

Implications about L2 reading and motivation

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Abstract

This research paper gives insights into effective guidelines and implications for an effective L2 reading instruction such as planning the reading curricula, selecting appropriate reading materials, diversifying students' reading experience, and promoting meaningful instruction through vocabulary development, extensive reading, strategic training, students' motivation and awareness of text structure and discourse organization.

Many researchers argue that reading is one of the most important language skills for both first and second language readers (Day and Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2004, 2005; Grabe and Stoller, 2001; Guthrie et al, 2004; Horst and Robb, 2005; Koda, 2005). According to these researchers, reading is crucial for learning new information, explaining, interpreting, and combining it based on old information and expectations. Furthermore, Grabe and Stoller (2001) argued that reading offers the foundation for synthesis and critical evaluation skills and serves as the primary means for promoting independent learning. Reading and comprehending a text is a complex skill to be acquired as it involves the activation and use of several processes such as a large recognition vocabulary, strategic reading, text-structure awareness, and fluency development. But, what several researchers agree on is the principle that reading comprehension ability is enhanced mostly through an extensive core reading instruction.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to draw on general implications of both L1 and L2 reading research and offer guidelines for teachers to promote and guide effective reading comprehension in an ESL/EFL setting. First it is important to note that reading should be given particular attention by curriculum builders. According to Grabe & Stoller (2001), teachers should adapt and abide by at least five crucial reading curricular goals when planning their reading curriculum. I am going to explain each of them in detail.

1) Conducting needs analysis to interpret institutional goals and expectations for learning.

According to many researchers the first step in planning reading curricula should take in consideration curricular needs as well as teachers' and students' needs (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2004, 2005; Grabe & Stoller, 2001; Guthrie et al, 2004; Horst & Robb, 2005; and Koda, 2005). The needs analysis should generally take into account institutional goals and L2 instruction reading contexts, and pay special attention to L2 readers and their socio-cultural factors in learning to read. It is important to examine the differences between L1 and L2 readers. Thus, L2 readers have weaker linguistic skills and a more limited vocabulary than L1 readers as they did not have the L1 exposure. They reflect different social, educational and cultural backgrounds in different EFL/ESL settings. Furthermore, L2 readers do not possess the L2 text-structure awareness but, on

the other hand, they rely more on their L1 knowledge and L1 reading abilities. L2 students also use more mental translation skills, word glosses, and bilingual dictionaries. Moreover, L1 and L2 students' motivations and attitudes differ. According to Day & Bamford (1998), teachers should first understand students' positive or negative attitude towards L2 reading and also take in consideration their attitude toward reading in general, their previous experiences with reading, and their attitude toward the L2 class environment and the L2 culture and people.

2) Planning reading curricula.

The second step that teachers should take after students' needs analysis is starting to plan the reading curriculum. First, the reading class can either be a part of an integrated skills' instruction or a separate one, combining extensive reading, intensive reading, strategic reading or a combination of them. The goals of the reading curriculum may vary from focusing on fluency development to the analysis of text structure coherence. Second, depending on the reading goals many researchers suggest different ways of planning the reading curricula. For example, Grabe (2004) suggests a coherent integrated curriculum that combines content and comprehension instruction. In this aspect he suggests two effective strategy instruction approaches: The Transactional Strategy Instruction which provides a general curricular approach with focus on strategic engagement, and Concept Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI), which focuses on content and reading comprehension in thematic units. Moreover, findings from Guthrie et al (2004) study draw on the effectiveness of CORI as providing both explicit cognitive strategy training and motivational support.

Day & Bamford (1998), on the other hand, pay more attention to extensive reading curriculum. They recommend 4 ways of incorporating extensive reading into the reading curriculum: 1) as a separate stand-alone course; 2) as part of an existing reading course; 3) as a non-credit addition to an existing course and 4) as an extracurricular activity.

3) Selecting appropriate text materials and supporting resources.

After planning the reading curricula teachers have to choose the appropriate reading materials. Grabe and Stoller (2001) noted that appropriate reading materials should complement students' linguistic, and cultural level, their age/interest characteristics, and flowing coherently from the known to the unknown. According to Day and Bamford (1998), Guthrie et al (2004), Horst and Robb (2005), only appropriate instructional materials and tasks involve learners in elaborating the new knowledge. They suggest the use of simplified graded readers especially for beginner/intermediate level students and less skilled students. Horst and Robb (2005) add that teachers should encourage students to read several simplified graded readers rather than a single passage. In this case they promote extensive reading by reading one simplified graded reader per week. Furthermore, findings from their study show that simplified texts for beginners offer optimum conditions for new vocabulary learning. Day and Bamford (1998) likewise recommend the use of class readers and free-reading materials. Guthrie et al (2004), on the other hand, give more emphasis on choosing thematic based materials linked

coherently with different topics and tasks. Furthermore, if the thematic based textbook is accompanied with modeling and high or low level scaffolding the reading instruction will be much more effective.

4) Diversify students' reading experience.

According to Grabe and Stoller (2001) one of the goals of effective reading instruction is to make use of a variety of instructional activities. Reading activities can be done not only in a formal setting but also in the library, at home, or in a lab. They also add that the most important fact to bear in mind is to encourage students to do as much reading in the amount of time available. Particularly interesting is the fact that most researchers base the diversity of activities on students' interests. For example, both Day and Bamford (1998) and Horst and Robb (2005) suggest that students choose their own books to read for the extensive reading either in the class or at home. Furthermore, many researchers recommend several reading activities which not only diversify the reading experience but they also build reading fluency (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2004; Grabe & Stoller, 2001; Guthrie et al, 2005). Researchers recommend the use of the reading activities that make students work against themselves rather than compete with other students. These activities would include the sustained silent reading, which is considered suitable for any linguistic level and reading ability. A reading class should devote 15-20 minutes to silent reading as it is highly motivational because it encourages meaningful reading as opposed to reading as an academic subject, and it is not interrupted, evaluated or instructed. Other diversifying activities would include the following: teacher and student read aloud activities, browsing and choosing, timed or paced readings that improve reading rate and overall reading fluency, rereading the same material for another purpose, using class readers, reading lab and flashcards' practice, and free class or home reading for unmotivated students. Day and Bamford (1998) and Guthrie et al (2004), also suggest using more pre and post reading activities in order to tap into students' personal response and world knowledge: organizing pre reading excursions and hands-on-activities, writing book reviews, mixed reaction reports and summaries for a more personalized activity, giving oral reports, organizing wall displays, rave reviews, and reading fairs. These activities not only monitor and evaluate students' reading but also turn individual reading into a common collaborative event.

5) Address the complex nature of reading through meaningful instruction.

According to Grabe and Stoller (2001), the primary means for meaningful instruction and the development of reading skills should be the promotion of extensive reading. Furthermore, they suggest devoting attention to the several interdependent areas that I am going to describe below:

- a) Vocabulary is crucial to effective fluent reading development (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2004; Grabe & Stoller, 2001; Horst & Robb 2005; Koda, 2005). According to these researchers extensive reading helps build a large recognition vocabulary, and vocabulary in itself, being acquired through incidental or explicit teaching leads to reading fluency development. What all researchers seem to agree on is that the development of a large incidental vocabulary and further rapid

word recognition and reading fluency comes through extensive reading. Vocabulary instruction should aim at simultaneous enhancement of both vocabulary learning and comprehension. According to Grabe & Stoller (2001) and Koda (2005), vocabulary instruction should be both direct and indirect. Direct/explicit vocabulary teaching should focus on conceptual scaffolding and multiple exposure in a variety of contexts. Grabe and Stoller (2001) suggest using the key word technique based on the words' comprehension degree of immediacy, usefulness and context. Furthermore, they encourage the creation of a vocabulary rich environment by promoting other techniques of explicit vocabulary teaching like analysis of word parts, associations, flashcards, mnemonic techniques, games, synonyms and antonyms, the use of graphic organizers, glosses, word family exercises, and illustrations, drawings and realia.

1. Indirect vocabulary instruction, on the other hand, should focus on teaching students how to teach themselves in learning new words, thus becoming strategic vocabulary learners. For example, students can practice in guessing word meanings from context, work with a dictionary, become word collectors, or as Guthrie et al (2004) suggests, incorporate vocabulary learning in group learning projects and hands-on-activities.
- b) Awareness of text structure and discourse organization will help students develop stronger comprehension skills (Grabe & Stoller 2001; Grabe, 2004; Koda, 2004). According to these researchers, direct instruction should focus on raising students' awareness of text structure by guiding students through transition words/phases, rhetorical patterns, coherence structures or linkages, and headings/subheadings. In this regard, Grabe (2004) suggests paying more attention to grammar processing instruction for text and discourse coherence. As syntactic parsing abilities promote better comprehension, then it is of importance to guide students through local and global coherence systems that combine in a text. Both of them will help students to identify major referents in a text, their continuity and reappearance, the shift of events, distinguish main from subordinate information, modality etc. Furthermore, the development of students' awareness of text structure can be promoted by the use of graphic organizers such as semantic maps (used across a large number of texts), outlines, compare/contrast matrices, Venn diagrams, chronological flowcharts etc. Moreover, Grabe (2004) argued that reading strategy training also enhances the awareness of text structure. Students should be trained to read a text carefully and pay attention to main ideas, supportive information, explore inferences and embedded definitions, examine headings/subheadings. These text analysis activities would engage students more in the reading task if they were combined into pre/during and post reading activities.
- c) Strategic reading and the development of strategic readers is considered as one of the major goals for reading instruction (Grabe, 2004; Grabe & Stoller 2001; Guthrie et al, 2004; Koda, 2004). According to these researchers, strategy instruction should focus on the direct teaching of several strategies combined with teachers' modeling and scaffolding, in order to lead to a gradual, long-term,

independent use of strategies on part of the students. In this respect, promoting the strategic reader is much more important than paying more attention to teaching individual strategies. By promoting this self-regulated reading mode, researchers suggest explicit step-by-step demonstration of strategies, by introducing a few at a time, discussing, explaining and modeling them in different genres and have students demonstrate them to each other. Guthrie et al (2004), in his study introduces the Concept Oriented Reading Instruction, which provides both, explicit cognitive strategy training for knowledge construction during reading and affective support for students. The most important strategies that he recommends using especially for elementary grades are: the activation of background knowledge, searching for information, summarizing, questioning and graphic organizers. The findings suggest that the combination of the activation of background knowledge with questioning leads to better reading comprehension. Furthermore, the strategy instruction in this study was based on more detailed, modeled high level scaffolding for less skilled learners and low level and more autonomous scaffolding for more proficient learners. Guthrie et al (2004) recommends starting with high level scaffolding for the whole class and then gradually shift to low level scaffolding, which will in turn lead to a gradual independent use of strategies. Another long-term instructional approach to teach strategies is based on the Transactional Strategies Instruction which focuses only on teaching strategies separate from other skills. The most effective way to go about teaching and reintroducing strategies on a continual basis is through pre, during and post reading activities. These activities serve the purposes of activating background knowledge, facilitating reading comprehension through strategic and purposeful reading, stimulating students' interest by relating their knowledge to world knowledge and personal response. They make use of graphic organizers, outlining, response writing tasks, questioning, discussions, previewing etc.

- d) Students' motivation is another factor that impacts successful reading comprehension (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2004; Grabe & Stoller, 2001; Guthrie et al, 2004; Horst & Robb, 2005). In order to motivate students to read more, these researchers recommend focusing on a more learner oriented instruction that makes use of age and linguistic level appropriate textbooks, interesting topics and tasks that activate students' background knowledge, and promote cooperative learning. Particularly interesting is the fact that many researchers recommend the creation and maintenance of intrinsic motivation as the most important motivational component that leads to reading growth and amount of extensive reading. An important goal for teachers would be to understand the differing motivations in the EFL classroom and try to build activities and tasks that would gradually make students not only more intrinsically motivated in the reading class but also outside class. In this aspect, Guthrie et al. (2004), in their CORI model study found that by creating specific classroom conditions such as the CORI hands-on activities, by providing student autonomy in book choice or what questions to answer, by offering opportunities for collaboration and by further stimulating children's situational interest in a topic/task, students will develop an intrinsic motivation towards reading activities

and will be more engaged in reading.

- e) Extensive Reading, is considered by many researchers as the central component of building both, reading ability and reading fluency (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2004; Grabe & Stoller, 2001; Guthrie et al, 2004; Horst & Robb, 2005; Koda, 2004). Researchers recommend the promotion of extended reading programs as one of the programs that would motivate students to read a lot. Grabe & Stoller (2001) provide several ways for the promotion of extended reading: 1) the sustained silent reading of level appropriate texts engages students in reading and improves their reading ability. 2) Students should have exposure to all types of reading and have purposes for reading. 3) The reading materials should be interesting, age and level appropriate, with the graded readers considered as highly motivational and offering extensive reading practice. 4) The teacher should serve as the best role model of an engaged reader who discusses the reading goals with students, reads aloud to students regularly, who allows students to have more independent reading choice and who keeps records of students' extensive reading progress. Furthermore, building diverse class libraries, reading labs/lab activities, creating a community of learners where students visit the library, discuss and share information about the books, take books of their choice at home, all these are subsets for promoting extensive reading.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to give some insights into the effective ways and implications for an effective reading instruction. Many researchers have focused on the factors that influence the development of reading skills (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2004; Grabe & Stoller, 2001; Guthrie et al, 2004; Horst & Robb, 2005; Koda, 2004). What all the researchers consider as the most important factor that develops reading ability and reading fluency is reading a lot. According to researchers several of the guidelines to take in consideration when teaching reading include: planning the reading curricula, selecting appropriate reading materials, diversifying students' reading experience and promoting meaningful instruction through the development of vocabulary, extensive reading, strategic training, students' motivation, and awareness of text structure and discourse organization. It is very important that the teachers combine as much of the above guidelines as possible into a general coherent reading instruction that will focus more on students' needs and motivations.

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