



Teaching Reading Principles: The Necessity of Applying the Principles in Teaching Reading

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Abstract

Reading is a written communication and this skill is somehow boring and difficult until learners acquire language. So, the process of teaching and learning reading should follow the aspects of motivating learners, attracting their attention to the reading and applying different teaching reading methodologies so that teachers and learners get success in reading. This article attempts to explore reading principles relating to teaching reading for learners in two levels: intermediate or upper-intermediate to help them enhance their reading. This article reviews valuable teaching reading books and presents teaching reading principles that might be useful for teaching English reading. They are, first, selecting reading texts which are suitable for learners' level; second, a good preparation for teaching reading; third, an encouragement to active participation from all students and finally, reading should be integrated with productive skills.

Keywords: reading, teaching reading principles, non- native English learners, Vietnamese students, EFL.

Introduction

Learning English always requires learners to acquire well four skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) so that learners can succeed in communication, researching for information or studying. Unlike speaking and writing skills, reading and listening are receptive skills, "where meaning is extracted from the discourse" and "somehow passive", and "the procedure for teaching receptive skills

generally starts with a lead in." Jeremy Harmer (2007:265). This is where we engage students with the topic of the reading and we try to activate their schema. While learning reading, learners "absorb knowledge from what teachers impart or from the texts", so it's really necessary for teachers to prepare what they will do before each reading lesson so that they can teach reading effectively. The main aim of teaching reading is to attract learners' attention, inspire

learners to read, enjoy reading and become good at reading; in the hope that this article, with four key principles which can help teachers get their aim and enhance their students' reading skill.

Principle 1: *Selecting Reading Texts Regard To Popularity, Learners' Levels and Learners' Need*

According to Tricia Hedge, the teacher's responsibilities in helping learners achieve the goals will be to motivate reading by selecting or creating appropriate texts, to design useful reading tasks, to set up effective classroom procedures, to encourage critical reading, and to create a supportive environment for practicing reading (2000: 205), and "select texts which meet the specific needs of their learners"; and "each learner will have different strengths to build on and different weakness to overcome". For instance, for learners who are teenagers, young adults prefer reading topics about daily life, sports, memories, film stars, high-tech or innovations. Likewise, for learners who are learning English for academic or professional purposes prefer to read topics relating to their specialty or expertise. Besides, Tricia Hedge also mentioned that, "other teachers will be dealing with prescribed texts or those available in a prescribed course book. Yet others will have facilities for choosing and preparing texts for classroom use but will need to formulate criteria for making that choice" (2000: 206). Selecting reading tasks proper to learners' level helps them feel no pressure to deal with reading tasks, so they feel motivated to keep reading in the hope of progressing reading skill. Nowadays, choosing suitable materials for each learners' level is not difficult because there is an abundance of free online English books such as story books, comic books, literature books or reference books which teachers and learners can choose the best for their extra reading. In Vietnam, the internet covers everywhere, even remote places and searching for English references is able to do.

One thing teachers need to remember is "if everything is just too easy, students are likely

to lose their respect for task of learning" (Harmer, 2007: 101). Learners, both weak and good learners, always have sense of pride when they overcome challenging tasks which belong to their levels. In generally, teacher's flexibility and adaptability are necessary to select right reading tasks for students' levels and purposes.

Principles 2: *A Good Preparation Will Help Teachers Get Successes in A Course*

A. Teachers' Preparation for Themselves

First of all, proper talks between a teacher and students about their needs in the course is necessary. The benefit from the talk is that makes teacher and students understand each other, and students feel more comfortable to talk to the teacher about their learning reading difficulties and their learning needs. Then, teachers "might discuss explicitly with students what is needed for effective English" (Tricia Hedge, 2000: 271) and "it is desirable and necessary" to talk with students what they will learn in the course such as how to use reading strategies, skimming, scanning, and they also learn and apply vocabulary, structures from reading tasks in writing or speaking. It is a first activity to draw students' attention and eagerness for learning useful knowledge in the course.

Secondly, planning lessons is necessary preparation. Harmer asserts that "whatever our reaction to the planning paradox, however, the fact remains that most teachers do think about what they are going to teach before they go into the lesson". Whether teachers think planning lesson is vital or not, a lesson planning helps a teacher have good intentions to carry out teaching reading before a lesson starts, and "create a logical sequence of activities in a lesson, with clear aims and clear links" (Tricia Hedge, 2000:30). Moreover, while planning a lesson, teachers will have to take into account the level of students, the class's features so that they will adjust and choose appropriate teaching methods, proper practice activities, proper reading materials, or focus more or less

on the features (grammar, vocabulary, kinds of questions such as True/False/Not Given, Multiple Choice, Matching Information, Matching Headings, Gap Filling) for particular students or student groups such as weak students, good or excellent students.

Finally, the way of teachers assists their learners in reading tasks is also important. The teacher should know when it is appropriate for them to give his or her instructions to his or her learners; for example, you shouldn't interrupt your learners to give the meaning of a word or give more your instructions /explanations while they are concentrating on their reading task and try to apply the strategies to deal with reading problems such as new words, complex structures. "The main function of the teacher, having proposed the activity and given clear instructions, is to help the learners do it successfully." (Penny Ur, 1996:23). However, if you recognize your learners need your help, you have to assist them. Penny Ur also states that "If you assist them, you thereby increase their chances of success and the effectiveness of the practice activity as a whole."

B. The Preparation for Students

All of us know that the aim of teaching and learning reading English as a second language is that learners can read English competently and pleasurably. However, "reading involves the processing of written language" and "more time is spent teaching reading than any other skill." (David Nunan, 1999:249). For the reason, first of all, teachers can give learners chances and encourage them to read many kinds of English books or "a range of texts in English" that they enjoy reading such as short stories, advertisements, comic books, letters or novels so that learners will gradually get a good reading habit.

Secondly, teachers help learners achieve important reading skills. Learners need to know how to apply different strategies (e.g. skimming, scanning) as appropriate, to use a knowledge of language (e.g. vocabulary, structure) (Tricia

Hedge, 2000:205) to understand reading texts. Comprehension of a written text will not progress very far if the reader is unable to read the words in it. However, reading words is clearly not enough – the reader also needs to know the meanings of the words to make sense of them and, obviously, if a high proportion of the word meanings are unknown (for example, when you are reading a technical text about an unfamiliar topic) then it will be impossible to understand the text as a whole. (Jane Oakhill, Kate Cain and Carsten Elbro, 2015:18). But, it is also important for learners to be able to guess the meaning of the reading text without remembering or knowing the meaning of a word. Jane Oakhill, Kate Cain and Carsten Elbro also assert that the reader does not necessarily need to know the meaning of every word in the text; some meanings are explained explicitly in the text, and some meanings can be inferred from the context. Moreover, teachers also help learners develop awareness of the structure of written texts in English and to be able to make use of, e.g., rhetorical structure, discourse features, and cohesive devices in comprehending texts. (Tricia Hedge, 2000:205). It is also the reason that vocabulary and language structures are taught in teaching reading. However, teaching reading skills depends on the age and levels of learners. For example, in Vietnam, students in primary schools who are in the beginning of English reading learn to read a short and simple reading orally and then, the teacher asks his or her learners some detail questions and the learners give their answer orally; but, high school students are taught reading skills because their English reading is in intermediate or advanced level that achieve enough linguistic aspects of the second language to apply reading skills effectively. In short, teaching reading skills are really helpful for intermediate learners to enhance their reading.

Principle 3: *Encouraging Active Participation from All Students*

It is obvious that effective reading class involves active and equal participation from all students, and learners are eager to take part in the lesson. However, we know teaching and learning reading is “somehow passive”, so teachers have to take account of motivating learners in each class because “learner motivation makes teaching and learning immeasurably easier and more pleasant, as well as more productive” (Penny Ur, 1996: 274). We may have already known extrinsic and intrinsic motivation that are important in teaching and learning language. Especially, it is really important for teachers to apply in their reading, listening classes. First of all, teachers pinpoint what kind of motivation, extrinsic or intrinsic, for their certain classes. The pinpointing motivation “is perhaps more useful for teachers” (Penny Ur, 1996: 276) to decide to choose and adjust their teaching methods appropriately; for example, for learners with intrinsic motivation, teachers should provide them proper reading tasks or challenging reading tasks, reading strategies so that learners can avoid minor mistakes, overcome obstacles while they are reading and extra materials to enhance their reading skills. Whereas, for extrinsically motivated learners, teachers give them not only proper materials and reading tasks, reading strategies, but teachers have to pay attention to teaching approaches and teachers’ attitudes in class.

The teachers’ attitudes, secondly, are important and affect learners’ motivation. As Penny Ur stated “the teacher’s most important function here is simply to make that learners are aware of their own success: the message can be conveyed by a nod, a tick” and learners will get “sense of pride or satisfaction by explicit praise or approval, or expression in quantitative grades”, these actions make learners feel happy and eager to attend reading activities in class and to do reading tasks at home, and teachers should ignore learner’s minor mistakes to keep learners’ confidence and full attention during the lesson. In addition, teachers can also use

games or mini test; in group, in pair or individual competition, to attract learners’ attention to the lesson because “learners will often be motivated to give of their best not for the sake of the learning itself but in order to beat their opponents in competition.” (Penny Ur, 1996:279). However, teachers should consider that “the competition is taken not too seriously and scores are at least partly a result of chance, so that anyone might win, positive motivational aspects are enhanced and stress lowered” (Penny Ur, 1996:279).

Finally, “authoritative demands” are also the way to motivate learners. “Learners are often motivated by teacher pressure: they may be willing to invest effort in tasks simply because you have told them to” and “making this demand is teachers’ authority and right” (Penny Ur, 1996:279). It means if a teacher at the first day of a learning course said to his or her learners that “you have to do your homework after each lesson”, or after each lesson a teacher says “remember to do you exercise in your workbook”, certainly, his or her learners will not follow the demand, or even, they don’t remember what you asked them to do. Your demand may be obeyed by intrinsically motivated learners some of extrinsically motivated learners. So, teacher should have “clear demand” such as “I want you to do this assignment by Friday” for adult learners or ‘You do the exercise 1,2, and 3on page 27’ for younger learners. However, teacher should avoid over-using or misusing “authoritative demands” because “if learners only do things because they are obeying commands, without any awareness of objectives and results or involvement in decisions, they are unlikely to develop personal responsibility for their own learning or long – term motivation to continue” (Penny Ur, 1996:279).

Principle 4: *Reading Should Be Integrated with Productive Skills.*

It’s obvious that “receptive skills and productive skills feed off each other in a number of ways” (Harmer, 2007: 266). Clearly, the

integration of reading skill with productive skills brings learners valuable input which helps learners get speaking or writing output effectively. It is due to the fact that students "see words in context to see how they are used" while they are reading and listening (Harmer, 2007: 229). Besides of getting new language input, students can consolidate their knowledge by doing writing and speaking relating what they learnt in the reading. Evidently, the theme of a reading or listening text could be exploited as a speaking topic or writing topic. So, in speaking and writing they have chance to practice and apply what they learnt.

In addition, the integration help students have chances to practice, remember and use their language knowledge effectively. Let take an example which illustrates clearly of integrating receptive and productive skills. "In the reading lesson, learners learnt *linkers of cause and result such as because/ because of/ so/ as a result*, and *metaphorical expressions, vocabulary of personality, job*. After the lesson, the teacher set up a speaking activity and give his or her learners speaking topics or writing topics that give the learners some chances to use what they learnt in the reading lesson. For example, the teacher asks his or her learners to work in pair to discuss the topic "Is it easy to find a job that you wish to get? Why or Why not?". Moreover, "frequently we ask students to listen to something (a recorded telephone conversation, for example) and take a message or notes. We might ask them to prepare a spoken summary of something they have read, or read information on the Internet as preparation for a role-play or some other longer piece of work." (Harmer, 2007:267)

In generally, "productive work should not always be imitative, of course. But students are greatly helped by being exposed to examples of writing and speaking which show certain convention for them to draw upon" (Harmer, 2007:267) and "it would make no sense to teach each skill in isolation" (Harmer, 2007:265). But, "there is no absolute format for the integrated

lesson" (Harits Masduqui, Volume 2 Number 1 2016). So, it completely depends on teachers' intention of designing lesson plans providing that their lesson plans work well and successfully in class.

Conclusion

Reading is one of four important skills in teaching and learning English. Reading is communicated in written language, so it requires readers to concentrate on their reading task and use reading skills in order to understand what the reading implies, to find specific information or general information. Therefore, teachers who teach reading, have to help their learners build basis reading skills so that the learners can enhance their reading and have interest in it. The reading principles are as a hope to support teachers in teaching reading. The article focuses on four principles: first, selecting reading texts regard to popularity, learners' levels and learners' need; second, a good preparation will help teachers get successes in a course; encouraging active participation from all students; and reading should be integrated with productive skills.

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