. Explain "economic growth".

4. Read the general comprehension questions on the board and try to anwer them.(you may write the answers in your note-book.) To save time, the teacher can use OHP if available.

a.   What are the important factors which cause inequality in the world?

b.   Which country has the worst ratio of income?

c.   In which country did the largest wage gap occur between the skilled and unskilled in 1990s?

d.   How did the liberalization of agriculture and market reforms affect China?

e.   What happened whwn the number of college graduates decreased?

5. **Skim the passage to answer the following inference question**.

a. Who may suffer from the digital divide?

b. What can you infer about the author's position on government policies?

c. Do you think the author believes inequality can be overcome?

d. What do you think is the best way to overcome inequality?

6. Follow-up activity: Text-mapping.

Skim the passage again and write the reasons for inequality in many regions of the world. For the following lesson the students may be assigned to write a short composition about the facts of inequality in Turkey using their own knowledge. Thus, writing skill may be integrated into reading skill.

V. CONCLUSION

As is known, the students who study academic English or ESP (English for Specific Purposes**)** will confront with texts of both types of context specific and formal schema**.** Therefore, preteaching of both key-words and technical concepts, discussing the background information about the passage will give relief to the students for their comprehension. It is believed that the students will be able to understand the passage with full comprehension if suggested procedures be followed.

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