

Strands in Teaching Reading for Social Sciences: Change and Innovation

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Abstract

Due to the on-going process of globalization, our global village is characterized by the use English as a language of widely communication and high-tech environment. Consequently, to fully cope with the new requirements of the globalizing market and workplaces on the international sphere, an urgent need has been called for an immediate command of specialised English courses worldwide.

This paper is an attempt at shedding lights on the underlying challenge the ESP teachers and practitioners may encounter to meet the target and the learning needs of the psychology learners at the department of PSYCHOLOGY- university of Tlemcen. Hence, the major assignment upon which the focus is put on is adapting a frame-work based principally on the new-fangled outlook and tactics for teaching English for psychology making use of both collaboration and cooperation between the subject and content specialists as well as raising the learners' intercultural awareness to become Intercultural Communicatively Competent.

Keywords: *ESP, English for Social sciences, course design, content-Based Approach, intercultural sensitivity;*

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1. Introduction

Owing to the on-growing process of globalization, our global age is increasingly characterized by the use of English as a *lingua franca* between nations of different speaking countries. Additionally, it has multifaceted as well as outstanding impacts on our world; it, in fact, entails the needs for a continuous growing of an international market pressures as well as high-tech environments.

Thus for the sake of fulfilling the needs and requirements of this market-pressure, a shared knowledge of the basic linguistic skills and abilities is believed to play a central role for more successful operations in both academic and workplace environments on the global spheres.

2. Theoretical background

Taking into consideration the importance of ESP / EAP reading skill along with strategies needed to be able to read, understand, learn about something, gathering useful information as well as achieving academic and professional success lead this skill to be characterized as the most essential and required one in any teaching and learning context.

It has been generally acknowledged among educationalists (CHITRAVELU, 1980; BASTERKMAN , 2008) that reading in these contexts is generally seen as similar to that of general English arguing that academic discourses contain certain language features that occur more frequently such as technical and sub-technical terminology. However, they are not specific to these environments and do not make the reading task different from general reading skill. Thus, it should be stated that what can be said about of EFL/ESL reading can be extended to ESP / EAP contexts.

What is more, ESP/ EAP reading are usually considered as just one part of GE reading. Yet, the most striking difference between these two types lies in the students' purposes for reading. In GE Reading, the purpose is more related to enjoyment. However, in EAP/ ESP reading context, ESP/ EAP learners have a clearly *utilitarian purpose* in learning English (MACKAY *et al*, 1978). This explains the fact that they have some clearly determined purposes in attending a reading course. They, for example, need to know how to skim the list so that to select what is relevant to their topics or scan the text to find appropriate information. Hence, FLOWERDEW *et al* (2001:185) believe that these learners need “*to learn about something, get information, learn how to do something*” The following diagram endeavors to summarize the differences and similarities of reading in general English and ESP/ EAP reading:

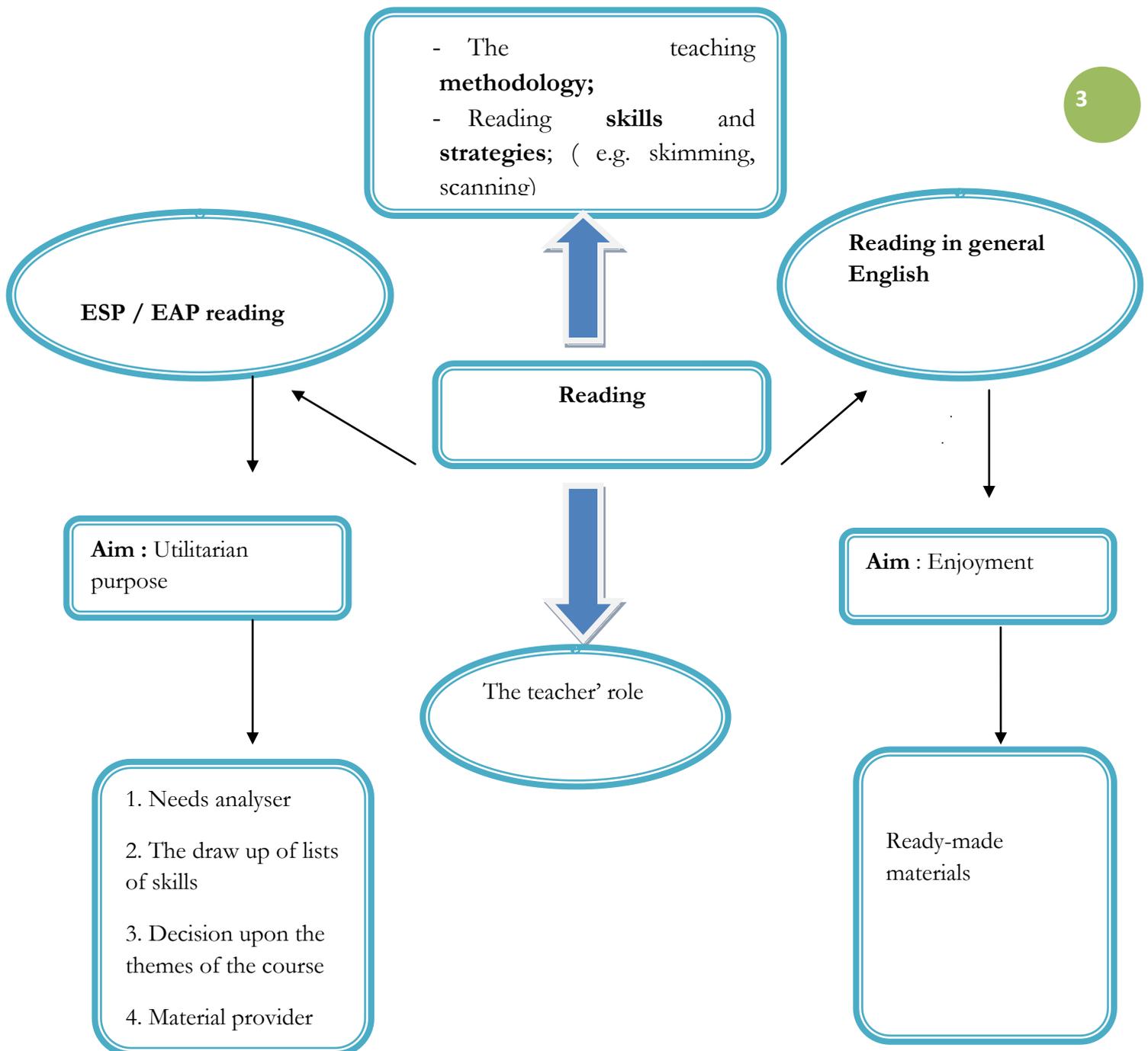


Diagram 1: The Similarities and Differences between Teaching General and ESP / ESP Reading

The ESP literature has clearly reported that the ESP teaching methodologies are not different in kind from any other form of language teaching, however, the difference lies on the role ESP teacher who plays many functions depending on the syllabus. This idea has been viewed by JORDAN (1997:122) who states: “*The role of the teacher will vary according to the type of the syllabus and the course.*” Moreover, it is to be mentioned that designing an ESP / EAP reading course, for instance, is not an easy task as this latter requires a fundamental understanding on the role of the ESP practitioner in selecting teaching materials, reading tasks and strategies.

3. Case study

In this present investigation, the researcher has drawn upon both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools. The goal of this mixed-method in education is, according to Perlesz *et al* (2003), to increase concurrent and construct the validity of the research questions by enabling the researcher to reduce prejudice.

To achieve this end, the research has made use of a semi-structured interview for the purpose of at gathering useful information about the ESP teaching situation that may affect the students’ reading comprehension. This face to face interview has been used to unveil data about:

- Teachers’ selection of content.
- Students’ language proficiency, needs, weaknesses in reading business content.
- Students’ use of reading strategies.
- Teachers’ strategy training.

With regard to the learners’ interests, ten (10) teachers clearly stated that their learners are not interested on the type of the ESP courses provided to them, justifying their answers by stating that they are beginners and they lack motivation as they consider the ESP course as being additional one. For the other teacher, however, the content of the course plays a crucial role, particularly, if it is easy, according to him, this may facilitate the students’ comprehension.

With respect to teachers’ assessment of the students’ language proficiency, there is a general consensus among them that the majority of them exhibit a low level of the English language. This may be due to the fact that nearly all of them received French courses in their university studies. In addition to this, none of them denied the role of language in reading comprehension, except one teacher who apparently tried to deviate from the answer stating that he has no idea!

Concerning the students’ difficulties, one teacher stated: “*my students do not have any difficulty and I always provide them with an easy content.*” The remaining teachers, on the other hand, argued that their learners encounter serious problems in reading supporting their answers by the following reasons:

- Low level of language proficiency,

- Lack of the business terminology,
- Lack of use of the reading strategies,
- Students' negative attitudes towards business English in general.

Furthermore, talking about the application of strategy training in the ESP classroom, a noticeable split of answers has been marked among the teachers, as one of them seems to be unfamiliar with the meaning of 'reading strategies' reporting the types of activities practised during the reading sessions. He, therefore, mentioned some techniques used in language teaching in general like to divide the students into groups with the aim of enabling them to work collaboratively. He reported: *"What I basically do is that I breakdown the text into paragraphs. I split students into groups, then I give each paragraph to each group (...) but during the time that I give them to read, I pass over them and help them"*.

As it could be observed from his saying, this teacher did not really take into consideration the sub-skills and strategies required by his ESP learners for a successful reading comprehension, but rather simply trying to facilitate and assist learners, according to him, understand some difficult words while reading. However, relying heavily on this activity is often negatively criticized in literature. The teacher, in contrast, should preferably train his learners to neglect or rather help them guessing the meaning of the unknown words from context. The remaining teachers, yet, quote some additional reading strategies with no explicit training. The cases in point are:

- Guessing the meaning from context.
- Finding the main idea of the passage.
- Extracting key-words.

As a matter of fact, and as an attempt to see how well the psychology learners make use of the reading strategies taught in their courses, ten (10) teachers out of eleven (11) agreed that the majority of the students are not conscious of them. One ESP practitioner, nonetheless, seems to be uncertain of what happens in his classroom saying that: *"I have no idea"*. This in fact shows the limited vision and perception of a 'novice' teacher expressing no teaching experience in EFL in general, and ESP in particular.

Asking them about the role of content-based themes in reading comprehension, ten (10) teachers maintained that this approach might be of crucial importance supporting their ideas by stating that providing them with such a content, students might be interested and motivated to read. However, they added that no collaboration and cooperation on the parts are provided.

As a final step, and for the aim of eliciting information about the teachers' viewpoints as far as the strategies which might enhance the learners reading comprehension, and enable them to overcome their difficulties, a number of recommendations were proposed summarizing in the following headings:

- Strategies training.
- Focusing on the main importing ideas of the passage.
- Teaching them to write correct sentences.
- The use of short text so that learners will not get bore.
- The integration of the other skills to empower the reading skill such as listening and writing.

To sum up the results obtained from this interview, one would say that the teachers themselves appear to be unaware of the set of strategies that might be applied and useful to teach reading, and thus, process comprehension. All of them seem to entirely focus on only *while-reading* strategies neglecting completely those used for activating background knowledge.

In the light of their responses, one may deduce that the application of strategy-training as far as *previewing* and those of post-reading strategies; the case in point is *summarizing the main point* of the text, are often seemed to be totally absent in these ESP teaching target situations. What is more, the lack of teaching materials lead their ESP learners to be, in general, not motivated and interested in these reading courses.

4. Suggestions and Recommendations

It is worth noting that this skill is commonly regarded as a difficult requirement for the teacher to enable his learners reaching high level of competency, as there is always a strong connection between reading skills, at the one hand, and the linguistic ability, on the other hand. It seems for a great necessary to pay attention to the two directions that may result in successful reading comprehension as summarized in the following diagram:

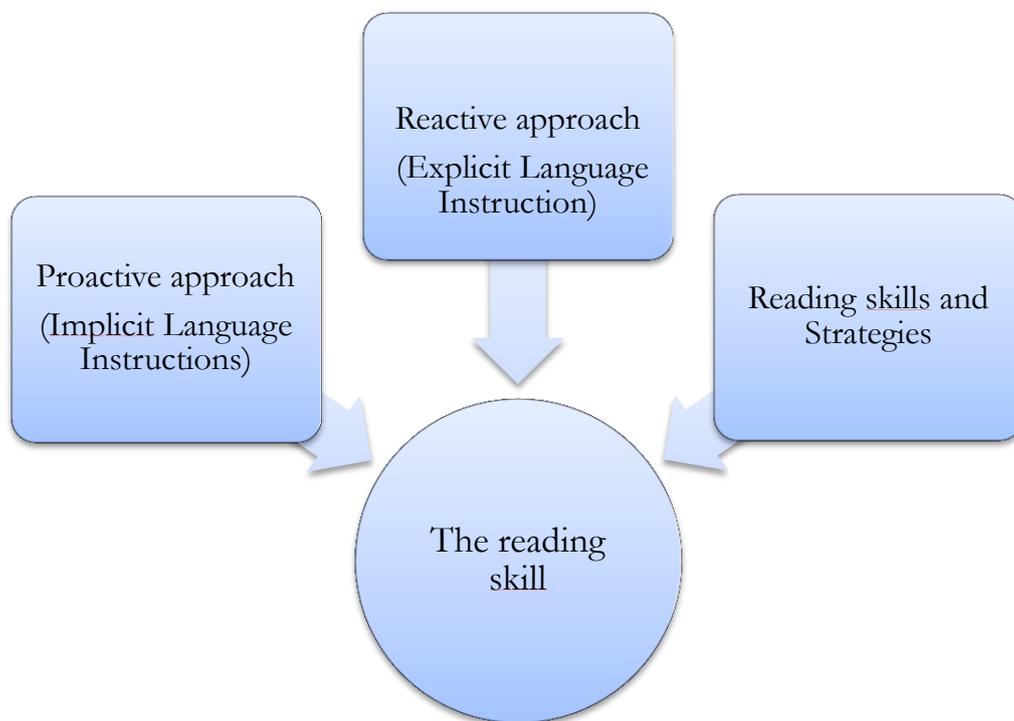


Diagram2 : Directions in Teaching Reading

Bearing in mind that the ESP learners' reading comprehension is not only tied to their reading abilities, but also, and more precisely, their linguistic knowledge, It seems, thus, for a great discernible to noticeably devise a new-fangled framework based on the new perspective for teaching reading incorporating at the same time the grammatical activities that occur more frequently in a given material which may hinder the students' reading comprehension. In this vein, DUDLEY-EVANS *et al* (1998:75) believe:

For reading, where the learners' grammatical weaknesses interfere with comprehension of meaning, the relationship between meaning and form can be taught or revised in context through analysis and explanation. This often includes the verb form, notably tense and voice; modals ...

The consolidation and reinforcement of the ESP students' linguistic knowledge while teaching reading refer to the "...pedagogical effort which is used to draw the learners' attention to language either implicitly or explicitly" SPADA (1997: 72). These implicit and explicit language instructions are articulated around two approaches, notably proactive and reactive approaches.

The former refers to any instructional decision planned by the teacher during the design of the reading courses "...to notice and use target language features that might otherwise not be used or even notices in classroom discourse" (LYSTER 2007: 44). It includes direct teaching of grammatical features found in the academic articles such as tenses; modals; voices; logical connections and articles. The reactive approaches, conversely, includes unplanned interaction between the ESP teacher and the learners. This may take place during the students' answers of the reading comprehension questions by providing them with feedback about their errors (LYSTER, 2007).

Moreover, in any ESP teaching and learning context, the process of teaching reading depends heavily on the teachers' theories, or sometimes on their visions as far as what constitutes an effective instruction. Yet, this may not support a good education. The role of the teacher, in contrast, is to draw upon his past wrong experiences for the purpose of ameliorating and enhancing his practice.

Bearing in mind that learners exhibit certain tendencies, styles and strategies, come with different needs and interests, in instructing reading, the teacher tends to use an *eclectic* approach, drawing on a number of theories and models for effective teaching. Besides, he should be flexible, coping with the challenges of the learners. The tasks should, also, be structured and organized in a way to motivate learners to read through the use of a set of supportive activities for the purpose of bettering the students autonomous in reading comprehension.

In so doing, the teacher should perform a *strategic role*. This requires a consolidating knowledge, an understanding of the subject matter, and the adaptation of possible strategies and materials in response to the immediate aims and objectives of the reading activity.

Additionally, the ESP teacher is required to provide learners with content-based themes by collaboration and cooperation with the subject specialists making use of instructional techniques and the establishment of well-defined goals and objectives. From the other layer of analysis, and for better enhancing the learners' reading comprehension, teacher should pay more importance for strategy-training, introduced in a systematic way by teaching learners how to employ them.

In an attempt at training the readers' strategic competence, prior knowledge activation is believed to be of great significance as it aims, fundamentally, at helping learners to approach the content of the given passage through the use of pre-reading activities that might be of major value to the learners. These may include the following:

- *Answering questions*: as a pre-reading phase, the teacher should ask learners a set of questions, training them to guess what the text is about. This strategy is, widely, believed to be effective as it enables them to relate what they know to the new text.
- *Prediction*: Prediction refers to a strategy used before and while reading, through the use of a number of hypotheses that will be confirmed, saved or modified.
- *Semantic Mapping*: it refers to word-association activity, asking readers in the first step about the topic of the text which will be recorded on the board afterwards. The students, then, are asked to verbalize their thoughts concerning the text being at hand, and later on, arranged them in the form of maps.
- *Brainstorming*: as pre-reading strategy, brainstorming requires the learners to bring what they have in their brains about the topic. This will be accomplished through different ways, including groups and individual brainstorming. It is maintained to be a supportive strategy, aiming at raising the learners' motivation as far as their engagement in meaningful communication.

To sum up, reading for specific purposes is considered as a necessary skill required by the ESP learners for academic success, social interactions, and transmission of ideas. Teaching reading embedded not only comprehension questions but also centre on content-based themes so that learners become acknowledged with the range of topics as well as the different set of terminology required to function effectively in their target environments.

Additionally, the teaching of reading course should not only focus on the text as linguistic entity but rather on the text as a vehicle of information, emphasizing, fundamentally, on its function, enabling learners to understand and learn about the culture of the target language and training the learners to become intercultural competent. This latter should be achieved through the application of some strategies such as noting, comparing and interpreting the target and mother languages.

This, therefore, requires a good accommodation of text selection and effective reading tasks that encourage the learners to read through the use of systematic and supportive reading strategies that facilitate and enhance their abilities to approach content-based themes.

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