
PROBLEMS FACED IN DEVELOPING READING SKILLS IN EFL

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Abstract: Reading is the first process a learner faces in school, no matter the language. It takes time to learn letters and reading signs by the help of the teacher or a facilitator at home. However, reading is an art in itself and it requires some skills to become a good reader, especially if one wants to be a public reader. Being primarily a decoding process where the encoder submits the message through a code, and the decoder decodes it and understands it, reading is considered as an independent activity that is carried out in different ways starting from school books, newspapers, magazines and academic textbooks to reading telephone directories and bottle medicine labels. This paper aims to find out the ways of enhancing fluent reading in a foreign language (English) and how to easier avoid difficulties a new learner meets in this process since the school and the teachers have a duty to encourage learners throughout their activity to gain and master reading skill easier, make it more enjoyable and varied process, so that they create their own reading habit and communicate freely and meaningfully for different purpose, discovering and developing their own methods, feelings and ideas of the reading process, through which try to enrich their thinking, speaking and written expression. This study finds that native language teaching also plays a primary role in the development and acquisition of other language reading and speaking skills. There is a research conducted in secondary schools (three of them) in Peja to analyze and have a clear picture of: The pupil’s attitude toward improvement of reading and its importance, reading activities which help learners to improve their communicative proficiency and The usage of native and the target language in classroom, using certain questionnaires distributed to pupils of those schools.

Keywords: foreign language, reading, fluency, communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is the first process a learner faces in school, no matter the language. It takes time to learn letters and reading signs by the help of the teacher or a facilitator at home. However, reading is an art in itself and it requires some skills to become a good reader, especially if one wants to be a public reader. However, there are still different perspectives on what reading is: Reading is primarily a decoding process where the encoder submits the message through a code, and the decoder decodes it and understands it.

Emerald Dechant(1991) asserts that “reading activity includes perception, memory retention, reasoning, evaluation, imagination, organization, implementation, and handling problematic points”. The purpose of reading is to extract the meaning of the text.

Fluent reading does not imply only understanding of author's words, but also the interpretation of the mood, tone, feelings, and attitude of the author. As Keith, Pollastek, (1989, p.23) states, while reading something a learner understands it in three levels: first level, recognition of graphic symbols to a small extent of meaning; secondly, identification of the meaning given to the author by the text and thirdly at the level where personal experiences and personal judgment affect the way he/she analyzes the text.

1.1 Reading processes

Understanding reading processes is perhaps important to understanding the nature of reading, though such a thing seems difficult to accomplish. While reading is a complex organization of structures of a high mental process, its analysis requires the ability to describe many of the most complex functions of the human mind. So, to answer one of the greatest questions in the field of reading what is happening in the visual system and in the human brain during the reading process, we need to put some light on what actually happens in our eyes and mind when we read. First of all one should know the purpose of reading. Reading may be used for at school or work, incidentally during everyday life activities (such as reading the instructions in a cooking recipe), or for pleasure. Each of these types of reading requires a special speed and strategy and then defines whether the reader is an active or passive reader. In the context of school or work, reading is a means of learning necessary information. According to Dechant (1991) reading is done through two main processes: the visual process that involves perceiving information through the eyes under the brain, and the mental process that requires the brain to interpret this information. Meaning exists in every kind of a text be it printed page, TV, electronic reading etc and is interpreted by the reader then taken in by mental images that engage the reader directly with the text by Identify letter features, Combine letter to recognize spelling patterns, Link spelling patterns to recognize words and then proceed to sentence, paragraph, and text- level processing. According to Dechant (1991) “Bottom-up model” the written text is hierarchically organized. The reader first processes smallest linguistic unit, gradually compiling the smaller units to decipher and comprehend the higher

units. It clearly begins as a sensory process. Through the eyes, the reader can recognize letters and words. Good readers use their knowledge of the author's purposes for writing to sort out what is important in a text from what is less important (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991). Knowing why an author wrote a particular text gives readers an idea of what they can expect to find in the text. Reading is strictly a serial process in which lexical, syntactic and semantic rules are applied to the phonemic output which itself has been decoded from the print. In addition to all these Paris (2011) inserts that visualization is the strategy that can help students transform words into higher level concepts, and improve students' focus, attention to detail independent reading skill.

2. TEACHING READING STRATEGIES:

"Strategies make the often invisible work of reading actionable and visible," writes Jennifer Sarravallo (2017) in her *The Reading Strategies Book*. "We offer strategies to readers to put the work in doable terms for those who are still practicing," writes Jen Serravallo. "The goal is not that the readers can do the steps of the strategy but that they become more comfortable and competent with a new skill. According to Sarravallo (2017) the first step is to make sure that teachers are matching the right goal to the right reader, know where to start, as every reader is unique and reading is not a perfectly linear process. Therefore teachers often need to determine which strategies to explain to students during the teaching process. For this reason, the list of the following strategies are presented by Adler, C. R. (Ed.). (2001). Do not forget that reading is the most likely skill required for each child to develop during schooling (Kosovo Education Center, 2019).

2.1. Monitoring comprehension

Learners are able to monitor their comprehension and know what do they understand while reading and what they do not (Serravallo, Understanding Texts & Readers, Responsive Comprehension Instruction with Leveled Texts, 2018). They have strategies to "fix" problems in their understanding as the problems arise.

Comprehension monitoring enables learners to:

- Be aware of what they do understand, Identify what they do not understand and Use appropriate strategies to resolve problems in comprehension.

2.2. Metacognition

Metacognition or "thinking about thinking" strategy. Enables learners to think about and have control over their reading. Before reading, they might clarify their purpose for reading and preview the text. During reading, they might monitor their understanding, adjusting their reading speed to fit the difficulty of the text and "fix" any comprehension problems they have. After reading, they check their understanding of what they read. (Adler, C. R. (Ed.). (2001))

2.3. Graphic and semantic organizers

Graphic organizers illustrate concepts and relationships between concepts in a text or using diagrams. Graphic organizers are known by different names, such as maps, webs, graphs, charts, frames, or clusters (EB, 2019).

Regardless of the label, graphic organizers can help learners focus on concepts and how they are related to other concepts. Graphic organizers enable learners read and understand textbooks and picture books, understand differences between fiction and nonfiction stories, provide students with tools they can use to examine and show relationships in a text as well as help learners write well-organized summaries of a text.

2.4. Answering questions

According to Adler, C. R. (2001) Questions can be effective because they: Give learners a purpose for reading, helps them focus attention on what they are to learn, to think actively as they read, to monitor their comprehension and to review content and relate it to their prior knowledge.

2.5. Generating questions

By generating questions, learners become aware of whether they can answer the questions and if they understand what they are reading. Students learn to ask themselves questions that require them to combine information from different segments of text. For example, students can be taught to ask main idea questions that relate to important information in a text.

2.6. Recognizing story structure In story structure instruction, learners learn to identify the categories of content (characters, setting, events, problem, resolution). Often, learners learn to recognize story structure through the use of story maps. Instruction in story structure improves students' comprehension.

2.7. Summarizing

Summarizing requires students to determine what is important in what they are reading and to put it into their own words. Instruction in summarizing helps learners to: Identify or generate main ideas, connect the main or central ideas, eliminate unnecessary information and finally remember what they read.

Why do some learners have reading problems? According to Dechant (1991) during everyday exposure to spoken language, children learn to speak naturally and, automatically from an early age. Speech communication is a

universal human feature, one of the characteristics that distinguish us as human beings (Hedeager, 2019). Children learn the language initially through hearing, and this is the basis of all other language learning. Children begin to learn the meaning through hearing and develop the knowledge of the world through hearing and repeating new words. Hearing-understanding is therefore an essential basis for reading-comprehension. The more the learners are given chances to read the better will comprehend. Therefore the speed of reading is essential, fast reading cannot be properly understood and caught by the learners, clear pronunciation and slow reading help learners hear better catch, repeat and remember and at the same time enrich their vocabulary. In her book “*Understanding Texts & Readers*” Serravallo (2018) gives an importance on understanding the confusion of readers while reading as the plot and setting, character, vocabulary and figurative language, themes and ideas change across levels. She further points out what to expect from a reader as text characteristics change. Using specific techniques in a certain level of reading is a must. Zemach. D (2016). Writes that skimming and scanning as activities help readers understand the text better, sometimes it is important to read slowly and carefully and sometimes quicker just finding important information during pre-reading reading, and post-reading in all units and for each reading within a unit.

3. RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative method is used to gain information, a survey with a closed - ended questionnaire distributed to the learners .

Research Population: The population of this study is represented by EFL learners in secondary schools of Peja (three of them)

Pupils’ questionnaire / responses

The questionnaire is anonymous. There are six questions, each of them is close ended where the learners have to choose between five options 1-5 (1 less agreed- 5 most agreed)

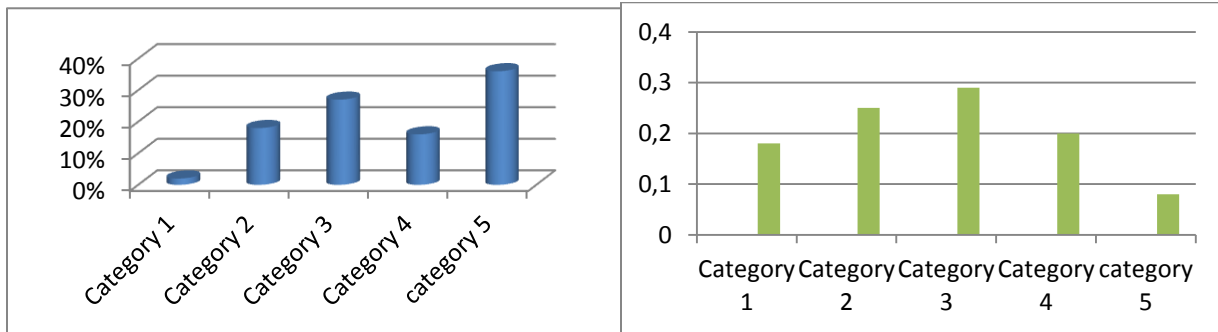


Chart1 Reading is the most important for learning a new language Chart.2 Decoding the alphabet is difficult!

The first question show that the learner’s perception about the importance of reading in improving a foreign language differs. 36 % of the learners agree that reading is basic in learning a foreign language. 16 % of them agree showing that except reading, there are also other aspects that help in learning a foreign language. Only 2 % disagree which show that some learners considered other skills more important than the reading skill, such as speaking skill. While the question in chart 2. shows that the majority of learners find English alphabet difficult to decode, compared to the Albanian alphabet.

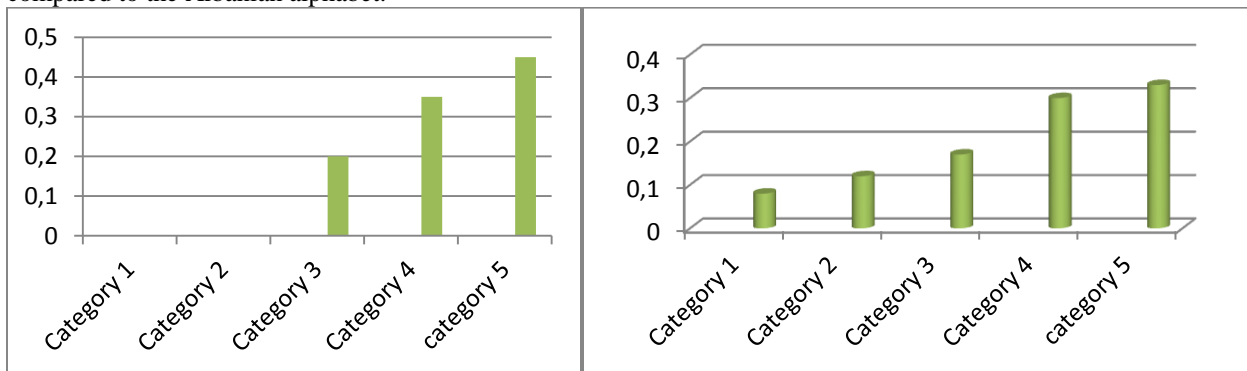


Chart. 3 Do you think practice reading inChart. 4. Being corrected by the teacher helps/classroom helps!

All the respondents agree that activities during the lesson will affect positively in their desire to read more. There is no negative answer in this question. Practice makes perfect still applies to those students. But, being corrected by the teacher was not really preferred by all the learners, there is a number who do not prefer as they feel ashamed knowing that they are doing mistakes in front the others. What they prefer is the teacher read correctly after the learners finish reading so, they catch their mistakes and try not to forget.

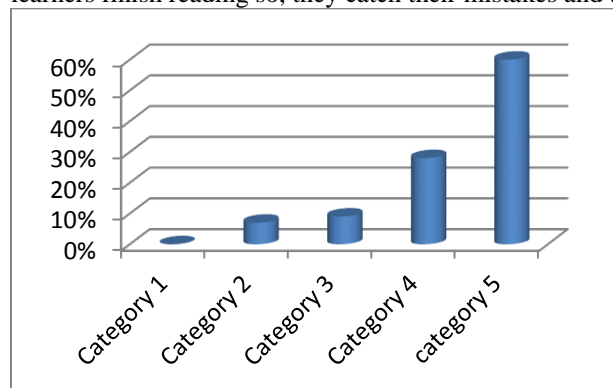


Chart.4. Speed of reading is crucial

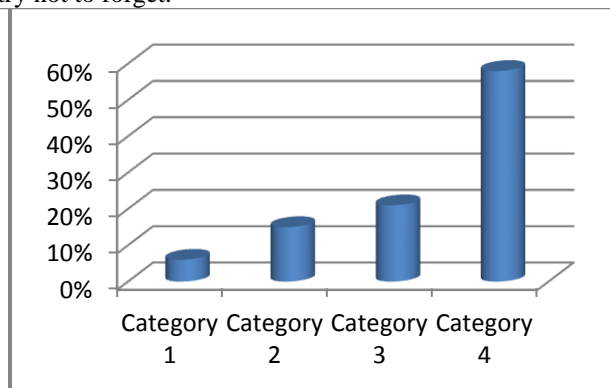


Chart5. Reading more helps a lot!

The teacher should always bear in mind that new learners are not very familiar with the words and the alphabet, that's why they should read slowly and try to be more understandable for the learner. Reading fast is considered a big problem by the majority of learners. The learners also consider that spending more time in reading different books is important in improving reading skills.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research tried to present attitudes toward the importance of reading in EFL learning as one of the four main language learning skills. To find out the ways of enhancing fluent reading in a foreign language (English) and how to easier avoid difficulties a new learner meets in this process since the school and the teachers have a duty to encourage learners throughout their activity to gain and master reading skill easier. Results show that the main purpose of reading is to realize the meaning of the text learners read, decode the letters properly, analyze and relate it to the prior knowledge. Realizing the meaning of the text is the reader's main goal. Improvement of the reading skills is closely related to the skills of learning the language and special attention has been paid to the development and use of the main reading strategies, which is the purpose of the realization of this study. Among the most commonly used reading strategies are: previewing the text through titles, figures, subheadings, superficial reading of the text for generating its general meaning, selective reading for obtaining specific textual information, content prediction the text of the text by intertwining the textual information and existing reader knowledge, the guessing of the meaning of words unfamiliar to the context. However, errors are considered as a part of the learning process so teachers should provide corrective feedback on reading mistakes. In addition, the obtained results from this research noticed that reading skill is essential to learn a foreign language and it effects the improvement of other language skills. Make learners read more often and teachers read slowly is crucial, learners ear should get familiar with the accent they hear. Teachers and other facilitators should take into account the learners feeling as well, during the class teachers should find a way of correcting learners in a way that they don't feel shamed or discourages in front of their peers.

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