Teaching reading and writing

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Teaching a foreign language implies a conscious activity. This activity is intended to result in personal learning for students. The procedure of learning a foreign language implies four main skills that are listening, speaking, reading and writing.

If we take into account the historical perspective at the beginning, teaching a foreign language was based on grammar and translation, so reading and writing were the major focus. Then speaking and listening took place and became one of the main goals of teaching.

Nowadays, the four skills are important to learn a foreign language as it is English. Taking into account this modern point of view I am going to base my research paper on reading and writing skills as a part of teaching English.

Reading is to be able to work out the meaning of a written text. What is on the page and what is on the mind Clarke and Silberstein (1977: 136-7) established “…Readers understand what they read because they are able to take the stimulus beyond its graphic representation and assign it membership to an appropriate group of concepts already stored in their memories…Skill in reading depends on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world.”

Writing is to communicate a message writing it down on a piece of paper. That is to say putting ideas down on a paper transform thoughts into words giving them structure and coherence. Peter Elbow (1973:14-16) expressed his concept of writing in this way: “Writing is a two-step process. First you figure out your meaning, then you put into language: …figure out what you want to say; don’t start writing till you do; make a plan; use an outline; begin writing only afterward.”

**READING SKILL**

**Types of reading**

Reading is a process that concerns an interaction between what is in our mind and the way in which we express those thoughts. This process is different depends on the circumstance by we are reading a book, a magazine, a newspaper, and so on. For that reason reading a text can be classified taking into account two categories:

a) Intensive. This occurs when you read short texts in detail in the classroom, for getting information.

b) Extensive. It refers to reading longer texts outside the classroom, for pleasure.
In this way, a student can read a poem or a novel intensive or extensively. Intensive reading, if the pupil reads the novel for a task in class. Extensively, he/she reads it in his/her leisure.

**Micro skills for reading comprehension**

There are several points to take into account for getting a perfect reading, that is to say, to understand perfectly a text:

1. Discriminate among graphemes ahs orthographic patterns of English.
2. Retain chunks of language of different lengths in memory.
3. Process writing at an efficient rate of sped to suit the purpose.
4. Recognize a focus of words and interpret word order.
5. Recognize grammatical patterns, rules, and word classes.
6. Recognize a particular meaning.
7. Recognize cohesive elements.
8. Recognize rhetorical forms and their interpretation.
9. Infer context (events, causes, relations, new and given information)
10. Distinguish between literal and non-literal meaning.
11. Develop and use reading strategies.

**Strategies**

Reading comprehension is a fundamental matter for learners of a second language. This becomes efficient if the learners follow the comprehension strategies. Some of these strategies are related to the procedures involved in listening skill. On the one hand, bottom-up procedures in which learners listen to stream of sounds and they have to segment the stream of sounds and recognize boundaries, and on the other hand, top-down procedures in which learners create expectations about the person is going to say, and once learners have created these expectations, they define or modify these ideas.

These are the main strategies that can be applied to the techniques of the classroom:

1. Word-attack skills: deducing the meaning of unknown words from context without looking them up in the dictionary.
   a) Using context clues: using synonyms and antonyms in the same sentence or paragraph.
b) Using structural information: this refers to word formation, an analysis of stems and affixes of words can help to get the meaning of unfamiliar words.

2. Reading in meaningful units: students should be able to read in meaningful units instead of isolated words. A useful way to teach this skill is to break up a sentence into sense groups and have students focus their eyes on the middle of each sentence group. Good readers have to read in chunks.

3. Scanning: using to locate specific information such a date, a figure, or a name. The key is to decide what kind of information we are looking for and where to find it. A useful way to teach this skill is to have students search for some specific information.

4. Skimming: we try to get the general idea of the whole text. The key of skimming is to know where to find the main ideas of different paragraphs, and to be able to synthesize them. One effective technique to teach skimming is to read the first and the last paragraph in full, and the first and last sentence of the paragraph in between and pick up the key words.

5. Prediction: making correct predictions with minimal sampling. Students can learn to make predictions based on the title, subtitle, and their knowledge of the topic.

6. Recognizing organizational patterns: taking into account text and discourse. The most common patterns are cause-effect, sequence of events, special geographic, descriptions. These patterns are linked by textual connectors. To teach this strategy students can read different passages with different organizational patterns ad identify their textual connectors.

7. Distinguishing general statements from specific details: general statements contain main ideas, and specific details are explanations and examples that support the general statements. So general are more important than specific. Students should learn to direct their attention to signal like in general, above all, in conclusion and I can be seen that.

8. Inference and conclusion: comprehension involves explicit and implicit understanding. So readers have to make inferences base on what is stated. Conclusion is based on putting stated facts together of what is implied from what is stated. In short, to infer is that the reader has to read between lines and to conclude is that he/she has to summarize stated facts.

9. Evaluation and appreciation: the reader has to understand, analyze, and synthesize to form his/her own opinion. To evaluate the students has to be critical and determine the author’s purpose. To appreciate the reader has to understand the author’s tone and attitude and to recognize his literary devices.

Reading performance

Performing a reading classroom depends on the variety of texts. We can ask to student to read orally at the beginning and intermediate levels. In this way, oral reading can be:

a) An evaluative check on bottom-up processing skill
b) A pronunciation check

c) An extra student participation

At advanced level, we use oral reading to serve these three purposes because the disadvantages:

a) It is not a very authentic activity

b) Students lose attention

c) It is mere recitation

Silent reading can be classified into intensive and extensive. Intensive in the sense that is a classroom oriented activity focused on linguistic or semantic details of the passage. Students have to pay attention on grammatical forms, discourse makers, and structures with the purpose of understanding literal meaning. Extensive because is has to achieve a general understanding of a text. In this sense, all pleasure reading is extensive.

Reading techniques

One important point is to have time for extensive reading. Silent reading provides a sense of fluency among students. This type of reading is like a method of self-instruction on the learner.

What students need is the focus to look for a text. Reading must be interesting and relevant, that is to say, reading must motivate the learners. For that reason we have to concentrate on what are their needs. One motivating approach is Language Experience Approach. The basis of this approach lies in student’s self-generation of reading material. They create their own textbook, for example divided into groups they can create a story or a dictionary. This method provides a different way of learning.

It is important that the student works with authentic language and context in a simple way. Most of times, the original texts are simplified. We have to take into account the difference between simple text and simplified texts. A simple text is that are authentic but grammatically and lexically simple. While a simplified text is that removes natural redundancy that become difficult.

We have to support the use of reading strategies.

To give enough time in classroom so students can apply bottom-up and top-down procedures.

Reading techniques are divided into three main stages:

a) Pre-reading: introducing a topic so learners encourage skimming and scanning. Students bring their knowledge to the text.

b) While-reading: students can take notes while they are reading. This provides a sense of purpose.

c) Post-reading: comprehension questions considering vocabulary, author’s purpose, and grammatical structures.
Finally, we can observe if the student has comprehended a text if:
- The reader responds to the command doing
- The reader selects from alternatives the best one choosing
- The reader summarizes what is read transferring
- The reader answer questions about the text answering
- The reader takes notes on the text condensing
- The reader provides an ending of the text extending
- The reader translates into the mother tongue duplicating
- The reader engages in a conversation indicating appropriate process of information conversing

What can we do with a text?

When we want to analyses and get a full comprehension a text of whatever kind (a novel, a piece of advertisement, a poem, a letter, a message, an essay, or what you want) we have to follow several steps to understand it correctly. These instructions are principally four which, at the same time, are divided into smaller items.

1. Pre-text
   - Prediction:
     - from first/last lines
     - title
     - key words
     - visuals
   - Guiding questions
     - Discussion on the topic (from a related activity)
   - Brainstorming related vocabulary

2. Comprehension
   - Checking predictions
   - Inventing a title
- Reordering
- Unjumbling texts in different styles
- Writing questions on the text
- Matching titles, visual, topic sentences to paragraphs
- Transferring and transforming
- Correcting a summary/selecting the best
- Comparing and contrasting texts
- Interrupting, predicting, completing
- True/false statements/open questions/gap fill/sentence
- Summary completion
- Understanding the communicative function or value

3. Language

- Awareness raising/analysis of grammar
- Pronunciation work
- Text cohesion devices
- Understanding the organizational patterns of the text (coherence)
- Deducing words in context
- Word formation
- Vocabulary awareness (synonyms, hyponyms, and collocations)
- Dictionary work
- Inference/style/connotation
- Matching words with paraphrases

4. Performing and responding

- Discussion, debate, planning
- Role play. Simulation
Activities

In this section, I have selected a text about the history of basketball. Then I have proposed several activities to work with the text.

**THE DAY BASKETBALL WAS INVENTED**

One winter’s day in 1891, a class at Young Men’s Christian Association Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts, USA, went into the gym for their daily exercises. Since the football season had ended, most of the young men felt they were in for a rather boring time.

But their teacher, James Naismith, had other ideas. He had been working for a long time on a new game that would have the excitement of American football, but without its danger of injury. American football is a dangerous game to play in a gym, because someone running with the ball can be caught and pulled down to the ground. Naismith thought, “Why not play a game in which the ball has to be caught, rather the player?”

Naismith showed the men a basket he had hung at each end of the gym and explained that they were going to use a round European football rather than the American kind, which is oval. At first, everyone tried to throw the ball into the basket, no matter where he was standing. “Pass, pass!” Naismith kept shouting, blowing his whistle to stop the excited players. Slowly, they began to understand what was wanted of them.

The problem with the new game, which was soon called “basketball”, was getting the ball out of the basket. Because ordinary fruit baskets with bottoms were being used, the ball, of course, stayed inside. At first, a ladder was set up near the basket, and someone had to climb up every time a basket was scored. Another solution was that one of the players would balance on the shoulders of another player after each score. It was several years before someone had the idea of removing the bottom of the basket and letting fall through.
There have been many changes in the rules since then. The game that was invented by James Naismith has become one of the world’s most popular sports, played in more than 70 countries. It is estimated that between 40 and 50 million men and women play in amateur and professional teams each year. The number of people who watch, particularly on TV, must be hundreds of millions.

PRE-READING

1. Brainstorming of words related to basketball
2. Why do you think basketball is so popular in the world? Discussion
3. Pre-teach some vocabulary

WHILE-READING

1. Completion questions
   - What’s the author’s nationality?
   - Where basketball was originated?
   - Where was it was played in USA?
2. Deduce from context those words which you don’t know
   daily injury balance
   whistle season no matter
3. True or false statements
   - Naismith developed a game that was both exciting and safe
   - It’s quite harmless to play American football in a gym
   - In Naismith’s new game, the players had to catch each other.
   - American and European footballs are shaped differently
   - Basketball is still played in the same way as it was in 1891

POST-READING
1. Make a summary of the main ideas of the text

2. Role play: recreate a situation/conversation playing in the gym

3. Discussion: what’s the importance of basketball in USA culture?

WRITING SKILL

Types of written language

Reading skill is closed to writing one. For this reason, we have to take into account the several types of written text that we can find. There are a lot of kinds of written text. Each of these kinds represents a genre of written language. If a pupil distinguishes the genre of the text that you are reading, he/she can know the purpose of his/her reading. For that reason, it is very important to identify the text. As a teacher, we must learn to the student differences among a novel, an advertisement or an article of a newspaper. In this way, there is an established list corresponding the following:

Non-fiction:
- Reports
- Editorial
- Essays
- Articles
- Reference: dictionary, encyclopedias

Fiction:
- Novels
- Short stories
- Jokes
- Drama
- Poetry
Characteristic of written language

1. Permanence: Students feel not very pleasant when they have to give their work to the teacher. They fear about it is not written correctly. For this reason, as teacher, we must guide and revise their work before the final writing.

2. Production time: Students must write their work in limited time since this process is an efficient factor to produce the final writing. As teacher, the goal is to establish the use of these limitations.

3. Distance: This means that we have to take into account the empathy, that is to say, a good writer must imagine or read mentally what the audience is going to read. For that reason, the writer has to select the language and how it is going to be interpreted.

4. Orthography: We have to pay attention about our non-literate and literate students. In that way, for non-literate we have to begin from the very beginning, for literate we have to produce new symbols by hands if their native language is not alphabetic, but if their native language has a different phoneme system, we have to pay a lot of attention in order to explain new phonemes correctly.

5. Complexity: Here, students must know to combine sentences, make differences between elements, create lexical variety, and so on.

6. Vocabulary: Students have to take into account the English vocabulary which is very rich.
7. Formality: Students have to learn how to describe, explain, compare, contrast, criticize, and argue.

**Micro-skills for writing skill**

We have to encourage several abilities to produce a writing work properly. These aptitudes are:

1. Produce orthographic patterns of English
2. Produce writing in a limited time to fit the purpose
3. Use appropriate word order and a core of words
4. Use grammatical systems and rules
5. Apply different grammatical forms for the same meaning
6. Use cohesive elements
7. Use coherence elements
8. Difference between literal and non-literal meanings
9. Develop and use writing strategies

**Writing performance**

Writing is a skill which its performance is very limited. In this sense, writing performance has five categories:

1. Imitative or, writing down: One method is dictation in which students can learn the order processing. This method involves several steps:
   
   a) Teacher reads a paragraph once or twice at normal speed
   
   b) teacher reads small phrase units(3 or 4 words) followed by a pause each one.
   
   c) Students write what they hear
   
   d) Teacher reads the whole paragraph at normal speed, and students check their writing
   
   e) Scoring of students’ written work

2. Intensive or, controlled: a way of controlled writing is to give a paragraph to students in which they have to change the given structure. Another form is dicto-comp, a paragraph is read at normal speed, then teacher puts key words on the board and ask students to rewrite the paragraph.
3. Self-writing: students write their experiences, feelings, or what they want in a journal.

4. Display writing: the diary exercises (examinations, answers) made on classes are elements of display for students.

5. Real writing: there is a link between real writing and display. This reality is injected into display, so there are three subcategories:
   a) Academic: students exchange information with each other and the instructor.
   b) Vocational/technical: students can improve writing through advancement in their occupation, such as a real letter.
   c) Personal: through personal letters, diaries, postcards, and so on.

Writing techniques

It is important to know some of the main goals of the good writers:

- focus on an idea in writing
- planning what write
- take the first ideas onto the paper
- follow an organizational plan to write
- utilize feedback to write
- revise the work

We have to take into account the English rhetorical conventions and explain them to the students.

It is important reading to be able to write a composition, so we must encourage reading of any kind of text in order to achieve the core of vocabulary of the topic.

Writing must be as authentic as possible in order to be clear for students.

There are three stages of processes writing: prewriting, drafting, and revising stages. Prewriting encourages the generation of ideas by reading, skimming or scanning, discussing a topic, or listening. The drafting and revising stages are the core of process writing by getting started, read aloud, or using the instructor’s feedback.

Interaction must be presented in writing in form of group collaboration, or critiquing.
Giving the features for English rhetorical, formal, conventions of writing. That’s to say, devices used to explain, propose, debate, and argue.

Evaluating a student is a process in which we must judge with explicitness in what we consider relevant aspect to write correctly. For that reason in the evaluation of a student written composition, we must take into account the following points:

**Content:**
- Related ideas
- Use of description, cause/effect, comparison/contrast
- Development of ideas

**Organization:**
- Introduction
- Middle: sequence of ideas
- Conclusion

**Discourse:**
- Topic sentences
- Paragraph unity
- Discourse markers
- Cohesion
- Reference
- Fluency
- Variety

**Syntax**

**Vocabulary**

**Mechanics:**
- Punctuation
Spelling

Activities

Then I am going to propose some activities in order to develop some of the principal steps to write a composition. These exercises must be done after the proper explanation about the topic.

CONNECTING IDEAS

1. Complete the following sentences using the suitable expression from the list.

   - Both...and
   - in addition
   - either...or
   - neither...nor
   - so/and so
   - Not only...but also
   - for one thing
   - whereas
   - yet
   - and/or

   a. What do you want to do this weekend? We can ...... go to the beach ... go to the mountain.
   b. We arranged catering for the occasion. ......, we have hire a band to play.
   c. ......, I haven’t time to talk now. ......I’m not prepared to discuss this with you.
   d. Smoking is ...... unhealthy, .... dangerous.
   e. ...... July .... Tom are invited to the prize-giving ceremony at the end of the school.
   f. Ian didn’t get high marks, ...... he was accepted to university.
   g. You’ll need paints, blue ...... yellow to make posters to advertise the event.
   h. Susan speaks fluent Italian, ...... shelly doesn’t understand a word of it.
   i. We have ......space ...... time to put on a full-length play at school.

SUBORDINATE CLAUSES

1. Read the following paragraph and answer the questions below.

   *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* was the man who created the fictional character *Sherlock Holmes*. *Doyle* was born in 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland, where he studied medicine. Being a poor student, he was forced to start writing stories in order to support himself. In 1887, when he was 28, his first was
published. It was in this book that Sherlock Holmes, the detective and his friend, Dr. Watson, appeared. “Elementary, my dear Watson” is an expression which is still used today and is the expression that Holmes is famous for. When Doyley wrote his Sherlock Holmes mysteries, he gave Holmes an address in Baker Street, London. This was the place that became the centre of Holmes’ work. Whenever he had a crime to solve, he would meditate in his Baker Street study. When Doyley tired of the character that he had created, he decided to kill him off. However, because these stories had become so popular, he was forced to bring back the character whose skill as a detective had become almost legendary. Doyley continued writing and while he was serving as a doctor in the Boer War, he wrote an article on that war, which earned him a knighthood. He died in Sussex, England, in 1930.

a. Identify the subordinate clauses in the passage.

b. List the words which introduce them.

c. Choose four different types of clause and explain what they are.

d. Find two examples of clauses which need commas. Explain.

ORGANIZING A PARAGRAPH

1. Read the following paragraph and answer the questions below

Tourism on a large scale is causing serious damage to the Mediterranean Sea and its coastline. Crows of tourist often leave behind large amounts of litter, such as paper, bottles and cans, on the beach of Italy, Greece and Spain. Furthermore there has been an increase in the number of yachts and tour cruises off the coasts and they are causing damage to marine life in these areas. Many yacht owners dump their rubbish and sewage directly into the coastal water. This increase in the number of boats has led to the building of marinas all over the Mediterranean. The litter, noise overcrowding and pollution in these marinas are destroying the fragile ecology of the Mediterranean waters, and, as a result, there are more dead birds, fish and marine mammals than ever before. In fact these tourists are gradually destroying the very coastal resorts they want to visit.

a. Can you identify the topic sentence?

b. How many supporting ideas are there?

c. Can you identify the concluding sentence? How does it compare to the topic sentence?

d. Which words were used to link ideas together and maintain unity and coherence?

ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING
1. Join the following pairs of sentences together using a suitable expression of comparison or contrast

a. The area of Greece includes many islands. The area of Spain includes several islands.
b. Robots can work 24 hours a day. People need to eat and rest.
c. England has along democratic tradition. Israel is a young democracy.
d. There are many types of entertainment in a city. Such entertainment is often quite expensive.
e. England suffered a civil war. Spin had a civil war.

Bibliografía


El idealismo modal, con objeciones del realismo modal

A continuación presentaremos algunas tesis sobre la metafísica de Leibniz. Llamaremos a esta concepción idealismo modal, debido fundamentalmente a dos razones: 1) en primer lugar se basa en un punto realista sobre las ideas. Más adelante diremos más sobre esto. En segundo lugar, 2) toma como nociones básicas las nociones modales de necesidad y posibilidad. Contrapondremos el idealismo modal de Leibniz al realismo modal de David K. Lewis, planteando objeciones desde el segundo al primero.