STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING READING SKILLS IN EFL CLASSES

Anastasia GURDUZA, *student, Faculty of Philology,*
Alecu Russo Bălţi State University
Scientific adviser: **Svetlana FILIPP,** *lecturer*

Rezumat: *Această lucrare este axată pe tehnica predării citirii ca unul din aspectele esenţiale în predarea limbii engleze. În articol sunt analizate tehnica şi strategiile folosite în procesul predării citirii, care pot eficientiza acest proces. În evidenţă au fost puse trei tehnici principale de predare a citirii: tehnica de pre-lectură, tehnica de lectură propriu-zisă şi tehnica de post-lectură. De asemenea, sunt descrise o serie de activităţi utilizate în cadrul acestor tehnici de predare.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *strategie, tehnică, predarea citirii, pre-lectură, lectură propriu-zisă, post-lectură, activităţi.*

Reading appears to be the most essential skill for people who learn English as a foreign language in the academic setting. Besides, reading is an essential skill for EFL students and is the most important skill to master since EFL readers with strengthened reading skill will make greater progress and attain greater development in all academic areas. The process of developing reading skills requires some strategies that help the pupil penetrate the code of the message of the text. Teaching reading implies more than assigning the pupil a text and requiring him to answer a series of comprehension questions when he has finished. A reading lesson is divided into three parts and each of them has its own particular aims and procedures.

In the present article we make an attempt to analyse those techniques that can be used by teachers during EFL classes making them successful. These techniques are: the *pre-reading technique,* the *while-reading technique* and the *post-reading technique.*

To understand what they read, learners need some knowledge of the topic. This can be as true for narrative as it is for informational material. Thus, the *pre-reading technique* is very important. Kathleen T. McWhorter states that "one of the basic goals in pre-reading is to look only at those parts of the reading material that will help the students to understand what it is about and how it is organized" [3, p.25]. This technique also aims 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. By pre-reading activities, we mean tasks that students do before they read the text in detail. A good piece of advice concerning this phase was given by D. Brown: "Spend some time introducing the topic, encouraging skimming, scanning, and activating schemata. Students can bring the best of their knowledge and skills to a text when they have been given a chance to penetrate the sense of the passage" [1, p.322].

Taking into consideration this fact we can say that the first goal of the pre-reading stage is founded upon the notion that the student's previous knowledge and experience affect his comprehension of the material. What teachers do in the way of attracting their attention, therefore, will influence their success.

A student should begin to read only when he has developed some ability and confidence in speaking English. He must have a reasonable basic vocabulary and be able to use a certain number of sentence patterns. An important preparation for reading is looking at pictures and in such a way a pupil can guess what the text is about and also the title can suggest any ideas for making the process of reading exciting. For example, it would be a good idea to give students the title of the text they will be reading. It is also a good idea to provide pictures that reflect the topic of the text. Based on the title and pictures, the teacher may ask the students to make 2-3 predictions as to what they think the text will be about. We can ask them to include reasons as to why they made the prediction.

Predicting is an important reading skill. The reader's predictions, no matter right or wrong, will get his mind closer to the theme of the text to be read. Then the real reading will either confirm or reject the predictions. The reading results will be better than the situation where the reader starts reading with a blank mind. Predictions can be done in many different ways.

(a) *Predicting based on the title.* Good titles always contain the most important information of a written text. Predictions based on studying the title seldom go wrong.

(b) *Predicting based on vocabulary.* Having made predictions based on the title, students can be asked to predict some lexical items that they are likely to encounter in the text. Then the students read the text to confirm their predictions.

(c) *Predicting based on the T/F questions.* The teacher gives the students some true or false statements. The students predict if these statements are true or false. Then the students read the text and check if they have made the right predictions.

The second type of pre-reading activity is *setting the scene*, which means getting the students familiarized with the cultural and social background knowledge relevant to the reading text. One main problem with reading in a foreign language is that many texts are culture-bound and students cannot bring their knowledge of the world to help them understand the text. The culture-bound aspect of the text can start right at the beginning with the title. Besides discussing culture-bound aspects of the text, we can also set the scene by relating what students already know to what they want to know. For instance, we can ask the students to write down three things that

they would like to know concerning the theme of a text they are about to read. Then we can ask the students to read the title to see if they can find what they want to know.

The third type of pre-reading activity, and one of the most valuable strategies for learners is *skimming,* which consists of quickly running one's eyes across a whole text for its gist. Skimming gives readers the advantage of being able to predict the purpose of the passage, the main topic, or message, and possibly some of the developing or supporting ideas. The teacher can train students to skim passages by giving them, for instance, thirty seconds to look through a few pages of material, close their books, and then tell what they learned.

The fourth type of pre-reading activity is *scanning*, or quickly searching for some particular pieces of information in a text. The purpose of scanning is to extract specific information without reading through the whole text. Scanning exercises may ask students to look for names or dates, to find a definition of a key concept, or to list a certain number of supporting details. Besides scanning for specific information, we can also ask students to scan for vocabulary. Similarly, we can ask students to scan for certain structures, for instance, tense forms, discourse connectors, particular sentence structures. The scanning result can serve as basis for grammar study. When conducting scanning activities, the teacher should take into account the following things:
   (I)   setting a time limit
  (II)   giving clear instructions for the task
 (III)   waiting until 70% of the students finish
 (IV)   making clear how feedback is going to be obtained [2, p.142].

However, teachers' suggestions for pre-reading are different, so that they are free to experiment according to the nature of the reading material and the inclinations of their classes. In an academic setting, more formal techniques might be more appropriate. These could be: word association activities, discussions and text surveys.

Word association activities generally involve taking out from the student as many ideas as they can offer regarding the subject of the text. Sometimes the teacher should supplement the student's contribution with new vocabulary and concepts critical to an understanding of the reading.

Discussions have also been found to activate what a student knows and through the exchange of information to enlarge his knowledge of the subject. He can be initiated by simply asking questions about the content of the text or by elaborating means, such as anticipation guides. These are series of statements, often provocative, which are intended to challenge the student's knowledge and beliefs about the content of the passage. After the students have individually indicated their agreement or disagreement on the worksheet provided, they may be put in groups and justify their responses.

*Text surveying***,** the last of the pre-reading techniques, is often used with longer stretches of discourse. The purpose of this activity is to quickly determine the structure of the visual support material, such as charts or maps. The questions should be formulated to provide the students with a reason for reading.

The next step in EFL reading is the *while-reading* technique. Reading passages are usually exploited by means of asking multiple choice questions, T/F questions, open questions, paraphrasing, and translation. However, there are also various ways of exploiting different texts focusing on the process of understanding, such as information transfer activities, reading comprehension questions and making inferences.

Information transfer activities. The information presented in plain text form is not facilitative for information retention. When the information in text form is transferred to another form, the visual form, for instance, it can be more effectively processed and retained. The way to transfer information from one form to another is called a *transition device*. The idea is that the learners are helped in understanding the text by means of nonverbal devices, such as charts, graphs, diagrams, figures, maps, etc.

Reading comprehension questions. One of the most presently used methods in teaching reading is asking the students to answer comprehension questions. We can classify questions according to the kind of information that we require students to get from the texts, or the kind of thinking that we wish the students to engage in. There are five types of reading comprehension questions:

(I) *Questions for literal comprehension*. Answers to these questions are directly and explicitly available in the text. Usually they are answered in the words of the text itself.

(II) *Questions involving reorganization or reinterpretation*. These questions require students to obtain literal information from various parts of the text and put it together or reinterpret it.

(III) *Questions for inferences*. This type of questions requires students to consider what is implied but not explicitly stated.

(IV) *Questions for evaluation or appreciation*. These are the most sophisticated questions which involve making a judgement about the text in terms of what the writer is trying to convey.

(V) *Questions for personal responses*. The answers to these questions depend most on the reader's reaction to the content of the text [5, p.65].

Making inferences, which means "reading between the lines", is an important reading skill. It requires the reader to use background knowledge in order to infer the implied meaning of the author. Inferences can be made both from single sentences and from the whole text. Sometimes, inferences can be made only after we have read the whole text and reinterpreted the text.

The last stage in the academic reading process is the *post-reading technique*. At this stage teachers often rely upon reading aloud, asking comprehension questions or asking students to paraphrase sentences of a text. Sometimes sentence by sentence translation is conducted. However, these activities are not enough to fulfill the functions of post-reading tasks. Post-reading tasks should provide the students with opportunities to relate what they have read to what they already know or what they feel. T. Rasinski and N. Padak point out that "the post-reading techniques encourage pupils to continue thinking deeply and widely about what they have read and

integrate the text information into their own cognitive structures" [4, pp.162-167]. In addition, post-reading tasks should enable students to produce language based on what they have learned. For this purpose, teachers should make use of discussions, role-plays, gap-filling activities, retelling, false summary, written assignments.

Discussion in class is quite often used as a way of exploiting reading texts for exchange of personal opinions. This sort of discussion can start with a question like "What do you think of…?"

Role-play is a very common language learning activity where students play different roles and interact from the point of view of the roles they play. Role-play is valuable in a language classroom for several reasons: (1) it's motivating; (2) students interact in small groups so that they have less pressure; (3) students have the chance to practice the newly learned language; (4) there is enough room for creativity. In order to be effective, a role play activity needs to be carefully set up.

During the *gap-filling* activity, the teacher provides the students with a summary of the text, leaving some blanks for the students to fill in. It is important to encourage students to use as many new words or expressions as possible.

Retelling involves that the teacher provides key words and phrases and students retell the story according to these words. Or, the teacher can ask the students to retell the story from another character's point of view.

False summary. The teacher prepares a summary of the text. However, it contains some wrong information. Students are to correct the wrong information based on their understanding of the text.

Writing. The students are asked to write something based on what they have read. Below is a short list of writing tasks that can be used as post-reading activities.

(a) Produce a tourist brochure for a place described in a text.
(b) Produce an advertisement for a product described in a text.
(c) Rewrite a story from another character's point of view.
(d) Write a short summary of the text based on a TD activity.
(e) Write a paragraph stating personal opinions about the issue discussed in the text.
(f) Write another ending to the story/text, etc.

Finally, it may be concluded that there exist a large variety of strategies and techniques that can be used in EFL classes, which are rather efficient and productive. Thus, the pre-reading activities prepare the readers for the following information. Moreover, it facilitates them to connect the new concept more meaningfully to the prior knowledge, which will lead to an easier and a more enjoyable reading task. The while-reading technique helps to enable pupils to achieve the lesson aims by handling the text in different ways. It allows students to integrate the knowledge and information they bring to the text with the new information from the text. The post-reading stage permits students to connect what they have read with what they already know or feel. It stimulates and motivates pupils to persist in their further thinking about the read information and assimilate it. Thus, EFL instructors should make use of a wide range of reading strategies and techniques in their teaching

process. As a result they will motivate and captivate the pupils and will enhance their ability to interpret the read material in a more creative and critical way.

References:
1. BROWN, H. D. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, Pearson Education, 2007. 410 p. ISBN 0131991280
2. KIRILLOVA, E. *Readings in Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language,* 1981. 207 p.
3. McWHORTER, Kathleen. *Efficient and Flexible Reading*, Canada, 1987. 447 p. ISBN 0316564133
4. RASINSKI, T. PADAK, N. *Effective Reading Strategies*, New Jersey, 1996. 342 p. ISBN 0130996696
5. RICHARDS, Jack, RODGERS, Theodore. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001. 192 p. ISBN 0521008433