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N. Korkem¹

¹Suleyman Demirel University, Kaskelen, Kazakhstan

TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION IN ESL INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS: A CASE STUDY OF INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Abstract. The main aim of this study was to explore how teachers are teaching reading comprehension in English as a Second Language inclusive classrooms. The focus was on teachers' instructions who teach English for inclusive learners. With the introduction of inclusive education, regular classrooms now have learners with various needs which need to be met by regular teachers through various instructional strategies. Therefore, relevant theories and literature were reviewed to relate on what reading comprehension entails and the effective reading strategies. Through this review, various concepts in relation to reading comprehension were clarified followed by a discussion on recent reading comprehension instructional strategies.

Keywords: English as a Second Language (ESL), inclusive classroom, instruction, strategy, reading comprehension.

Аннотация. Основная цель данного исследования состояла в том, чтобы изучить, как учителя прививают навыки понимания прочитанного текста на английском языке в классе с особыми обучающимися, имеющих дефекты здоровья. Основное внимание уделялось инструкциям учителей, которые преподают английский язык в инклюзивных классах. С введением инклюзивного образования, в обычных классах теперь есть учащиеся с различными потребностями в процессе обучения, которые должны получать знания наравне с обычными детьми с помощью различных учебных стратегий. С этой целью были рассмотрены соответствующие теоретические источники по данной проблеме для выяснения того, что значит понимание чтения и эффективные стратегии чтения. В этом обзоре были разъяснены различные концепции, связанные с пониманием прочитанного, после чего последовала дискуссия о последних стратегиях обучения пониманию прочитанного обучающимися с особыми потребностями.

Ключевые слова: английский как второй язык (ESL), инклюзивный класс, обучение, стратегия, понимание прочитанного.

Андатпа. Берілген зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты мұғалімдердің инклюзивті сыныпта қалай ағылшын тілін оқытып оқу және оқыған

мазмұндарды түсіну әдістемелері мен жолдарын үйренуін үйрету. Ағылшын тілін инклюзивті оқушыларға үйрететін мұғалімдердің нұсқауларына назар аударылды. Тұрақты сыныптарда инклюзивті білім беруді енгізу арқылы оқыту процесінде әртүрлі қажеттіліктері бар студенттер әртүрлі оқыту стратегиялары арқылы тұрақты мұғалімдермен кездесуі қажет. Сондықтан, тиісті оқу теориясы мен әдебиеті оқылымды түсінудің және тиімді оқу стратегияларын анықтау үшін зерттелді. Бұл шолу оқылымды түсінуге қатысты әртүрлі түсініктерді түсіндірді, содан кейін оқудың жаңа оқу стратегияларын талқылау болды.

Түйінді сөздер: инклюзивтілік, инклюзивті сынып, оқыту, стратегия, оқуды түсіну.

Topicality of the research

Inclusive education is a new phenomenon in Kazakhstan which like many other countries ratified the “Salamanca Statement for Action on Special Needs in Education” in 2007 (Reference Tool Kit for Child Friendly Schools, 2010). As a result, the education system in Kazakhstan has embarked on developments which are geared to meet the contents of the Salamanca’s five clauses. This has been portrayed in the formulation of a policy on primary education in Kazakhstan which says “*government shall provide an enabling environment for children with special educational needs and for the underprivileged within the conventional school system*”. As such, Kazakhstan has started working towards inclusive education in order to realize Education for All (EFA). These developments have seen the presence of learners with different needs in classrooms under regular teachers. In a country where literacy level is not low (74.8%) according to UNICEF, the basic education target is on reducing illiteracy level. Ability to read is regarded as one of the most important basic skills for survival in day to day lives.

However, the policies for achieving EFA have brought in challenges such as; unqualified teachers, large classes, inadequate teaching and learning materials, methods issues and many others. These challenges have greatly affected the teaching of reading comprehension. English is the mode of communication from standard five up to tertiary level. However, fewer and fewer learners are able to read English text without difficulties let alone comprehend. According to scholars[3,56], the quality of a teacher is what determines the student learning in schools. Some of the researchers are emphasizing that teachers should be in a position of putting into practice the new approaches and skills in order to ensure effective reading comprehension. Therefore, this study is set at enhancing the use of effective instructional strategies for reading comprehension.

Aim of research – is to investigate what methods of instruction do teachers use to ensure that all learners are reading with understanding.

Methods of the research: classroom observations, semi-structured interviews conducted in order to come up with data for thematic analysis which will report experiences, meanings, and the reality of the participants. The nature of the study is qualitative in which narrative description has been used to come up with an understanding of the approaches which regular teachers are using in teaching reading comprehension in English.

As *objective* of the study it is determined to show the effectiveness and implication of instructional strategies in reading comprehension skills in ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom.

The *main problem* that inclusion teachers have is meeting the needs of all learners. With every child learning at their own pace, and with each having their own strengths and needs, classroom teachers may find it difficult to find reading comprehension strategies that work for all students.

Novelty of the current study is provision of required strategies, methods and materials for the promotion of language learning and teaching in the inclusive educational setting. The current work aims at developing approaches, tools and techniques to create meaningful language teaching and learning environment.

Learning to read is very important to enable formal education in which reading to learn takes the central focus [1, 80]. As learning is an ongoing process, it requires one to have the ability to process information. The world of today demands readers who are able to read more and faster than before. There are now more media in which information is being conveyed which require more effective instruction approaches to assist learners to effectively understand the ever-increasing variety of textual formats [2,122]. The basis of it all is the ability to read which has been defined as “the process of deriving meaning from print” [3,59]. On the same, some researchers [4,19] define reading as an interpretation of written word symbols through interaction between graphic symbols which represent language and the readers’ skills in the language with an aid of cognitive and background knowledge.

Following “reading comprehension is about getting the meaning out the text”. On the same Goodman agrees that reading comprehension should be understood as making sense of print [5,62]. All these definitions are stressing on the importance of understanding the written text. However, the RAND definition is relatively broad because it is looking at reading comprehension as a process which involves extracting and constructing meaning. This process is done through the reader’s interaction and involvement with the written text [6]. Therefore, going by RAND’s definition, reading comprehension to be accomplished requires the active participation of a reader, presence of the text, achievability of the activity, and the social context.

There are three elements which are involved in comprehension. A heuristic has been developed to show how the reader, text, and activity of reading interrelate based on social-cultural context in reading comprehension .

According to this model, reading comprehension involves the reader, text, and the activity. All these three elements contribute to the development of reading comprehension and as such they are interrelated. According to RRSg, the reader brings attributes in cognitive abilities, motivation, knowledge, and experiences into reading comprehension ‘the text plus the activity’. The comprehension process may develop through maturity, experiences, and/or classroom instruction. Through classroom instruction, the reader is able to use various strategies in becoming self-regulated and active reader.

«Extracting» is one of the key words in RAND’s definition of reading comprehension. In reading comprehension, a reader has to “interact” with the text in order to “extract and construct” the meaning. That is, the reader brings in the attributes into the text in order to make sense of it. While the reader may use experiences and knowledge to extract and construct meaning, but classroom instruction will help a reader to interact with the vocabulary, structure, discourse, and genre of the text [7]. Despite the instructional orientation which teachers may decide to follow, the intent of reading instruction should always focus on enabling readers to derive meaning from the text [8,34]. Furthermore, according to RAND, the “interaction” will require the reader’s “involvement” and this can be done through “activities”. The act of reading is done for different purposes. Through those various purposes, different processes of reading comprehension such as decoding, linguistic and semantic processing, and monitoring are involved. As such, the reader, text, and activity are indeed intertwined. However, all this takes place within the social-cultural context in which the classroom is part of it.

With social-cultural theory’s understanding, reading is viewed as a social process by taking the context of children in and outside school into consideration. Based on Vygotsky’s understanding, researchers have come up to understand that reading structures social interactions and that social relationships affect reading [9,41]. Vygotsky’s interest in the use of signs and tools in mediating learning and the importance of speech (language) strongly supports the assertion that reading is a social process. In addition to signs and tools in which language dominates, another important notion is the zone of proximal development in which “the knowledgeable other” assist the novice in the manipulation of signs and tools.

There are a number of research-based principles of best practices in reading which have been proven to be effective to all learners [2,121]. Effective reading instruction depends upon the teachers’ knowledge of the content, their experiences in the field, the ability to make decisions about the instruction, and flexibility to interact with other teachers for collaboration [10,73]. Therefore, what is required is for teachers to know their learners and use strategies which will be applicable to their individual needs and most important is to follow the balanced approach which may comprise whole-language approach and skills instruction.

The whole essence of reading is for a reader to make meaning out of the text. Referring to the RAND definition above, to comprehend means to extract and construct meaning through interactions and involvement with the text [6]. While balanced approach can be followed to effectively teach reading comprehension, but teachers should have in mind that they are dealing with learners of different learning styles and needs. As such, [7] teachers should use a variety of reading comprehension strategies such as reciprocal teaching and collaborative strategic reading.

Lastly, it is the classroom environment which also needs to be conducive to learners for effective teaching and learning of reading comprehension. Morrow has argued that organization of an effective classroom is a product of an effective teacher. The presence of posters, charts, books, word walls, and learning centers transform a classroom from a mere four-walled room into a learning environment. This in turn motivates learners and develops in them the interest to learn which in the long run enhances reading comprehension [2,124]. To ensure that all learners are engaged Pressley argues that teachers should connect with learners personally and discourage competition between learners. Furthermore, argument that instructional environment should promote cooperation and not competition. Learners in cooperative situations view problems as challenges for the group and not reflecting their own inabilities [8,36]. All in all, it can be said that to come with a good learning environment, it will still be revolving around the preparedness of the teacher.

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