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UDC 378.016:811

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/tps2663-4880/2023.29.1.28>

## READING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

### РОЛЬ ЧИТАННЯ У ВИВЧЕННІ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ

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Alongside with writing, reading is one of the greatest achievements of human culture. It helps people to gain new knowledge, keep in touch with friends, get into the attractive world of literature and historical events that took place a long time ago. This article draws special attention to reading as the most essential vital skill, crucial in learning English or any other foreign language. The article emphasizes the importance of mastering the skill of reading comprehension for general education and for foreign language acquisition, considering it a powerful contribution to the process of studying. The article describes methods and approaches to teaching and mastering reading that contribute to the process success. It is also reveals the correlation between reading and other language skills and their interdependence. The article introduces various strategies in teaching reading and their specific features. All modern reading strategies are substantial and important in mastering reading skills as each of them has a particular place and plays a peculiar role in the development of reading comprehension. The author takes into consideration a special place of sub-skills in developing reading skills, namely grammar and vocabulary, and an ever-present relationship between each of them and reading. The article stresses at their role in mastering reading comprehension, especially the role of vocabulary. The article maintains that there is dependence between mental development and the level of reading fluency. Those who gain fluency in reading are good at any educational process. Therefore, reading is being given importance in the sphere of education. It is also considered as one of the most challenging areas, which requires more attention at any level of education.

**Key words:** reading, comprehension, fluency, language skills, reading strategies.

Читання, як і письмо є одним із найбільших досягнень людської культури. Воно допомагає отримувати нові знання, підтримувати зв'язок із друзями, поринати у привабливий світ літератури та історичних подій, що відбулися дуже давно. Стаття привертає увагу до того факту, що читання є найнеобхіднішою життєво важливою навичкою, критичною і майже вирішальною для вивчення англійської чи будь-якої іноземної мови. В ній підкреслюється важливість набуття вміння повністю розуміти прочитане. Це вміння вкрай необхідне як для освіти взагалі так і для оволодіння іноземною мовою зокрема, тому що це вміння є потужним імпульсом для всіх когнитивних процесів. Стаття описує методи та підходи до навчання читанню, як процесу отримання інформації, які сприяють успішності у оволодінні цією навичкою. Вона розкриває залежність між читанням та іншими мовними навичками, їх взаємовплив. У статті представлено різні стратегії навчання читання та їх особливості. Усі сучасні стратегії в цій сфері важливі для оволодіння навичками читання, оскільки

кожна з них займає особливе місце та відіграє свою спеціальну роль у розвитку розуміння прочитаного. Автор наголошує на важливості піднавичок в розвитку навичок читання, а саме граматики та лексики, постійний зв'язок між кожною з них і читанням. У статті підкреслена особлива функція граматики та лексики в опануванні розуміння прочитаного, особливо словникового запасу. У статті стверджується, що існує залежність між розумовим розвитком людини і та її рівнем вміння вільно читати. Ті, хто вміють вільно читати, добре справляються з будь-яким завданням під час навчального процесу. Тому читання посідає таке значне місце у сфері освіти. Також звертається увага на той факт, що читання це одна з найскладніших сфер, яка потребує підвищеної уваги на будь-якому рівні навчання.

**Ключові слова:** читання, розуміння, вільне читання, мовні навички, стратегії читання.

**Problem setting.** It is generally accepted that reading proficiency is the fundamental skill in studying as well as in everyday life. Reading skills are also essential basic skills for learning English. While mastering English learners need to practice four language skills for successful communication: reading, speaking, listening and writing. When people learn a language, at first they listen and only then speak, read, and write. Nevertheless, it is the reading that is considered the most important, difficult and challenging skill among them. At the same time, it is both a goal and a means of learning. It contributes to the development of other language skills and to overall cognizance. It helps learners to accumulate vocabulary. When learners read they come across a lot of new words and expressions in different contexts. Mnemonic activity accompanying the process of reading ensures the memorization of language units. This process can be voluntary or unintentional. Besides, reading improves grammar and helps in improving writing as there is a special link between reading and writing. When students read a text in a foreign language and answer the questions or express their opinion about what they have read, they improve their speaking skills. Eventually, the more and better we read, the richer our vocabulary becomes and the stronger our grammar skills are. Consequently, reading implies improving all the language skills.

Reading is quite beneficial for learners as owing to their reading skills they acquire much information in different subject areas and learn lots of new things about the language, but to take advantage of those benefits they need to achieve the necessary level of reading comprehension. After all, in the process of reading human brain decodes and stores not only written signs or a text as a coherent whole, but also the semantic unity we have perceived and reinterpreted. Hence, we can say that reading is an interactive and vitally important mental activity. Learning to read is a cognitive process that stimulates mental activity: students are invited to solve the problems requiring some understanding of the facts, as well as the ability to catch and interpret the main idea of the text and to express their own point of view. Reading often becomes a starting point of self-awareness, helping readers to become more conscious of who they are, to

explore their feelings and to formulate their points of view. Developing reading comprehension is crucial, challenging and vitally important. Only modern advanced methods and approaches may help teachers and learners here. Teachers need to understand the mere process of learning reading and to be able to assist their students in developing reading skills and coping with eventual challenges as well as to evaluate how really efficient and useful the approaches they apply are and how much they serve their reading proficiency.

#### **Analysis of recent research and publications.**

A lot of researchers see English reading as one of the most essential speech activities. Anderson R.C., Hiebert E.H., Scott J.A., Wilkinson I.A. claim that reading is a vital life skill, which contributes to remarkable academic achievements and helps to build a successful career in future. According to Faria Sultana & Mohammad Ali Ahsan, people with poor reading skills, who are not accustomed to read much and fluently, the most likely will lose a chance both for high grades and a good job all together with personal achievements. Only analytical and critical reading allows going into the issue as deep as possible when working with an assignment. The main aim of that is to understand the author's intention and the purpose. In fact, reading consists of two layers of reality: one that we can see and one that we cannot see. Thus, the goal of reading is to make the imperceptible layer and the underlying meaning visible and clear [4, p. 20]. Neslihan Kose states that the essence of reading is to catch the idea of the author and understand the invisible meaning of written information. Dr. Teele posits that the goal for readers is to be able to understand what they read.

Discourse on the importance of reading in ELT appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was Stephen Krashen who brought up the question. A lot of other educators attacked the problem as well: Brown (1993); Chervenick (1992); Joe (1998); Lantigne & Schwartz. Their idea was that in order to master a second language well enough, students needed a comprehensible input (reading). Thereby, they assumed that reading texts were comprehensible and could have a positive effect when learning a second language. Block & Israel argue that teachers "can assist their students in improving their reading

comprehension by giving instruction of reading strategies like predicting, making affiliation, inferring, questioning, summarizing” [2, p. 95].

**Setting objectives.** The purpose of the article is to discuss some issues of teaching a foreign language emphasizing the importance of mastering reading comprehension. The article is intended to pay attention to the relationship between all four kinds of language skills, their influence on each other and the leading role of reading in that. The aim of the article is to investigate both the importance of reading skills for educational and language development, their peculiarities, goals, challenges and benefits as well as the use of innovative approaches and methods in teaching reading.

**Presenting the main material.** English is spoken practically everywhere in the world. The necessity for fluency in English makes teachers all over the world look for new and more advanced ways of developing language skills, in particular, reading. About 80% of world companies are looking for employees with high reading fluency. Having a good command of reading, people understand what they read and respond properly. When students read a text in a foreign language and answer the questions or express their opinion about what they have read, they improve their speaking skills. A special role of reading as a communicative activity is very important at any stage of learning. That is why English teachers often try to give reading tasks in class.

It is necessary to explain the process taking place when a reader decodes and understands a text. The process of extracting information from the text evolves as follows: a reader gathers visual information and synthesizes it in their brain where the information is identified, recognized, analyzed and finally perceived. For fluent readers this process is automatic [1, p. 88].

For readers whose fluency is insufficient it is quite difficult to get what the text is about. So teachers strive to apply a range of new and advanced methods and approaches to help their students to become more fluent in reading.

The main goals of reading are to master reading comprehension and develop mental abilities. Psychiatrists compare the effect the reading has on human brain with the effect of physical exercise on the body. Reading stimulates the activity of neurons responsible for the processes of reading and writing in human brain. These neurons assist to generate ideas, concepts, meaning, develop logic and capacity to understand. All the above mentioned mental abilities help to study and solve problems in different areas of human life. Reading is able to develop critical

thinking skills, because when reading students learn to analyze, to interpret, to reflect and evaluate and, what is the most important, think the issue over objectively and impartially. Fluent readers are better thinkers in everyday life.

To develop reading skills teachers use different strategies of getting information from the text: reading for specific information, reading for gist, skimming and scanning, prediction. Teachers often start working on a text with a prediction. It is a good start as the title of the text or pictures, if any, usually help to imagine the context. When a context is outlined it is easy to understand the content and do reading comprehension. Another task is reading for gist. Here the whole thing is not to find out uselessly what the text is about, but to get a rough idea about the text, to be able to answer the questions, choose the correct title or picture that matches the content of the text or find some specific facts or information in the text at the next stage of reading, if there are any [1, p. 40].

When students are encouraged to anticipate and read for gist first, later they handle the context more easily and use their prior knowledge for better understanding of what they are reading about. As a result, it allows improving their reading comprehension.

Skimming has something in common with reading for gist since both deal with the information at the level of a rough idea. However, unlike gist reading, skimming is the method of speed reading. It is specially taught as a part of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) because their students have to read a lot in English. Within this strategy students are taught to read sometimes only the first line of each paragraph as it often contains the main idea of the whole paragraph. Skimming save hours of reading and is very useful when you aim to preview the content but it is not good for detailed or academic reading because when you skim you can miss important information. Nonetheless, teachers are encouraged to practice skimming with their students in class because it is quite appropriate as a strategy for a proficient reader using information in English for studies. Reading proficiency implies the ability to read quickly. Skimming is the best way to train the speed of reading.

On the contrary, reading for specific information or scanning requires thorough and attentive reading to do the reading comprehension tasks. Scanning is a method of reading text quickly by only searching specific facts, and not reading the whole text. This strategy can be also especially useful for academic purposes. Scanning as well as skimming uses key

words or phrase-search terms. Significant difference is that skimming is rather about obtaining information from a bird's eye view whereas scanning is about locating and eliciting necessary facts. It is good to skim the text before scanning to decide if it is really contains the necessary information. Scanning is a reading strategy based on concentration and can be quite tiring.

All the above-mentioned strategies contribute to the development of reading fluency as high speed of reading allows coping with an important amount of information, stimulates analyzing, sequencing, decoding, retelling, using context clues, predicting, drawing conclusions. Students able to skim and scan are flexible readers. They save time because they do not have to read everything when getting the necessary information. Their strong point is understanding what kind of information they need and how to find it in the text. Skimming and scanning are very effective reading strategies boosting reading comprehension. Reading comprehension processes of a fluent reader are fast and simultaneous [3, p. 225].

When decoding words is difficult, a challenge lies in getting how the words are connected in a sentence; otherwise, readers just overload their memory and still can't understand the text.

It is worth to mention a special correlation between the development of reading skills and vocabulary and grammar issues. Vocabulary knowledge is gained owing to regular and extensive reading. Students are expected to read in order to expand their vocabulary, but at the same time they need some vocabulary to be able read. Some reading experts say that for independent reading in a second language we need at least 3,000 words; others say that we need 8,000–9,000 words. However, it depends on the goals of reading. Accumulation of new words is a special problem too. Sometimes readers memorize words involuntarily, though it happens only seldom. It is better to concentrate on the vocabulary before reading or use texts with repeated vocabulary. It is especially important at early stages of learning. If learners can understand words in a text, it is easy for them to get the meaning. That is why accurate and rapid vocabulary recognition is very important and improves reading comprehension. To understand a written text without assistance, students have to recognize 98% of words in it [1, p. 18].

There is an explicit relationship between understanding a written text and understanding the structure of a language. To improve reading comprehension it is necessary to deepen grammar knowledge. Activities aimed at using a context for the

elimination, analysis and examination of grammatical structures should be practiced.

The SQ3R method in teaching reading contains some stages. It can be used even at early stages of learning when reading skills are weak but sufficient to get information from a simple text. This method improves understanding and retention. The name SQ3R is an abbreviation from the names of five steps included in this method. They are: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review. By following these steps it is possible to get from the text as much information as possible, expand vocabulary and improve not only reading but also writing and speaking skills.

1. Survey. This is the stage of gathering information by means of skimming or scanning and focusing on it. The reader gets a rough idea about the text and its most important elements.
2. Question. This is the stage of engagement and concentration on the text. The reader asks as many questions about the content of the text as possible and finds answers in the text. Headings and subheadings can be turned into questions too. Questions can be added in the process. Trying to formulate a question and to answer it, the reader is engaged in reading and learning.
3. Read, R1. This is the stage of active reading. Stages Survey and Questions are mandatory and absolutely have to be performed before starting reading.
4. Recite, R2. This is the stage of retelling, rewriting or recalling. The reader identifies the main ideas and answers the questions from step Q, orally, in writing or both ways. It allows retraining the mind and concentrating on reading and learning. After each step, it is necessary to stop, remember the questions and try to answer them by memory. If students are not able to do that, they are asked to look at the text again. It is important not to move on to the next step until they can reproduce previous answers.
5. Review, R3. This is the stage of refining mental organization, where the reader begins building memory. If all the steps were completed correctly, students should remember their questions and test themselves by remembering the answers. If they are not able to do that, they have to come back to the text again.

Silent reading is extremely important where vocabulary expansion is concerned. Reading silently students do not need to waste time on pronunciation. They can pay as much attention as possible to reading for understanding. If the information is comprehensible and interesting, students feel motivated and remember passive vocabulary easily. Feeling comfortable when reading, they tend to read in English willingly and master reading skills faster. Therefore, it is very important, at least initially, to find texts that can

get students interested. Pleasure reading stimulates word recognition skills [5, p. 28].

Reading for pleasure, students are able to define what words are and are not important for reading comprehension, what they can and cannot skip. They are focused on the meaning, not on unfamiliar words. Very often teachers ask students to share their impression after the reading, both for speech and comprehension practice. When reading silently students can work with new words that occur directly in the context, catching their meaning more easily and learning to handle the structure of the sentences where those new words were used. This activity improves their writing style.

Thus, reading can contribute to vocabulary build-up, improve conversational proficiency, writing ability and finally the proficiency of reading itself.

**Conclusion.** Reading is one of the most important cognitive skills that contribute to self-development, thanks to which people not only develop as individuals, but also gain knowledge and experience the world. Reading is an active thought process that shapes a person and is absolutely essential for communication. We are talking about reading both in your native language and in a foreign language. Reading in English is especially important for

gaining professional knowledge, as it is often used for international publications, contracts, and manuals. Moreover, reading develops critical thinking. People who are fluent in reading are often more balanced in their attitude to life, as they are able to assess the situation and draw conclusions.

Taking into account the significant number of different studies and pedagogical practices currently existing on the development of reading skills, it can be concluded that reading is the key to academic success and a positive attitude towards life. Reading is a powerful tool for human cognitive development and a source of information in various fields. Thus, we consider reading as the goal and means of the educational process. Free reading contributes to the development of other language skills and sub-skills.

It should be recognized that the development of reading skills involves the solution of a number of problems. The teacher is faced with the task of choosing the appropriate method of teaching to achieve the desired result. From this point of view, all modern approaches are applicable, but which one will suit the situation in the classroom depends on many factors. All of them are advanced, effective and important. Therefore, the teacher must decide which one will be the most suitable.

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