



A Novel Study of Using Newspaper to develop Reading and Comprehension Skills for Learning of English

B.Raja Shree

Department of English, Muthayammal College of Arts & Science, Namakkal, India
rajiprakash94.18@gmail.com

Abstract— Vocabulary learning is an important and indispensable part of any language learning process. The author of this thesis focuses on effective vocabulary teaching strategies in the English for Academic Purposes ESL classroom. Drawing on findings obtained from observing three English for Academic Purposes ESL classrooms across the U.S.A, several current databases and his personal experience as a teacher and learner, the author discusses various effective vocabulary teaching strategies in the English for Academic Purposes classroom which could greatly assist English language learners in their journey of language acquisition and therefore expedite the language learning process.

The main purpose of this study is to cultivate extensive reading habit in English as well as to encourage knowing the culture norms of the targeted language by using the effective & popular newspaper as a teaching tool. The work was based on Descriptive as well as Analytical study as a result of the research carried out with the help of a questionnaire conducted that has been statistically calculated in the form of percentages to the averages of Libyan and Indian participants (students and teachers) who read newspaper and reasons that make the others not read it, through this research the researcher is able to identify as well as see the significant advantages and benefits in using newspaper as teaching material/tool. At the same time, there are a few disadvantages that teachers and students should be aware of when using newspaper. Therefore, the researcher has seen that the use of English Newspapers will certainly encourage and motivate the students and help them to perfect their reading and comprehension skills.

Keywords— *Newspaper, Reading and Comprehension, Teaching Materials, Schools and Vocublary.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The present paper is a study on the significance of using newspapers that may contribute in increasing reading and comprehension skills for learning English as a second language. The ability to read is one of the basic necessities of modern day life. In day-to-day life people encounter material for reading either in their first language or a foreign language. With the instances in normal day-to-day life that require a person to read a written text being numerous, reading becomes essential for everyone. The purposes of reading are not only demand the capacity to decode printed or written letters but also to understand the meaning of words in the given context. Thus reading assumes much significance in day-to-day life.

Teachers in education rely mainly on textbooks that are mostly outdated. These textbooks are not rich in providing variety in the use of vocabulary as well as in all aspects of life. So, the students tend to use only the words that they learn from the textbooks. For example, most of the books that are used at Libyan secondary schools include short stories that have direct questions which need to be answered along with grammar tasks at the end. There is no social interaction among the students or their teachers in the class except for the answers to the direct questions. This is only the activity in the reading and comprehension class at these schools. The newspaper articles are been to be highly motivational for students of all ages and students enjoy the variety of reading and visual material included in the newspaper, teachers will help their students comply with state educational standards and prepare them for both standardized tests and real life situations by using newspaper articles and photos in conjunction with specific strategies and rubrics. Therefore, the important function of modern education which is to teach students to use many informational resources available, including the newspaper as a current reference can be achieved.

The study identifies reading and its relation to comprehension as well as the importance of both reading and comprehension for learning English as a second language. The researcher was also able to include the importance of extensive reading regarding the content that he could analyze with the use of newspaper that could develop reading and comprehension skills for the targeted



students. The researcher also indicates the benefits of the newspaper as well as the advantages and disadvantages of using newspaper as teaching material with the aspects that the effective types of newspaper should contain.

A. The role of reading in learning English as a Second Language

After talking about the importance and purposes of reading in general, we will now move on to the importance of reading in English for students of English as a Second Language. Students whose first language is something other than English are referred to as "English Language Learners" and are often designated as *ESL* in order to receive accommodations and support with their language acquisition goals. English as a Second Language *ESL* or *TESL* also refers to specialized approaches to language teaching designed for those whose primary language is not English.

B. The importance of using newspaper

The newspapers are regarded one of the most reliable, easily available, less expensive and effective sources of sharing information and knowledge. The newspapers offer us a wide range of knowledge and in-depth analysis of incidents and events. Generally, people prefer to read out the newspapers along with their morning cup of tea or breakfast. The newspapers are published in various languages with a great number of supplements and editions. The reputation of any newspaper largely depends upon its circulation, number of editions, printed copies, and number of readers, coverage and scope. Reading newspapers on regular basis is considered a good habit.

C. Newspaper as a tool to improve reading and comprehension skills

The use of authentic material such as news articles in the ELT classroom will turn the newspaper into a powerful tool for encouraging participation and effective sharing of opinions and knowledge, improving reading and comprehension skills and enhancing the knowledge of current affairs for the learners of English as a Second Language. Through the fresh learning tool (English newspapers) of daily news, editorials, features and even advertising, students at the different grade levels can learn educational concepts like math and cost comparison skills, history and current events and how they shape our world, all these things can be occurring while improving reading and comprehension skills. Firstly, the English language learners are doing two jobs at the same time; they are learning a new language (English) while learning new academic concepts. They are literally moving between two different worlds. Secondly, ELLs have to work harder and need more scaffolding than the average native English-speaking student who has an age- and level-appropriate command of the English language. Scaffolding is providing support for students as they learn new skills or information (Cummins, 2000, as cited in Taylor, 1990). Thirdly, academic vocabulary is often very technical and less frequently used than conversational English used in the English language classroom and students are constantly required to use higher level language function such as analyzing, predicting, explaining and justification. Due to the enormous and alarming gap between the acquisition of basic conversation English and academic English, it is therefore important for teachers in the English for Academic Purposes ESL classroom to be knowledgeable about the most effective and current teaching strategies in vocabulary instruction and provide constant academic scaffolding to ELLs.

Since the focus of this study is on effective vocabulary teaching strategies employed by teachers in the English for Academic Purposes classroom, it is crucial to highlight the importance of academic vocabulary instruction in the English for Academic Purposes ESL classroom. Stahl (1992, as cited in Taylor, 1990) found that vocabulary instruction directly improves comprehension. He points out that, as the difficulty of words in a text increases, understanding of the text decreases; therefore it is critical for students to have a deep understanding of academic vocabulary in order to understand new concepts. He also states that we use academic vocabulary to communicate to the world what we know. Individuals who can express themselves precisely with appropriate language are more likely to make a positive impression on their employers, colleagues and clients (Cummins, 2002, as cited in Herrel, 2004). McKeon (2002, as cited in Zwiers, 2008) argues that academic vocabulary enables us to communicate our needs, increases our chances that our needs are fulfilled and enables us to understand the needs of others. Furthermore, vocabulary is positively related to higher-status occupations (Marzano, 2004, as cited in Zwiers, 2008). I agree with Marzano; from personal experience, I discovered that vocabulary acquisition is essential to academic, social and professional success. Once again the teacher's role in ensuring this success is critical.

D. What is Academic Vocabulary ?

Academic vocabulary is the language that is used by teachers and students for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge and skills which includes learning new information, describing abstract ideas and developing student's conceptual understanding (Chamot and O'Malley, 2007 as cited in Herrel, 2004). Academic vocabulary is used across all academic disciplines to teach about the content of the discipline; e.g. Students who study chemistry are required to know the chemistry concepts. According to Marzano (2004, as cited in Adger, 2002) academic vocabulary includes general academic terms such as analyze, infer and conclusion. It enables students to understand the concepts and content taught in schools; it is critical for students to have a deep understanding of the content vocabulary in order to understand the concepts expected throughout the content standards (Schmidt, 2005, as cited in Zwiers, 2008).

Academic vocabulary helps students to convey arguments and facilitate the presentation of ideas in a sophisticated manner. It prepares students for academic success by helping them preview, learn and practice vocabulary from Academic Word Lists (Cummins, 2002, as cited in Zwiers, 2008). According to Cummins (2002, as cited in Zwiers, 2008) the main barrier to student comprehension of texts and lectures is low academic vocabulary knowledge, due to the subtechnicality of the academic language. He points out that academic vocabulary is based on more Latin and Greek roots than the daily spoken English vocabulary. Cummins (2000, as cited in Zwiers, 2008) also states those academic lectures and texts use longer and more complex sentences than are used in spoken English. Cummins (2002, as cited in Zwiers, 2008) suggests that academic vocabulary contributes to the development of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in ELLs which enables them to apply the language, using abstractions in a sophisticated manner. It also enables them to think and use language as a tool for learning.

E. Speaking vocabulary

This refers to all the words an individual can use in speech.

Lexicon also refers to a reference book containing an alphabetical list of words with information about them and can also refer to the mental faculty or power of vocal communication (McCarthy, 1990, as cited in Taylor, 1990). According to McCarthy (1990, as cited in Taylor, 1990) the role that mental lexicon plays in speech perception and production is a major topic in the field of psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics. Celce-Murcia and Larsen Freeman (1999) define lexicon as a mental inventory of words and a productive word derivational process. They also state that lexicon does not only comprise of single words but also of word compounds and multi-word phrases (Celce-Murcia and Larsen Freeman, 1999). According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen Freeman (1999) lexical units function at three levels: the level of the individual word, word compounds and co-occurrences and conventional multi-word phrases. Nations and Waring (2000, as cited in Adger, 2002) on the other hand, classify vocabulary into three categories: high frequency words, general academic words and technical or specialized words.

Academic comprehension improves when students know the meaning of words. Words are the building blocks of communication. When students have a great vocabulary, the latter can improve all areas of communication, namely speaking, listening, reading and writing. Current models of reading in the English for Academic Purposes ESL class room consider vocabulary knowledge an important source of variation in reading comprehension, because it affects higher level language processes such as grammatical processing, construction of schemata and text models (Adams and Collins, 1977 as cited in Zimmerman, 2007). When students have a higher academic vocabulary development, they can tolerate a small proportion of unknown words in a text without disruption of comprehension and can even infer the meaning of those words from rich contexts. English language learners who experience slow vocabulary development are less able to comprehend text at grade level. Such students are likely to perform poorly when assessed in various areas and are at risk of being diagnosed as learning disabled. I am cognizant of the fact that vocabulary acquisition, semantic development and growth of word knowledge are currently being studied in several interesting ways, hence the research that is presented here is to complement and augment these studies by introducing effective vocabulary teaching strategies in the English for academic purposes ESL classroom that will expedite the vocabulary development in ELLs.

Without some knowledge of vocabulary, neither language production nor language comprehension would be possible. Thus the growth of vocabulary knowledge is one of the essential pre-requisites for language acquisition and this growth of vocabulary knowledge can only be possible when teachers employ effective vocabulary teaching and learning strategies which are the objectives of this research thesis. With the large deficits in second -language vocabulary of ELLs, it is crucial that students in the



English for academic purposes classroom to first have a semantic understanding of what academic vocabulary is before they even learn it.

II. TEACHING WORD FAMILY

Development in lexical semantics and the mental lexicon have prompted the development of the semantic field theory, semantic networks or semantic grid strategies, which present and organize words in terms of interrelated lexical meanings (Gus and Johnson, 1996:64). The semantic field theory suggests that the lexical content of a language is best treated not as a mere aggregation of independent words or unstructured list of words but as a collection of interrelating networks of relations between words (Stubbs, 2001). The meaning of most words is governed, in part, by the presence in the language of other words whose semantic functions are related in one or more ways to the same area of situational environment or culture (Robins, 1980).

A simple example of a semantic field is the set of kinship terms: father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, uncle, aunt or the various body parts learned as a subset. Words may be grouped together (related to each other) according to different criteria. Animals for example may be grouped in terms of physical or perceptual features such as pet, wild, food etc. According to How (1999) individual word meanings exist within systems of related meaning (kinship) and knowledge of the meaning relations among a set of words would seem to follow from knowledge of the constituent meaning. There is ample psychological evidence that supports this assumption (How, 1999). Adults are better at remembering words from a list that contain semantically related subsets than words from lists of unrelated words. Semantic interrelationships among words cannot be acquired incidentally through reading. They need direct systematic instruction, which enables the learner to recognize the semantic relatedness between words. This strategy also enhances retention of vocabulary learned in this manner (How, 1999).

EFL students are inefficient readers (Grundy 1993). They often try to process what they read piece by piece and this can greatly inhibit their efforts at getting even a general understanding of a newspaper article. They tend to read each sentence, two or three times in order to process it and this approach obviously increases in complexity as they continue reading the article. Each time they encounter additional information, it is added to what has already been read, and this brings about a re-structuring of the whole, which may require the student to return to something they have already read in order to clarify the new sentence. In addition, ESL/EFL students tend to approach newspapers articles in class from the perspective of form -- grammar and vocabulary, rather than the purpose for which it was intended, to inform. Students need to be reminded to focus on meaning rather than form.

III. ACADEMIC APPROACHES

In my research, I have found two proficiency theories representing the academic language approach: the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA). Researchers indicate that academic language proficiency is the level of skill that a student has to learn academic languages used in textbooks and lectures. Jeff Zwiers defines academic language as “the set of words, grammar, and organizational strategies used to describe complex ideas, higher-order thinking processes, and abstract concepts” (20). It includes “the understanding of the semantic and syntactic features of language such as vocabulary items, sentence structure, and transition markers” (qtd. in Brock et al. 12). Jim Cummins defines academic language proficiency as “the extent to which an individual has access to and command of the oral and written academic registers of schooling” (67).

Within these concepts, academic language consists of three dimensions: linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural/psychological dimensions. The *linguistic dimension* is the fundamental stage “which examines existing linguistic forms as well as potential linguistic forms that can be created in order to name new concepts” such as phonology, vocabulary, grammar, and sociolinguistics (Valeontis and Mantzari 2). The *cognitive dimension* includes “the components of background knowledge, the ability to engage in higher-order thinking, and the ability to use strategies to engage with text” such as underlining, highlighting, paraphrasing, outlining, identifying the main ideas, and anticipating and answering questions (Brock et al. 15). The *sociocultural dimension* refers to the social practices imbedded with norms, values, beliefs and attitudes. It “enables learners to understand the produced sentence appropriately” because “all speakers adjust their speech style according to the social situation and the topic of discussion” (Scarcella 17). CALP and CALLA both include all of the three academic dimensions.

A. Limitation of the Academic Approach

Though the previous two approaches are used in academic proficiency, they deal with a broad area of L2 learners' academic levels. The reason is found in the difficult process of proficiency that English learning students often confront. The most difficult area for them can be seen in the reading process of students who have limited surface level proficiency. Chamot and O'Malley describe the task problem, caused from the surface level, in the following passage:

Cognitively demanding task requires learners to manipulate concepts, solve problems, and learn new and often challenging information. These tasks require specialized language and language structures that vary depending on the content area. (84) In addition, Adamson argues that "language proficiency consists of more than just mastery of linguistic forms; it includes reasoning ability as well" (29). Both authors demonstrate that it is not necessary for language learners to study language itself, but that they need upgraded learning skills (i.e. cognitive and reasoning processes) to achieve proficiency.

- **A Basic Newspaper Article Lesson :** Here I show the students the headline and follow up with the five Ws to have the students speculate on the possible content of the article. I also encourage the students to draw on their general world knowledge.
- **The Story :** Initially, I re-introduce the five Ws by having the students write down the question words in columns on a piece of paper, then I have the students read the story lead to see if they can determine the answer to the questions of who, what, where, when, and why. I then follow this up by having the students compare their notes in pairs. Next, I have the students read the underlined parts of the story to get the gist of the story (I usually underline these myself before class) and then I follow this up by having them go through the five Ws either in pairs or as a whole class activity. By this stage the students usually have a good sense of who, what, where, when. It is also important to enforce strict time limits in all reading stages (one to three minutes, depending on the article).

Over the past two centuries a media culture has emerged in which newspapers, radio, television, film, and electronic communication provide materials that help us shape our view of the world. We are immersed from cradle to grave in a media and a consumer society and thus it is important to learn how to understand, interpret and criticize its meanings and messages (Kellner, 1995). Thus, in the area of teaching English as a foreign language, gaining critical media literacy has become increasingly important, especially since English is one of the most predominant languages used in our mass-mediated culture. This article focuses on the medium of newspapers as a practical tool for enhancing media literacy in the foreign language classroom, and as a resource for creative task-based classroom activities. In what follows I discuss: (1) the possible benefits of using the newspaper in the foreign language classroom, and (2) practical guidelines for introducing and using the newspaper in the classroom.

B. Advantages of Using the Newspaper in the Foreign Language Classroom

There are a number of important points to make about the use of newspapers in the English foreign language classroom:

- **Availability:** English newspapers are available on a daily basis. Moreover, nowadays most newspapers are available on line (see Appendix A), so learners can easily access various English newspapers and magazines from around the world.
- **Variety:** Newspapers contain a wide variety of text types. They are therefore a natural source of many of the varieties of written language that become increasingly important as learners develop proficiency in the foreign language. Moreover, the variety of topics found in the newspaper appeal to almost everybody, thereby motivating students to learn and seek further information.
- **Access to Information:** Newspapers and news databases contain a wealth of materials, which can be searched. By using newspapers and computerized databases students can obtain information on different topics. Thus, the use of newspapers in the classroom may help learners master skills and strategies needed to access and obtain information.



- **Content** : Because newspapers deal with the outside world, their use in the classroom bridges the gap between the outside world and the classroom. By using the newspaper students widen their horizons, learn about other cultures and societies and enrich their general knowledge.

C. Integration of Enabling Skills

Using the newspaper in the classroom enables learners to integrate all skills necessary for learning a second or foreign language in a natural way. Students talk about what they read in the papers; make judgements about it; listen to the judgements their classmates have made and can write about articles they have read. Newspapers, thus, provide a stimulus to a wide range of communicative, task- based, and integrated activities.

- **Learner Independence** : Using the newspaper in the classroom lends itself very easily to task- based activities, e.g., research work, presentations, class debates, etc. The use of newspapers as an instructional tool may thus provide learners with opportunities to make choices about their learning, and encourage team work and learner autonomy in the classroom.

D. Authenticity

The use of newspapers in the classroom enables meaningful and interesting communication. Not only are newspapers authentic materials in themselves, but they also evoke an authentic personal response when we read them. By using the newspaper in the classroom the process of language learning becomes relatively natural as learners are given real-world opportunities (or simulations) to apply or adapt knowledge. In sum, newspapers are an invaluable resource in the foreign language classroom. They provide learners with exposure to the target language as well as ample opportunities for using it.

E. Practical Guidelines for Using the Newspaper in the Classroom

Before using the newspaper in the classroom, students should be familiarized with the components of the newspaper. Introduce the students to the various sections of the paper (e.g., News, Sports, Entertainment, Opinion, Health, Arts, Books, Science, Technology, etc.) as well as with vocabulary items connected with the newspaper (e.g., editor, scoop, reporter, correspondent, feature, etc.). A suggested classroom activity for introducing the newspaper in the classroom is presented in Appendix B.

Students need to develop metacognitive knowledge of the processes involved in reading the newspaper. It is thus recommended to familiarize students with the elements of media texts and journalistic writing (e.g., headlines, captions, sources, lead paragraphs, keywords, images, signs, etc.). In addition, it is important to explain the difference between *fact* and *opinion* and the ways they are used in the context of the newspaper. Students should be encouraged to read, analyze and criticize newspaper as well as other media texts (e.g., radio, television, etc.) in order develop critical media literacy and to learn how to resist media manipulation. After the students have been acquainted with the main features of the newspaper, and have enhanced the relevant skills and strategies, they can gradually perform more complex task-based activities (Willis, 1999) based on the newspaper. These kinds of activities are student-centered. The role of the teacher is primarily to guide and facilitate the activity-based learning process. Some of the main factors that the teacher should take into account when designing a task are: students' level and ability in English, contextual factors, task complexity, students' prior knowledge and experience, self access materials (e.g., dictionaries, clear reference grammar books, other media, etc.), task duration, familiarity with the text type, strategies and skills needed to perform the task, (e.g., oral or written presentation skills), assessment tools, etc. Suggestions for classroom activities and tasks are presented in Appendix C.

It should be noted that teaching students effective reading strategies is an essential element in using the newspaper in the classroom. Thus, the teacher should help students develop a complex repertoire of the necessary reading strategies (e.g., skimming, scanning, getting the main ideas and supporting details, making inferences and understanding implicit information, exploring text organization, identifying bias, identifying and interpreting imagery, summarizing the text critically etc.). Developing an awareness and understanding of the processes involved in reading the newspaper will enable students to react and respond to the newspaper in a more insightful and critical manner as well as to perform their tasks more successfully.



IV. CONCLUSION

I have found that combining some of the many techniques that exist into a content free newspaper article lesson plan to be advantageous. I am able to get through my lesson plan efficiently within my forty-minute lesson. The plan has allowed me to better achieve my teaching goals and it helps me to prepare newspaper article lessons quickly. Students are motivated and readily take on the challenge that reading newspapers present them with.

References

- [1] Adger, C.T. (2002). *What teachers need to know about language*. McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- [2] Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, D. (1999). *The grammar book*. An ESL/EFL teacher's course. 2nd edition.
- [3] Henrikson, B. (1999). *Three dimensions of vocabulary development*. Cambridge University Press.
- [4] Herrel, A.L. (2004). *Fifty strategies for teaching English language learners*. An ESL teacher's tool kit. 2nd ed. Winnipeg, Canada. Penguin Publishers.
- [5] Taylor, L. (1990). *Teaching and learning vocabulary*. Herefordshire, UK: Prentice Hall international.
- [6] Zimmerman, C.B. (2007). *Vocabulary learning methods*. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- [7] Zwiers, J. (2008). *Building academic language*. Newark International Reading Association.
- [8] Antepara, R. (2003). Using News Stories in the ESL Classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 9 (12).
- [9] BAMFORD, J. & R. R. DAY (1997). "Extensive Reading: What is it? Why Bother??" *The Language Teacher Online*, 21/5, 6-12. Retrieved 23 August 2004 from <http://www.jalt-publications.org/tlt/files/97/may/extensive.html>.
- [10] Worthy, J. & Broadus, K. (2002). Fluency beyond the primary grades: From group performance to silent, independent reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 55(4), 334-43.
- [11] Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [12] Daly, B (2004) Facilitating discussions of Newspaper articles in the ESL/EFL classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, X (7).
- [13] Cheyney, A. B. 1992. *Teaching Reading Skills through the Newspaper*. Newark: International Reading Association.
- [14] Academic American Encyclopedia 1989. Grolier Incorporated Danbury, Connecticut, Vol. 14.