

Sonia Carlota Martínez Abarca ^a; Gioconda Monserrate Aviles Villon ^b; Ana María
Maruri Orellana ^c

Using Content-Based Reading Materials for Academic Reading

*Revista Científica Mundo de la Investigación y el Conocimiento. Vol. 1 núm., 4, septiembre,
2017, pp. 730-743*

DOI: 10.26820/recimundo/1.4.2017.730-743

Editorial Saberes del Conocimiento

- a. Magister en Enseñanza de Inglés como Idioma Extranjero; Licenciada en Ciencias de la Educación mención Inglés; Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral.
- b. Magister en Enseñanza de Inglés como Idioma Extranjero; Licenciada en Ciencias de la Educación mención Inglés; Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral.
- c. Magister en Enseñanza de Inglés como Idioma Extranjero; Licenciada en Ciencias de la Educación mención Inglés; Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral.

ABSTRACT

This text explores the conceptual developments useful as theoretical support to the Project “Metacognitive Strategies in the Teaching and Learning of Reading”, which are related to the notion that reading underlies the work, the strategies (cognitive and metacognitive) and its role in the reading didactics; moreover, some aspects showed are related to the didactic design proposal, the unit didactic, the didactic planning, and the elements that constitute it.

Palabras clave: Reading; comprehension; cognition; strategies; didactics configuration.

RESUMEN

En este texto se abordan algunos de los desarrollos conceptuales que sirven de sustento teórico al proyecto “Diseño, elaboración y validación de una propuesta para la didáctica de la lectura fundamentada en metacognición”, los cuales están relacionados con la noción de lectura que subyace al trabajo, las estrategias (cognitivas y metacognitivas) y su papel en la didáctica de la lectura; de igual forma, se presentan algunos aspectos relacionados con el diseño de la propuesta didáctica como tal, en lo que tiene que ver con la unidad didáctica, la planificación didáctica y los elementos que la conforman.

Keywords: Lectura, comprensión, cognición; estrategias, configuración didáctica.

Introducción.

As it is commonly understood, the reading process is not easy to assess because it is complex and personal. Many communicative events take place during the reading process and the reader has to cope with them trying to comprehend and obtain as much as he/she can understand from the text. There is a close relationship between the reader and the text (Alderson & Bachman, 2000), and the reader's perception of the material that is affected by life experiences and purposes. Reading is a complex strategy, and active process of constructing meaning, not a simple matter of skill application (Grabe (2009). Comprehension requires a dynamic participation of the readers and their ability to seek, organize and reformulate the information in their own words, resorting to their own experiences and background knowledge. It will be shown how the implementation of content-based materials can develop a good academic reading comprehension in learners. This will be proven by analyzing a variety of strategies, skills and types of texts that make the reading task multifaceted and a combination of mental processes, knowledge, and abilities.

First at all, it is necessary to examine the process of reading academic papers separately from that of reading in general. The goal of English Education is now to develop students' academic and professional competence, enabling them to effectively communicate in academic and professional contexts. Thus, to equip students with this ability, the English teachers are expected to develop tailored in-house materials which can best cater to the special needs of their students. While designing new materials can be extremely satisfying, both professionally and creatively, it can also be a complex undertaking posing a number of challenges to the teachers.

Using Content-Based Reading Materials for Academic Reading

Vol. 1, núm. 4., (2017)

Sonia Martínez Abarca; Gioconda Avilés Villón; Ana María Maruri Orellana

There have been a number of accounts in the literature by materials developers of the process they follow when developing materials. Rather surprisingly, as Tomlinson (2003) states, many of them describe processes which are ad hoc and spontaneous and which rely on an intuitive feel for activities which are likely to “work”. However, they say very little about principles of language learning and teaching which guide their writing or about any framework which they use to facilitate coherence and consistency. Conducting needs analysis, formulating goals and objectives, understanding of vocabulary, finding input materials, or creating activities are some of the issues that materials writers face during the materials creation process.

Analysis of needs is the technique for collecting and assessing relevant information to course design: it is the means of establishing the how and what of a course. (Hyland, 2006)

This technique can involve surveying students about their goals and backgrounds; consulting faculty about course requirements and academic tasks; collecting and analyzing students’ assignments as well as authentic target texts; or observing students in their lectures and noting the linguistic and behavioral demands (Hyland, 2006). The choice of these techniques can undoubtedly be influenced by the teaching context (e.g., the time and resources available); however, teachers’ decisions should always be informed by research-based principles. Awareness of these principles is likely to lead to more informed instruction, more effective curriculum planning and materials development and thus more successful learning for foreign language (FL) students.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) establish that materials writers should consider the findings of learning research, decide which of its findings are most relevant and applicable to particular contexts, and then develop a set of criteria and use them as a basis for developing

context-specific materials. This, according to Tomlinson (2003), can help materials designers clarify their own principles of language learning and teaching as well as create more effective and efficient materials.

A key aspect of developing materials is formulating goals and objectives from the data gathered by needs analysis. By identifying students' target English situations, analysing texts assigned in students' mainstream classes, or considering students' learning processes and then focusing on them in instruction, teachers are thought to better match their instruction with students' needs.

In order to improve reading comprehension and learning in academic contexts learners should interact with and actively processing a text. This active interaction with academic texts usually implies the employment of a variety of metacognitive abilities which have been shown to greatly enhance students' academic literacy (Garner, 1992; Kirby & Pedwell, 1991; Schmitt & Baumann, 1990). As Abromitis (1994, p. 4) notes, metacognitive abilities could "help students be more consciously aware of what they learn, situations where that knowledge may be used and the procedures for using it". For more complex academic reading tasks, these abilities involve goal setting, comprehension monitoring, strategy use and strategic processing of a text, inference, background knowledge activation, and the recognition of discourse structure and discourse signaling in texts (Grabe, 2009). It would therefore seem that materials writers need to create materials that support the mastery of these abilities.

The literature on reading highlights the importance of exposing English language learners to multiple genres, particularly academic genres, and explicitly instructing them on the comprehension processes of those genres (Grabe, 2009; Hyland, 2006). Indeed, in the contexts

Using Content-Based Reading Materials for Academic Reading

Vol. 1, núm. 4., (2017)

Sonnia Martínez Abarca; Gioconda Avilés Villón; Ana María Maruri Orellana

where the students have to negotiate a variety of discipline-specific text types, the materials should also serve as the models of academic genres the students have to master (Fitzgerald, 1995). This is because, as the literature suggests, it is the reading purpose and genre that determine the type of the reading process. Moreover, different purposes for reading, and different types of texts (or text genres) being read will also lead to more emphasis either on a text model of comprehension or situation model of interpretation.

In addition, texts that are typically intended for learning purposes should build and reinforce text comprehension as an initial goal; but “when the reader has extensive background knowledge on the topic and the author, and a more evaluative stance towards the text is expected”, reader interpretation should be emphasized (Grabe, 2009, p. 47). For instance, manuals, technical documents, most textbooks, and many science texts will require text comprehension, while literary texts, historical narratives, and news editorials, will require, to varying degrees, a greater emphasis on reader interpretation. Consequently, developing students’ knowledge will help learners to become more successful readers of their disciplines (Hudson, 2007).

The ways that information is conveyed logically and coherently in texts have a strong impact on reading comprehension especially in academic contexts. (Fitzgerald, 1995)

Knowledge of discourse structure helps readers organize the content and promotes reading comprehension. Thus, by learning patterns of discourse structures (e.g., cause and effect, comparison and contrast, classification, problem and solution), students should be able to transfer the knowledge of textual patterns across texts and content areas (Grabe, 2009).

Another important issue is the understanding of vocabulary which help students read and comprehend better. The more vocabulary students know, the better they can decode and understand what they read.

While the study of English becomes a commonplace nowadays, reading in English is becoming increasingly important for the students. They need to be able to read texts in English, not only for academic purposes, but also for their careers. Reading has many beneficial effects in language acquisition. Some researchers believe that reading facilitates language development (Martin-Chang & Gould, 2008). The more a person reads, the more they will develop their vocabulary knowledge. Reading can also help students improve their spelling and writing skills (Harmer, 2007).

Reading is a very complex process that requires many different skills. Hancock (1998) establishes that in reading, comprehension involves understanding the vocabulary, seeing relationships among words and concepts, organizing ideas, recognizing the author's purpose, evaluating the context, and making judgments. Before reading, the teachers need to ensure that the reading passage contain vocabulary and grammar structures that are familiar to the reader or learner. If the level of vocabulary is difficult, then the teacher could introduce other easier words or synonyms to make the text within scope of comprehension.

Studies have accumulated ample evidence for the importance of general knowledge relevant to the content and topic of the text. Readers who have more relevant knowledge of the topic of a text tend to show better comprehension of and learning from the text. It is presumably because relevant general knowledge helps semantic and conceptual processing at various levels, activating relevant semantic feature information, generating correct explanatory and elaborative

Using Content-Based Reading Materials for Academic Reading

Vol. 1, núm. 4., (2017)

Sonnia Martínez Abarca; Gioconda Avilés Villón; Ana María Maruri Orellana

inferences, and facilitating the new information connected to prior knowledge in meaningful and coherent ways (Freeman & Freeman, 2003).

In the context of L2 reading, it is often expected that the student may learn the language of a text in addition to the content of the text. Learning new vocabularies contained in the text may be considered to be a part of learning the content of the text. However, how incidental vocabulary learning occurs through reading and what aspects of the vocabulary items are learned are not completely understood. Incidental vocabulary learning through reading may be affected by learner-related factors (e.g., L2 proficiency, L2 vocabulary knowledge, and L1 background), lexical or text-related factors.

Teachers should also spend time in class doing activities that develop the students' vocabulary knowledge from explicit vocabulary instruction or have students do more extensive reading. In addition, reading skills such as reading around the unknown words and making educated guesses about what a word means are still valuable and necessary skills in reading. After all, reading strategies are something that all language learners learn to use, especially when they encounter difficulties, but vocabulary is something that language learners acquire through the act of reading and studying. In everyday life, the former (reading strategies) are a useful skill, but the latter (vocabulary knowledge) should receive an equal amount of attention because reading comprehension is strongly related to vocabulary knowledge (Joshi & Aaron, 2002).

Teachers should develop more authentic materials that are more closely related to students' specific needs, exposing them to the target language as it is used by the community which speaks it, and which students are expected to master. (Guariento & Morley, 2001)

Sometimes, it is necessary to simplify texts, either for weaker students or for practicing some reading strategies, on the other hand, teachers should be cautious to oversimplify texts because making everything explicit may deprive students of an opportunity to develop their capacity to infer.

Topics relevant to students' current needs should be an important criterion for materials selection. The most effective means of teaching language learners with academic needs could be through content-based teaching (Freeman & Freeman, 2003). Content-based teaching is thematic and involves "a set of related topics (usually three) that generate the coherence of the curricular content" (Grabe, 2009, p. 345). Benefits frequently cited for using it are related with increased vocabulary learning and greater mainstream academic success because learning is contextualized. In addition, repeated exposure to the same vocabulary in different contexts is likely to ensure that many words are assimilated with little conscious effort (Nuttall, 2005). Moreover, content instruction can further lead to the acquisition of reading strategies and develop critical understanding of a variety of written genres (Grabe, 2009).

Once it has been established that selected topics are interesting enough to arouse curiosity and stimulate the mind, teachers should create activities that take into account students' learning styles, encourage the use of appropriate reading strategies (Kuzborska, 2010), and more importantly, make students take an active role in the process of reading by engaging them both cognitively and affectively with texts. "Real-life" tasks resembling the ways in which people read texts in normal life or, with reference to academic classes, the tasks that students encounter in their mainstream classes could promote more meaningful and motivating interactions with texts.

Using Content-Based Reading Materials for Academic Reading

Vol. 1, núm. 4., (2017)

Sonnia Martínez Abarca; Gioconda Avilés Villón; Ana María Maruri Orellana

Effective “real-life” tasks engaging students in reading comprehension can involve speaking and writing. A speaking task role play is considered to be particularly effective when teaching students how to focus on points of view, master the argument presented in the text and prepare to defend it against others. (Nuttall, 2005). Thus, for instance, when teaching economics and business students an article on Corporate Social Responsibility, it could be prepared for by asking students to act out relevant situations in the roles of financial analysts, the government, environmentalists, shareholders of small and large companies, local communities, and the like, all of them with different attitudes.

A writing task that permits a meaningful exploration of texts is a summary (Grabe, 2009). It demands a full understanding of the text, including the ability to distinguish between main points and examples and to perceive the relationship between the various parts of the argument. A functional summary is considered to be of even more value and interest, for it is a summary for a specified and plausible “real-life” purpose, such as, for instance, writing a report for the university supervisor or principal (Nuttall, 2005). Teachers should consider “real-life” tasks rather than comprehension questions in order to create meaningful and effective activities.

In conclusion, there are some issues that materials writers have to take into account during the materials creation process. One of major importance is the reading goal due this may influence how L2 readers process a text. Another issue of importance is the general knowledge relevant to the content and topic of the text. Readers who have more relevant knowledge of the topic of a text tend to show better comprehension of and learning from the text. It is presumably because relevant general knowledge helps semantic and conceptual processing at various levels, activating relevant semantic feature information, generating correct explanatory and elaborative

inferences, and facilitating the new information connected to prior knowledge in meaningful and coherent ways.

In the context of L2 reading, it is often expected that the student may learn the language of a text in addition to the content of the text. Learning new vocabularies contained in the text may be considered to be a part of learning the content of the text. However, how incidental vocabulary learning occurs through reading and what aspects of the vocabulary items are learned are not completely understood. Incidental vocabulary learning through reading may be affected by learner-related factors (e.g., L2 proficiency, L2 vocabulary knowledge, and L1 background), lexical or text-related factors.

To prepare students to read, it is essential to overcome comprehension difficulties and prepare them to be autonomous in the future. There are lots of effective ways to guide them, but, unfortunately, sometimes teachers ignore them and tell students to simply read and hope they become skillful in getting information without planning any strategic steps i.e. organizing ideas, taking notes, using reference skills, etc. In this respect, there are many kinds of effective instructional activities that can help students comprehend and remember what they read and as teachers it is our responsibility to make them available to the students. Reading and being informed is an essential prerequisite to know about new theories and practices that support the design of new materials.

References.

Abromitis, B. (1994). *The role of metacognition in reading comprehension: implications for instruction*. Literacy Research Report, 19, 1–31.

Using Content-Based Reading Materials for Academic Reading

Vol. 1, núm. 4., (2017)

Sonnia Martínez Abarca; Gioconda Avilés Villón; Ana María Maruri Orellana

-
- Alderson, J.C., & Bachman, E.I. (2000) *Assessing Reading*. Cambridge U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Bamett, M.A, (1988). *Reading through context: How real and perceived strategy use affects L2 comprehension*. *Modern Lang.*72, 150-162.
- Fitzgerald, J. (1995). *English-as-a-second-language learners' cognitive reading processes: a review of research in the United States*. *Review of Educational Research*, 65,145–190.
- Freeman, Y., & Freeman, D. (2003). *Struggling English language learners: keys for academic success*. *TESOL Journal*, 12(3), 5–10.
- Garner, R. (1992). *Metacognition and self-monitoring strategies*. In S. J. Samuels, & A. E. Farstrup (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (pp. 236–252). Newmark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. L. (Eds.). (2002). *Teaching and researching reading*. Harlow, UK.: Longman.
- Guariento, W., & Morley, J. (2001). *Text and task authenticity in the EFL classroom*. *ELT Journal*, 55(4), 347–353.
- Hamsa A., Puteh-Behak f.,and Mohd H. (2015) *Examining EFL Secondary Reading Curriculum in Iraqi Kurdist*. *Applied Sciences*, 2015 ISSN 1812-5654
- Hancock, O.H. (1998). *Reading skills for college students* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle Rivers, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Harmer, J. (2007). *How to teach English*. Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hudson, T. (2007). *Teaching second language reading*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hyland, K. (2006). *English for academic purposes: An advanced resource book*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Joshi, R.M. (2005). *Vocabulary: A critical component of comprehension*. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 21, 209–219.
- Joshi, R.M., & Aaron, P.G. (2000). *The component model of reading: Simple view of reading made a little more complex*. *Reading Psychology*, 21, 85–97.

Kuzborska, I. (2010). *The relationship between EFL teachers' beliefs and practices in reading instruction to advanced learners of English in a Lithuanian University context*. Colchester, UK: Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Essex.

Kuzborska, I. (2011) *Teachers' decision-making processes when designing EAP reading materials in a Lithuanian university setting*, English for Academic Purposes, doi:10.1016.

Martin-Chang, S.Y., & Gould, O.N. (2008). *Revisiting print exposure: Exploring differential links to vocabulary, comprehension and reading rate*. *Research in Reading*, 31, 273–284.

Nuttall, C. (2005). *Teaching reading skills in a foreign language*. Oxford: Macmillan Education.

Schmitt, M. C., & Baumann, J. F. (1990). *Meta-comprehension during basal reader instruction*. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 29, 1–13.

Tomlinson, B. (2003). *Developing materials for language teaching*. London: Continuum.