

LEARNER TRAINING FOR READING: LITERATURE IN EFL CLASSES

Abstract

The main purpose of reading in L1 is usually to have access to the literature written in that language. While reading in the first language is pleasant and fun, reading in a foreign language can be painful. In foreign language reading the words that one does not know makes the process difficult and boring. Foreign language reading instruction needs to be organized in such a way that the learners both learn the techniques, get skilled in FL reading and at the same time enjoy reading. In most EFL reading classes texts are used for vocabulary teaching and comprehension. If reading materials are chosen from literary texts that represent "higher" forms of culture, learners both develop the essential reading skills and also enjoy being acquainted with the target culture.

The emphasis in this paper is mainly exploring some techniques relevant to using literature in our English Language Teaching classes.

The possible answer to the question of what the definition of reading is might be that reading is an interaction between the reader and the text. While it is the physical eye movement on a text, it is at the same time an engagement in understanding what the message is. Therefore, reading in our English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes could be conducted in various techniques with different purposes not in one text with multi purpose as done in practice. Most teachers use the texts for both vocabulary teaching and detailed comprehension. Students need to develop certain reading skills before they go for a full comprehension of a text. Teachers need to train their learners on how to guess the words they do not know, how to get the gist of a text and on how to scan for certain information.

In foreign language reading the words that one does not know makes the process difficult and boring. While reading in the first language is pleasant and fun, reading in a foreign language can be painful. We can bring fun to our reading classes by making use of literary texts like poems, short stories, plays or novels.

How do we start training then?

A guessing game will make the EFL reading class more interesting, more fun. We can assign the task : read and guess what . Tell them that this is a competition. They can work in pairs and write down their guesses. When the time is up, you can ask them to tell/or write on the board their guesses and why they think their guess is right.

The Stone top

The damp echo

The cold wind

The held breath

The fading foothills

The small trees

The missed turning

The hopeless face

The chinks of light

The life-line sky

The cold echo

The Stone steps

A Japanese student of English

The Stone tower

Carter&Long (1987)

You can ask them to guess the title, to guess the place, to guess the situation and to guess the end of the story. You can give them other simple poems and underline some of the words. You can ask them to guess what

they mean and tell you why they think so. As a follow up activity for a shaped poem, you can ask them to write a poem in a shape which correlates with the meaning.

Day & Bamford, 1988 quote Field (1997) who gives a good example of L2/FL reading classes where students sit silently and wait for the teacher to ask comprehension questions. Then Richard, 1988 brings in his own comment and states "students learning to read a second language do not have to act like that. Rather, they can be enthusiastic and confident about reading and leave the second language reading course as independent and lifelong readers in the target language." (preface, xiii)

Day & Bamford, (1988, pp. 14-15) believe that use of literature in language classes has a number of benefits and states some of them as:

- it is very motivating
- it is authentic material
- it has general educational value
- it is found in many syllabuses
- it helps students to understand another culture
- it is a stimulus for language acquisition
- it develops students' interpretive abilities
- students enjoy it and it is fun
- it is highly valued and has a high status
- it expands students' language awareness
- it encourages students to talk about their opinions and feelings

Learners in our EFL classes can be trained to become good readers throughout their lives if the materials are chosen carefully and the planning for training is done properly.

The texts in course books are chosen carefully but they are designed according to the structure taught in that unit. It is the teacher's responsibility to make it more realistic and meaningful by designing activities relevant to their lives. They will not always have teachers asking them comprehension questions. They will themselves be struggling with the texts they read in the foreign language they learn. So they need to be

equipped with the reading skills to make the task easier and more enjoyable.

The tasks designed for reader training depend upon the materials chosen to be studied as intensive reading and as extensive reading. The terms “intensive” and “extensive” reading in EFL are put forward to bring in the differences between classroom reading and out of class reading. Palmer (1968, p. 137; 1964, p. 113) chose the term extensive reading to distinguish it from intensive reading. Intensive reading is associated with the teaching of reading in terms of its component skills. Extensive reading, in contrast, is generally associated with reading large amounts with the aim of getting an overall understanding of the material. Extensive reading is a prime means of developing a taste for foreign language reading. EFL teachers assign simplified classics to be read but in practice most of the follow up activities seem to be boring since all students do similar activities such as talking about the characters, summarizing the plot etc. Extensive reading activities need to be designed to give the student the pleasure of reading, reading silently for the sake of reading and comprehension. Therefore, students of EFL could be asked to read silently in class for five minutes, or the curriculum and syllabus could be designed with silent reading slots. Students need to be given the chance to choose the materials. In those silent reading classes EFL students are provided with literary texts of different types and levels and are trained to evaluate their own reading speed and comprehension and choose the materials accordingly. For example, reading materials can be grouped according to FL proficiency level and can be put in boxes or shelves in different colour. Along with each level, Common European Framework for Languages “CAN DO” statements are placed. Students do their silent reading evaluate themselves and the next session choose something from the upper or lower level. This would easily be a real life training session then. Thus, by the help of extensive reading, teachers develop high motivated fluent foreign language readers- students who read fluently.

Research results on extensive reading in EFL show positive impact on the development of more interest on reading in FL and improving it. (Elley and Mangubhai 1981, Hafiz& Tudor 1989, Cho & Krashen 1994, Mason & Krashen 1997). The positive impact of reading in EFL was seen on reading ability, on positive attitude toward reading-affect, on vocabulary expansion, on linguistic competence and on EFL writing.

Activities for extensive reading designed by EFL teachers are infinite in numbers. A few of them can be stated as; in- book opinion forms (Day & Bamford 1988, pp.150-151) where the reader writes a short comment for the next reader, a reading fair with posters designed on the books read, re-reading to prepare materials for lower level readers

As a conclusion, in both intensive reading for pedagogic purposes and in extensive reading for pleasure, training of EFL students for fluent and high motivated foreign language reading, teachers of EFL need to design activities other than reading and answering comprehension questions which are far from real life activities apart from the surveys we do very occasionally.

REFERENCES

Carter, R. & Long, M. (1987) *The Web of Words: Exploring Literature Through Language*, Cambridge University Pres

Cho, K.S. & Krashen, S. D. (1994) , Acquisition of Vocabulary from the Sweet Valley Kids series: Adult ESL Aquisition. *Journal of Reading*, Vol. 37(8) (pp. 662-667)

Day, R.R. & Bamford, J. (1998) *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom*, Jack C. Richards (Ed.) Cambridge Language Education Series, Cambridge University Pres

Elley, W.B. & Mangubhai, F. (1981) *The Impact of Book Flood in Fiji Primary Schools*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research

Hafiz ,F.M.,& Tudor, I. (1989) *Extensive Reading and the Development of Language Skills*, *ELT Journal*, Vol. 43(1), (pp. 4-13)

Lazar, G. (1993), *Literature and Language Teaching, A guide for Teachers and Trainers* , Williams &Wright (Eds.)Cambridge Teacher Training and Development series, Cambridge University pres

Mason, B. & Krashen, S.D. (1997) *Extensive Reading in English as a Foreign Language*, *System*, Vol.25(1) (pp.91-102)

Palmer ,H.E. (1964) , *The Principles of Language Study*, Oxford University Press

Palmer, H.E. (1968), *The Scientific Study and Teaching of Languages*, Oxford University Press