

EXTENSIVE READING AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPETENCE

The importance of reading skills in the development of proficiency in a foreign language cannot be overestimated. Readers interact with the text calling upon their previous knowledge and experience and acquire the new information.

There are different reading strategies that are related to effective comprehension of texts. Strategies refer to the actions that readers select to achieve their goals.

There exist different ways of reading. Extensive reading involves reading long pieces of text. As learners read, their attention and interest vary – they may read some parts of the text in detail or they may skim through other parts. Extensive reading is rapid reading for main ideas of a large amount of text. Intensive reading is reading for complete understanding of an entire text. Reasons for reading influence how we read, i.e. which reading skill we use. Skimming requires the learner to look for the main idea or the general gist of a passage. Scanning is a quick overview of the text, looking for specific details or information.

Extensive reading teaching and learning are an inseparable part of the language acquisition process. The nature of extensive reading may vary but general characteristics include the following: reading large amount of material (it can be fiction, both novels and short stories, newspaper articles, travel brochures, etc.); reading on a regular basis; reading longer texts, reading for different purposes(professional interest or pleasure); reading as a class activity or individually.

Professional or individual interest can be regarded as an important criterion in selecting texts for extensive reading. Some other factors are as follows: the topic and the length of the text, its type (description, review, narration, comparison, etc.) and a reading purpose. According to Rivers and Temperly the framework for reading purposes and resources may include the following:

- 1) for getting information - readers can be offered or choose themselves travel brochures, catalogues, information leaflets, weather forecasts, advertisements;
- 2) for pleasure - short stories and novels, plays, reviews.
- 3) for expanding knowledge on some topic - newspaper and magazine articles, guidelines;
- 4) for getting and following instructions - maps, route planners, instructions for use, manuals;
- 5) for knowing the international and local news - news articles and reviews;
- 6) for finding what is on and where - programmes and announcements
- 7) for keeping in touch: invitations, letters, postcards, memos, etc.

No doubt, the list mentioned- above includes authentic texts. When a teacher uses this framework for selecting the texts during the study process the learners are provided with different reading purposes and can practise different ways of approaching the text.

Nowadays it is common practice to use a three-phase reading procedure which involves pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities. At the pre-reading stage

students can be encouraged to do number of tasks and answer different questions, for example, to name the goal of the text, to express an opinion about the topic, review one's own experiences or become familiar with some language patterns used in the text. In such a way the teacher prepares the students for purposeful reading. He/she can select the tasks or combine them.

The pre-reading activity may include a discussion in order to raise an interest in the topic. For example, if the text is accompanied by a set of pictures or photos the students can describe and talk about them, predicting the content and the message of the text. They can also express agreement or disagreement with a number of proposals about the topic, answer a set of questions, etc. All this activates the student's prior knowledge of the topic.

As reading is considered to be an interactive process, while-reading activities have been widely used. Their aim is to involve and encourage the students in the process of reading itself. Such activities may be as follows: follow the sequence of ideas, respond to the opinions expressed, make notes, predict the development of events, etc.

Post-reading activities can be varied, much depending of the text itself. They may include spoken or written activities which require the use of the content and language patterns they have met in the text. The students can be offered to take part in the debate, role-play or focus on some linguistic features, for example, vocabulary. In this case the teacher should think carefully what kind of exercises can be used or designed to ensure effective training.

The students can be involved in making up post-reading questions. They work in small groups to check comprehension of the text and construct key questions. The teacher elicits questions from the group, corrects them and then the class selects a set of questions which students answer in their groups. The students can also prepare questions on self-chosen texts individually for other students to evaluate and answer. This kind of peer interaction can be highly motivating. It is worth building different kinds of classroom interaction into reading activities as well as ensuring that students have individual practice in applying the strategies they are learning.

Most of researchers express an opinion that it is necessary to ensure some kind of support for extensive reading. One way of achieving this is to provide time for short interviews with students about their individual reading. The teacher can use this time to recommend books, advise on reading problems, suggest activities and encourage students to reflect on their reading by discussing the books they have read.

Another way of supporting extensive reading is organising book conferences. They can be carried out mainly not to check comprehension but to involve students in a real communicative situation. Alongside with traditional issues and questions of the type: who, what, where, etc. the students should tell about their attitude to characters, writer's manner of writing and others.

J.Parrott advances a useful procedure which he calls "reading syndicates". The students are divided into small groups. They discuss a range of books to be chosen, select those to be distributed among the syndicates. The teacher can facilitate the process by having a list of genres and titles within each genre which are available. Students read their books during a fixed period of time. Then syndicates meet and members recount their reading experience to other students. Such reading syndicates combine motivation of self-chosen books, classroom interaction and recommendation of books to other students.

To sum up, reading activities should aim at building students' ability to engage in purposeful reading of authentic texts, developing competences in a foreign language, acquiring knowledge of the world.

References:

Parrott, J. Reading syndicates: a working model for the language classroom.
Reading in a foreign language 3/2:411-416.