



A Reading Instruction for a First Year Middle School Class

تعليمات للقراءة لتلاميذ قسم سنة أولى متوسط

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Abstract -

Reading is a cognitive activity that involves the eyes and the brain and many complex processes. According to a number of researchers such as Davies (1995), learning to read requires bringing together a number of actions involving the eyes, the brain, and the psychology of the mind that do not occur naturally. Teaching reading for first year learners in an Algerian middle school class is very important and strategic. Actually, teaching them how to read requires some essential processes. These are: word recognition, phonics, phonemic awareness, oral language, vocabulary and prior knowledge. So the components of a reading instruction for those learners include the above processes and more. The aim of this paper is to suggest a reading instruction for an Algerian first year middle school class.

Keywords-

word recognition , PHONICS, PHONEMIC AWARENESS, ORAL LANGUAGE, PRIOR KNOWLEDGE.

الملخص-

القراءة نشاط إدراكي يشمل العين والدماغ والعديد من العمليات المعقدة، وتعلم القراءة حسب بعض الباحثين مثل (Davies) (1995)، إذ يتطلب الجمع بين عدد من الاجراءات بما فيها العين والدماغ وسيكولوجية العقل، والتي لا تحدث بشكل طبيعي، كما أن تعليم القراءة للمتعلمين في المرحلة المتوسطة الجزائرية مهم جدا واستراتيجي، إذ في الواقع إن تعليمهم كيفية القراءة يتطلب بعض العمليات الأساسية، وهي: التعرف على الكلمات، الصوتيات، الوعي الصوتي، اللغة الشفوية، المفردات و المعرفة القبلية، لذا فإن مكونات تعليمية القراءة لأولئك المتعلمين تشمل العمليات المذكورة أعلاه وأكثر من ذلك. كما أن الهدف من هذه الورقة هو اقتراح تعليمات القراءة لفئة تلاميذ السنة الأولى في التعليم المتوسط في مدرسة جزائرية.

الكلمات الدالة -

التعرف على الكلمات، الصوتيات، الوعي الصوتي، اللغة الشفوية، المعرفة القبلية.

1. Introduction

Algerian learners, mainly beginners, are exposed to a number of texts during learning and studying English in middle school. Since the aim of reading is comprehension, they should be first trained to read through a number of steps and under the teacher's guidance. This is a gradual process but an ongoing one that starts with recognising sounds (phonemes) and associating graphemes (letters) and those sounds to create words. We cannot talk about reading comprehension if the learners are unable to recognise words primarily as this is the basis for an effective reading instruction. First year Algerian middle school learners have three one-hour sessions of English per week; one of them is considered as a tutorial session. These learners should be guided to acquire the English language starting from the aforementioned processes, decoding, and other ones so as to be able to read in the first place, then to comprehend what they read. The teacher's guidance and involvement are far too important, which encourages the young learners to follow and cooperate successfully. So the focus is on the building blocks of an effective *reading*

instruction. To this end, we shall describe the components of the suggested reading instruction for a first year middle school class, but let us start with defining the terms *reading comprehension* and *reading*.

2. Reading comprehension and Reading

At the beginning, we should know how researchers have defined both reading comprehension and reading.

2.1. Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension has been given many definitions. Grabe (2002) claims that comprehension is the main goal of reading. For Irwin (2007), reading comprehension is “*an active process to which each reader brings his or her individual attitudes, interests, expectations, skills, and prior knowledge*” (p. 8). Thus, reading comprehension involves using prior knowledge besides other elements (Cartwright, 2009 & Jennings et al, 2006). Thus, the aim of reading, most of the time, is comprehension; nonetheless, at the very beginning, first year learners read for the sake of discovering and being acquainted with the language.

2.2. Reading

Reading has many definitions. Reading, according to Davies (1995) and Alderson (2000), is an active skill that requires the reader to guess, predict, check, and ask him/herself questions about a text through a variety of activities (Grellet, 1981). Aebersold and Field (1997) define reading as “*a powerful activity that confers knowledge, insight, and perspective on readers*” (p. 6). For them, to define reading means to understand the act of reading. For Broughton et al (1980), reading is a complex skill that involves some sub-skills such as starting with the recognition of letters, then words, up to correlating those words with meanings. This view has been judged to be traditional, for it views reading as a decoding activity. Nonetheless, this decoding activity is very useful with beginners.

3. Components of a Reading Instruction

As mentioned earlier, we shall depict the components of a reading instruction which are respectively: word recognition, phonics, phonemic awareness, oral language, vocabulary, and prior knowledge.

3.1. Word Recognition

Word recognition is composed of two words: word and recognition which means recognising words. It is defined as “*the processes of extracting lexical information from graphic displays of words*” (Koda, 2005, p. 29). Gough (1984) considers it as “*the foundation of the reading process*” (p. 225. Cited in Roberts et al., 2011, p. 229). Learners who are able to read words, they have already developed a variety of prerequisite skills. They understand that

- a) words can be spoken or written,
- b) print corresponds to speech, and
- c) words are composed of sounds (phonemes).

Reading comprehension depends on strong word recognition skills. These include phonological decoding of a word and then accessing its meaning in memory (Koda, 2004; Grabe, 2009). To do this, the reader must:

- a. translate a word into its phonological counterpart, (e.g. the word “mat” is translated into the individual phonemes (/m/, /æ /, and /t/).
- b. remember the correct sequence of sounds.
- c. blend the sounds together.
- d. search his or her memory for a real word that corresponds to the chain of sounds (/m/, /æ /, /t/).

In fact, skillful readers do this so automatically and rapidly that it looks like the natural reading of whole words and not the sequential translation of letters into sounds and sounds into words (ibid). Mastering the prerequisites for word recognition may be enough for many learners to make the link between the written word and its meaning, with little guidance.

➤ Teaching Word Recognition

Teachers start uttering words and ask their first year learners to repeat, then write those words one after the other on the board, and ask the learners to read after them. After that, teachers ask the learners to write those words one after the other on their slates. In another step, the teacher can write the letters of those words in a jumbled order, and ask the learners to rewrite the words; of course, they do it on slates. Teachers should encourage the learners to read those words out loud after being corrected on the board. At the beginning of the next

session, teachers ask their learners about the previous words; they invite them to spell and write the words on their slates...

Teachers should encourage pair works; for example, one learner asks his neighbour to write a word on slate or to spell it, and they change roles. Teachers can also insert words with missing letters in a written conversation and ask the learners to find those letters. This type of activities strengthens the word recognition skills. Actually, teachers can find so many ways for fostering those skills among the learners. All in all, word recognition is the most important component in a reading instruction and in reading in general.

3.2. Phonics

Phonics refers to the connection or the association of letters and sounds. It is also the combination of these sound-symbol connections to create, spell and read words on the part of learners (Davies, 1995; Nuttall, 1982).

➤ Teaching phonics

Teaching phonics requires many ways to be applied while reading. These ways are referred to as approaches, and each approach allows the reader to use phonics to read and learn new words in a different way. In fact, there exist four types of phonics (Chris Drew in HelpfulProfessor.com):

a. Synthetic phonics

In this approach, readers are taught to first connect letters to their corresponding sounds and then to blend those together to make a word (bottom-up approach). For example, blending the following letters to their corresponding sounds, “f” /f/, “i” /i/, “t” /t/, makes the word “fit”.

b. Analytic phonics

Unlike synthetic phonics, analytic phonics approaches words from top to down; that is to say, a word is identified as a whole unit and then its letter- sound connections are parsed out. For instance, the word “fat” is made up of “f” /f/, “a” /æ/, and “t” /t/.

c. Analogy phonics:

This type of phonics uses familiar parts of words to find out new ones. For example, a learner may use his /her prior knowledge of the word “blue” to read the word “glue” or the word “seat” to read the word “meat”, etc.

d. Embedded phonics

It entails phonemes and graphemes associations in context; that is, it emphasises learning to read during reading tasks. The teacher reads first and teaches the learners the phonemes/graphemes that recur within the context of the reading session.

All of those approaches can be taught and used independently or in combination to help beginning readers learn to identify new words. First year learners should be introduced to the notion of “phoneme” or speech sound gradually. The teacher should be patient as the learners encounter the English language and its pronunciation officially for the first time.

3.3. Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic Awareness is closely related to phonics because both of them involve the connection between sounds and words. The two may seem the same, but there exists a difference. While phonics is the association between sounds and letters, phonemic awareness is the understanding that words are created from sounds (phonemes) (National Reading Panel, 2000). Phonics is used only in written language because it involves letters. Phonemes are sounds only and while they can be represented using letters, they can also be simply the auditory sounds of words. Phonemes are most often learnt before a learner begins to read because they are centred on the sounds of language rather than written words.

➤ Teaching Phonemic Awareness

There are a number of ways to teach phonemic awareness. Phoneme isolation involves the reader in parsing out the individual sounds in a word in order to determine its meaning. Likewise, phoneme segmentation requires the reader to break words into their corresponding phonemes. Phoneme identification relies on the reader’s general knowledge of phonemes to identify sound patterns in words. For example, a reader would identify the phoneme /f/ he

knows from the words “flat” and “foot” to help him/her learn how to read a new word: “fame”, for example. The teacher should show her learners that some letters may have more than one sound. For example, “c” can be pronounced either /s / as in “face” or /k/ as in “cat”. Moreover, many letters or combinations of letters may have only one sound. For example, “gh” is pronounced /f/, and “ch” and “ck” are both pronounced /k/ as in “anchor” and “sick”. Phoneme blending requires the reader to connect a series of phonemes to create a word. For example, /b/, / I/, and /t/ creates the word “bit”. Finally, Teachers should also encourage their learners to find the removed sounds from words and even substitute them. For example, the teacher removes the sound / I/ from the word “big” (/b/, / I/, /g/); the learners’ task is to find the missing sound. Also, the teacher may ask them to substitute a phoneme (sound) with another one. For example, / I/ in “big” can be substituted by /æ/ to create the word “bag” (/b/, /æ/, /g/).

First year learners must be involved in activities that help them understand that words are composed of separate phonemes and that sentences are made up of separate words. These processes are the building blocks of spoken language.

3.4. Oral language

Learning to read involves learning about the English writing system that represents speech. Comprehension of written language on the part of learners is directly related to the effective use and understanding of oral language (TEA, 2017). That is, beginners learn from spoken language about themselves, their colleagues, and the world.

➤ Teaching Oral Language

Teachers can make learners develop their oral language through story-telling activities and other language games. Young learners should be encouraged to use oral language to express themselves when they learn about print and books, both at home and in school. Teachers can develop learners’ oral language through songs. This can be done by making learners read aloud stories and asking their mates to listen to them. Listening to stories has benefits such as acquiring new words, new sentences, new ideas, etc. The teacher can also ask her learners to tell stories in their own words. In her turn, the teacher selects one of the stories and writes it on the board and then reads it to the learners. The latter practise reading the story, too. Besides, it is important to

involve the learners in rhyming activities in which they are required to look for similar words. For example, “same” rhymes with “name”, “came”, and “fame”.

When first year learners listen to stories read aloud by the teacher continually, this is going to foster their oral language development and assist the connection of oral and written language. Progress in reading depends to a great extent on developing oral language.

3.5. Vocabulary

In order to comprehend a text, beginning readers need to know the meanings of individual words. They build an understanding of the text by grouping and making sense of words in context. Vocabulary is very important in learning to read and reading development (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). Good reading, therefore, involves having good vocabulary knowledge (Grabe, 2009). Words that are recognised in print have to match the oral vocabulary of a reader in order to be understood. Of course, first year learners are expected to learn vocabularies and work on them in each session, in class and at home. The starting point is with short conversations. The amount of new words depends on how much the learners read either in class or at home.

➤ Teaching Vocabulary

Vocabulary should be taught directly and indirectly. Direct instruction includes giving word definitions and teaching the vocabulary before reading a text (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). Indirect instruction refers to incidental vocabulary learning such as extensive reading and exposure to language in rich contexts (Day and Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2009). For this reason, Day and Bamford (ibid) claim that learners should be encouraged to read in class requires for at least fifteen minutes. They also recommend that learners should take books and read them at home. Word knowledge develops through repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items (Grabe, ibid) in listening, speaking and writing. Furthermore, word definitions in text aid vocabulary development.

Teachers should read stories aloud and at the same time, they should encourage their learners to read aloud in class and at home. Learners should also attend to the meanings of the new words. Generally, first year learners are exposed to conversations about introducing oneself, talking about one's age, etc. especially at the beginning of the first

trimester of a school year. The teacher's role is to provide the learners with a varied number of words to use in different contexts and give the learners the opportunity to use those words where appropriate. In short, vocabulary is crucial as comprehension depends on the rapid identification and understanding of words and groups of words.

3.6. Prior Knowledge

Prior knowledge is an important component in reading. It fosters reading comprehension (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Grabe, *ibid*; Jennings et al, 2006). In actuality, there exist many types of prior knowledge such as knowledge of the world, linguistic knowledge, cultural knowledge, and subject- matter knowledge. Prior knowledge is influenced by a reader's interest in a subject matter (Irwin, 2007). The familiarity of the text content facilitates its comprehension (Alderson, 2000 & Carrell & Eisterhold, *ibid*). Using a type of prior knowledge to understand a text depends on the type of reading tasks.

➤ Teaching Prior Knowledge

Teaching prior knowledge can be done through the following tips:

- a. Taking into consideration the learner's interest and the subject matter of the text when selecting books is important
- b. Focusing on unfamiliar words, in the classroom, is crucial
- c. Activating prior knowledge and discussing new words and concepts with learners before reading a text improves comprehension

(Nuttall, 1996; Grabe, 2009)

A threshold of knowledge about the topic of a text is going to help first year learners make sense of that text. This process should be developed from the beginning of the instruction. Using prior knowledge is a very important element that assists readers in comprehending what they read.

4. Conclusion

First year English learners in an Algerian middle school class should be taught all the principles and factors that help them to learn to read. Any reading instruction should include the aforementioned components, namely word recognition, phonemic awareness, phonics, oral language, vocabulary, and prior knowledge. Since Algerian pupils

study English for the first time in their first year in middle school, they are in need to have this kind of instruction as a strong basis for reading and reading comprehension but for learning. Thus, the teacher's role is to be aware her/himself about how reading develops in order to be able to apply the suggested instruction in class. Practically, the teacher is going to rely on what is available in school and classroom as aids and materials such as the whiteboard, books, slates, etc. In case books including short stories are not available, the teacher is going to look for a solution, which means that the teacher is the master of his class. Teachers should exploit the tutorial session in story telling activities and more. This instruction should be applied since the beginning of the first trimester. In summary, the components of the suggested reading instruction must be interrelated and orchestrated so that teachers can work with their learners on many components at a time and involve all learners in the various activities.

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