

Evaluation of a Reading Lesson

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Abstract:The aim of the article is to evaluate a particular reading lesson based on certain criteria. It is composed of four parts. In the first part, there is a brief description of the stages of the reading lesson. In the second one, there is a presentation of the actual criteria and in the third part, an evaluation of the reading lesson as a whole and its reading activities, based on the above criteria. Finally, in the fourth part, there are some suggestions/ modifications of specific activities, so as to suit learners' needs.

1. The stages of the reading lesson

The reading lesson consists of three phases, the pre-, the while- and the post-reading one. In the pre-reading, there are some general questions on superstitions and a vocabulary review, presenting important vocabulary, while at the same time, learners are supposed to match the words with the appropriate definition.

In the while-reading, where the actual reading takes place, there are four exercises. The first one is a True-False, asking learners to answer according to the text. The second one, a short multiple-choice activity, where learners are given four options each time to choose the correct one. In the third one, they are given an open-ended activity and they are asked to answer based on the text, while the fourth one is a gap-filling activity, where learners are supposed to fill-in the summary of the text with the words given.

Finally, in the post-reading stage, there is one more gap-filling task, including extra vocabulary, an additional text on superstitions and some further general questions on the text.

2. Evaluating criteria

The particular reading lesson is assessed according to numerous criteria.

One of the main criteria is the background knowledge the reader owns, essential element for the comprehension of a reading text. According to Carrell & Eisterhold (1983/ 1988: 73), real reading comprehension can be achieved only when the reader can relate his pre-existing knowledge with a reading text.

Another important criterion is the reading strategies the learner uses to approach a reading text successfully and autonomously and become an independent reader (Grabe & Stoller, 2011: 10). Some of them are cognitive and others metacognitive. The most crucial ones are scanning, skimming, intensive and extensive reading (Beaumont, 1996: 30-31). Scanning involves looking for specific information, while skimming, getting the general idea of the text. Scanning requires selective reading and attention to details, while skimming is focused on understanding general information (Calfoglou, 2019: 33). On the other hand, intensive reading focuses on the teaching of language, whereas extensive reading on relating language and real-world experiences (Day, 2015). According to Day & Banford (2002: 137-144), there are some elements constituting successful intensive reading, such as the ease of the reading text, the variety of reading topics, learners' decisions on what to read according to their needs and interests (Krashen, 1993), purposeful reading aiming at general understanding, reader's personal reading pace, individual and silent reading, teachers guiding learners

and at the same time, being role-models for them, extensive reading itself, while Prowse (2002) referring to the actual response to a book, considered the comprehension questions purposeless and irrelevant to real world knowledge. Williams (1986) focusing on extensive reading, where there is meaningful reading material aiming at increasing readers' fluency, reading ability and amusement (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2009; Krashen, 2011), word recognition (Ellis, 2003), motivation (Guthrie, Wigfield & Perencevich, 2004; Schiefele et al., 2012), and other linguistic and non-linguistic skills (Bamford & Day, 2004; Cirocki, 2009; Day & Bamford, 1998; Day et al., 2011; Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Hunt & Beglar, 2005; Iwahori, 2008; Lake, 2014; Nation, 2009), mentioned the importance of dealing with interesting and engaging texts and pointed out that learner-readers should participate actively in the reading process instead of remaining passive as listeners or focusing exclusively on providing correct answers in post-reading comprehension activities. Other than that, he stated clearly that teachers should guide learners, but at the same time, offer them the opportunity to develop their reading skills autonomously (Broady & Kenny, 1996; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Matsubara & Lehtinen, 2007). Prowse (2002) argued that the integration of listening in the reading process is quite useful too, while he pointed out that testing should be avoided at all costs (Davis, 1995: 320).

In the process of evaluating the reading text, the terms of TAVI and TALO were taken into account, too. TAVI refers to the use of a text as a vehicle for information, whereas TALO as a linguistic object (Johns & Davies, 1983). In the first case, reader-learners choose the actual reading texts (Johns, 1980) - in most cases authentic ones-, while the focus is on doing instead of knowing. Moreover, the main aim of reading is to focus on general meaning and not on details or testing, while pre-reading activities play an essential role guiding readers, stating the reading purpose and activating their background schemata. Finally, in TAVI learners are supposed to engage in group work, essential element promoting their independence, dealing with real-life information gap activities (Broady & Kenny, 1996; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Holec, 1981; Matsubara & Lehtinen, 2007). On the other hand, in TALO the syntactic structures to be taught define the selection of a particular text, regardless of students' needs and interests (Davies & Greene, 1982), whereas the main focus is on knowing. Also, there is lack of pre-reading activities or there are just a few, including mostly vocabulary- matching translations. Moreover, in this method language itself is in the centre of attention, instead of overall meaning, while the focus is on providing specific answers (testing) based on specific information and details. Furthermore, TALO is a teacher-centred method (Khan, 2007), since the teacher presents the text or poses questions requiring specific answers, leaving thus no space for constructive and meaningful expression. On the contrary, learners' role is passive (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Finally, in TALO the post-reading activities are mostly lexical, grammatical or comprehension questions, whereas in TAVI, there are mostly communicative tasks (Calfoglou, 2019: 81).

3. Evaluation of the reading lesson

The particular reading lesson consists of three phases, the pre-, the while- and the post-reading.

It is treated as TALO and its main focus is on the product (correct answers) and not on the process, which can be inferred by the type of activities (exam-centered activities). Moreover, the choice of the particular text, which is quite long, is not made by learners themselves. Most activities are closed-type activities (Willis, 1996: 28), such as matching, T/F, multiple choice and gap-filling, with no communicative purpose and require bottom-up processing instead of a combination of top-down and bottom-up, key essential for effective reading (Rumelhart, 1980) and focus on points of details and knowing. Only two activities have a communicative purpose and offer learners the opportunity to guess and express themselves (focus on doing). According to Davies (1995), T/F statements, multiple choice activities and gap-filling require silent reading and they are called passive, since the target focus is not on deep and real comprehension but on testing. At the same time, they do not provide enough chances for real learning. Additionally, some of the strategies used in the particular reading lesson are scanning for specific information, skimming for the gist and intensive reading, since

learners are provided a text chosen by their teacher and they are supposed to read only to answer the questions (Waring, 2011). Finally, they work individually and they do not engage in group or pair-work (Correia, 2006), which is really beneficial for their learning and development of their skills (Bruton & Samuda, 1980; Gass & Varonis, 1985; Porter, 1985).

4. Modifications of the reading activities

As noted above, the majority of the activities of the particular reading lesson focus on the product and not on the actual process of learning, have no communicative purpose and do not encourage interaction among learners, leading to autonomy and independence (Broady & Kenny, 1996; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Holec, 1981; Matsubara

& Lehtinen, 2007). Thus, a number of changes are necessary.

According to Brown (1994), the pre-reading stage's purpose should be to activate learner's background schemata (top-down process), introduce the topic and help them relate the text to their pre-existing knowledge (Díaz & Hernández, 1998). In the particular one, there are two activities. The first one includes three open-ended questions, while in the second one, there are six words and learners are supposed to match them to their definitions. Thus, the second activity is a vocabulary instruction one, which according to Calfoglou (2019: 78), is a basic element for the teaching of reading. However, Prowse (2002) suggests that such kind of activities prevent readers from developing their prediction skills. Thus, learners could be given some -relevant to the topic of superstitions- vocabulary items to discuss in teams and try to relate them to their real-life experiences, drawing conclusions on their meanings (Correia, 2006) instead of matching.

In the while-reading, where according to Brown (1994) learners are given instructions and proceed with the actual text, there are four activities, a T/F, a multiple choice, an open-ended and a gap-filling. The first activity's focus (T/F) is on scanning, since learners are supposed to search for very specific information in the text and mark the utterances as T/F, developing thus fragmentary comprehension (Widd, 1979). It is an exam-oriented task, focusing on testing (Widdowson, 1979) and it should be removed. The multiple-choice task, which is a test-oriented activity too, requires many strategies, such as scanning (first two questions), skimming (last question) and intensive reading and it is a bottom-up activity. The particular activity would be better if learners were asked to provide justifications upon their choices (Grabe, 2012: 7). The third task requires scanning and intensive reading. If the activity focused on providing less specific answers and encouraged learners to interact in doing so, it would be more communicative and purposeful (Calfoglou, 2019: 30). The final exercise (gap-filling) focuses again on the product and it could be included in the post- reading stage, summarizing the key elements of the text.

Finally, in the post- reading stage, where learners are given the chance to answer comprehension questions and discuss on the reading text (Brown, 1994), there are two tasks, a gap-filling one with further vocabulary and another text on superstitions accompanied by some comprehension questions. The first task could be removed as it does not actually help learners comprehend the text or even provide additional useful information. Regarding the additional text, it could be removed, too. In the post- reading stage, learners could be asked to work in pairs or teams, engage in dialogues or role-playing activities to exchange information, collect data and create spidergrams or diagrams of the text (Grabe, 1997), aiming at overall comprehension. Some further suggestions would be to integrate other skills, such as speaking as much as possible (Grellet, 1981), offer learners the chance to choose the reading text on their own (Brown, 2012; Holec, 1981) and read extensively (Grabe, 1986).

5. Conclusion

The particular reading lesson, which consists of three stages (TAVI feature), is mostly a bottom-up lesson focusing on lexis, looking for specific information and providing specific answers. It is a text-oriented lesson, comprising mostly of closed-type comprehension activities (T/F, multiple choice) without any communicative purpose. The flow in some points is interrupted, because there are some irrelevant and unnecessary activities that could be omitted or incorporated in a different stage (task sequencing). Also, the text is treated as TALO, since it has many features of the ones mentioned above (type of activities, reading text choice made by the teacher, no group-work), while reader learners' autonomy and interaction is not targeted and achieved, since readers are only seen as answer-providers and not as independent learners. By modifying the activities as mentioned above, the reading lesson will have more TAVI features and will be more appropriate for learners.

Finally, we must highlight the productive and effective role of digital technologies in the field of education. These technologies, which include mobile devices (22-30), a variety of ICTs (31-67), AI & STEM ROBOTICS (68-86), and games (87-90), facilitate and improve educational procedures such as assessment, intervention, and instruction. In addition, the use of ICTs in conjunction with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation, and emotional intelligence cultivation [91-136], as well as with environmental factors and nutrition [18-21], accelerates and enhances educational practices and outcomes, particularly for language learning practices.

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