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ON DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

ABSTRACT

The paper includes intensive and critical reading types as well as is known in the world of increasing information and technological advances reading comprehension and critical thinking skills are of key importance.

The article presents some of reading comprehension methods elaborated on the basis of neurocognitive research, and is aimed at developing and fortifying students' reading comprehension abilities.

Methods introduced in the article will make the teaching process and the teacher-student collaboration more productive.

***Key words:** neurocognitive research, critical reading, intensive reading assimilate, creative thinking.*

РЕЗЮМЕ

О РАЗВИТИИ НАВЫКОВ ЧТЕНИЯ ПРИ ОБУЧЕНИИ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

Как известно, в мире растущих информационных и технологических достижений обучение навыкам чтения и понимания, критического мышления приобретает особую важность.

В статье представлены некоторые методы чтения, разработанные на основе нейрокогнитивного исследования и нацеленные на развитие и

совершенствование навыков чтения и их понимание. В статье также рассмотрены интенсивный и критический типы чтения.

Методы, предложенные в статье, предполагают сделать процесс обучения эффективнее, а сотрудничество между преподавателем и студентом более продуктивным.

***Ключевые слова:** нейрокогнитивное исследование, критический тип чтения, интенсивный тип чтения, усваивать, креативное мышление.*

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ԸՆԹԵՐՑԵԼՈՒ ԵՎ ԸՆԿԱԼԵԼՈՒ ՀՄՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ
ԶԱՐԳԱՅՈՒՄԸ ԱՆԳԼԵՐԵՆԻ ԴԱՍԱՎԱՆԴՄԱՆ ԳՈՐԾԸՆԹԱՅՈՒՄ

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

Ինչպես հայտնի է, տեղեկատվական աճի և տեխնոլոգիական առաջընթացի աշխարհում ընթերցանության և ընկալման, քննադատական մտածողության հմտությունների ուսուցումը չափազանց կարևոր է:

Հոդվածում ներկայացված են ընթերցանության և ըկալման որոշ մեթոդներ, որոնք մշակված են նյարդահոգեբանական հետազոտության արդյունքում և նպատակ ունեն զարգացնելու և ամրացնելու ուսանողների ընթերցելու և ընկալելու հմտությունները: Քննարկվում են նաև ինտենսիվ և քննադատական ընթերցանության տիպեր:

Հոդվածում առաջարկված մեթոդները ավելի արդյունավետ կդարձնեն դասավանդման պրոցեսը և դասախոս-ուսանող համագործակցությունը:

*Բանալի բառեր՝ նյարդաճանաչողական ընթերցանություն,
քննադատական ընթերցանություն, ինտենսիվ ընթերցանություն,
ընկալելի, ստեղծարար մտածողություն:*

*Reading furnishes the mind only with materials of knowledge; it is
thinking that makes what we read ours.*

John Locke.

Reading is one of the most important skills that non-English speaking students need. Reading is the basis of students' advancing in other aspects of foreign language competence, such as writing, listening and speaking. Reading is an indispensable part of learning process.

Effective reading presupposes complete comprehension of the material.

Neurocognitive research shows that effective reading and comprehension of the text is provided by such brain activities as thinking, working memory, metacognition.

Thinking constructs meaning during reading, producing understanding that stimulates additional thought, promotes deeper understanding. Roe Smith and Burns define reading comprehension as understanding and identify four different types of comprehension: literal (acquiring directly stated information), interpretive (deriving implied ideas in the text), critical (comparing ideas from the text with known standards) and creative (going beyond the text to develop new ideas). Three of these types – interpretive, critical and creative are considered “high-order comprehension” and require analysis, interpretation and synthesis. Reading beyond the literal level requires cognition. (Roe, Smith and Burns, 2005)

Mursell states, there is one key idea which contains in itself the very essence of effective reading and on which the improvement of reading depends: “Reading is reasoning, when you read properly, you are not merely assimilating. You are automatically transferring into your head

what your eyes pick up on the page. What you see on the page sets your mind at work, collating, criticizing, interpreting, questioning, comprehending comparing. When this process goes on well, you read well. when it goes ill, you read badly". (Mursell, 1951)

Working memory receives and processes data linking them with already known or understood concepts, creating a meaning. In connection with this, analogies provide working memory's content and functioning. They activate working memory processes. Ruef points out the benefit of including analogies in the learning process. An analogy relates something new with something known, mirroring working memory processes. Using analogies engages students' working memory processes establishing foundation of understood concepts upon which new concept understanding may be constructed. The analogy habit networks the mind. (Ruef, 1998).

Metacognition a neurocognitive process, directs attention to understanding and evaluating one's own thinking. Costa and Kallik define metacognition as knowing one's knowing. Metacognition involves revising and editing one's own ideas to change direction, to improve performance or to gain confidence in previously drawn conclusions. (Costa and Kallick, 2000).

Halpern thinks that through metacognition students recognize relevant and irrelevant information and can direct attention accordingly. (Halpern, 2003).

Many researchers argue that reading in a foreign language is similar to reading in the first language.

Goodman points out that reading processes are universal for all the languages since making meaning from written texts happens in all of them (Goodman, 1998).

Zuniga admits that reading in a first language and in a foreign language are processes that share many things as well as involve significant differences. Reading in a foreign language implies certain linguistic aspects such as the difference between writing systems and sounds or the lack of

knowledge and competence in the foreign language. In fact, problems in handling the code (vocabulary and grammar) can be obstacles in the comprehension process. Moreover, the construction of meaning is hampered due to the absence of a cultural context, from which the reader can build the message. (Zuniga, 2001).

Goodman defines reading as a receptive language process. He states that reading is a psycholinguistic process, which starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning constructed by the reader. He argues that the writer encodes thought as language and the reader decodes language to thought. (Goodman, 1998).

The above-mentioned aspects point out that developing reading comprehension activity is a very complex process and implementing comprehension strategies in the classroom is challenging and very responsible work.

We shall dwell upon some instructional methods which activate reading comprehension activity and makes educational process more effective.

Explicit instruction.

According to this method a task is partitioned into manageable steps, the systematic practice takes place and a teacher feedback is provided at each step. Explicit instruction presupposes systematic presentation of a comprehension through thinking skill, such as identifying a sequence of events, recognizing cause and effect, drawing conclusions. Students are systematically directed by the teacher by asking a series of questions prompting and guiding them.

Students are given a reading comprehension assignment, then they are asked to speak about cause and effect relations and answer the questions: why did it happen? How did it happen? and so on.

Explicit instruction enables students to identify relationships within the text, answer correctly comprehension questions, discuss and retell the text successfully.

Student practice.

It is important that students should practice reading aloud activity.

Duke and Pearson are of the opinion that students regularly involved in thinking aloud activity provide greater reading comprehension ability due to three instructional benefits:

1. Thinking aloud helps control impulsiveness, preventing students from drawing unsupportable conclusions while reading.
2. Thinking aloud provides an opportunity for feedback as the teacher can prompt or redirect students during the thinking process.
3. Thinking aloud promotes self-monitoring of comprehension.

(Duke and Pearson, 2002)

Instructive feedback.

Thinking aloud creates opportunities for instructive feedback. Instructive feedback involves teachers and students in discussing current proficiency levels and projecting the ways of enhancing achievement. Teachers evaluate the situation, control reading comprehension, elaborate further steps to raise proficiency level.

It is noteworthy mentioning that students work in *small groups*, exchanging ideas, points of view, positions after covering texts in the classroom. Small group interactions foster the cognitive activity and improve reading comprehension. According to Reznitskaya and Anderson, “through collaborative reasoning” students increase mental activity, promoting mastery of comprehension thought processes. (Reznitskaya and Anderson, 2002)

The next and a very essential point is the *literature*, the *textbooks* and *additional materials*, which are to be used by teachers.

Literature must represent appropriate levels of text complexity and motivate students.

Peterson states that literature characterized by readability levels lower than current student capacities, fails to promote development in several comprehension-related abilities, such as vocabulary and fluency. Literature beyond the students readability level prevents the application of

comprehension skills. Literature should fall into a students' zone of proximal development challenging but not frustrating the student. (Peterson, 2001)

Motivation occurs if two factors are present – if there is a reasonable chance of success and if the result is valued. This goal can be reached if a teacher assesses students' level of knowledge, their interests, collaborates with students, utilizes necessary ways and techniques to raise their reading comprehension abilities. Teachers should be flexible. "Humans are motivated when they are successful and when they value a task, reading instruction should emphasize activities that are low in frustration and high in value. (Rocher L. and Duffy, 1982)

In our rapidly developing age students are obliged to elaborate a big bulk of professional literature to select necessary information in a short period of time. It is important that students should acquire intensive as well as critical reading skills. To master the techniques of intensive and critical reading students should have high order comprehension levels: interpretive, critical, creative.

Intensive reading.

The top-down model aims at activating reading process and stimulating readers comprehension of the text. The method is based on psycholinguistic theory and named "a psycholinguistic guessing game". The reader is supposed to select minimal language cues to make hypotheses referring to the text.

The hypotheses are corroborated, rejected, or altered as the work over the text proceeds. The main idea is excluding word-by-word identification and making reading process more effective.

Critical reading.

1. Differentiating between fact and opinion.
2. Identifying the characters and their behavioral peculiarities.
3. Determining cause and effect relation.

Students are required to read extensively on academic courses. They should carry selective work thinking about the purpose for reading at every stage of the research, identifying the parts of the text that possess necessary specific information. They need to relate the information in the text to information they already know. It is concerned with the abstract knowledge structures the reader possesses based on his/her prior experiences and which may be activated in the mind of the reader and utilized as she or he tries to interpret the text. The critical approach to reading is an active skill and helps students interact with the text. This, in turn, aids their understanding of the text and making important decisions about the text they are reading. Full comprehension of a text is an interactive process between the readers' background knowledge and the text.

The most important advantage of intensive and critical reading is to make students flexible readers. The teacher should play a pivotal role showing and directing students: what to read, how to read, provide necessary materials for reading, to raise students' comprehension abilities.

According to Dubin F. and Bycina D., "It's up to the teacher to impart a positive attitude about the activity of reading. Many students need to be introduced to the idea that through reading there lies an entire world of new ideas, fantasy and wonderment". (Dubin and Bycina, 1990)

Reading comprehension instruction helps students meet global challenges, draw meaningful inferences from the overwhelming quantity of information. Acquiring reading comprehension skills students learn more efficiently, research more productively and present logical, informed arguments.

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Նաիրա Ստեփանյան - դասախոս, Եվրոպական լեզուների և հաղորդակցության ֆակուլտետ, անգլերենի թիվ 1 ամբիոն

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