ISSN: 0976-3031

Available Online at http://www.recentscientific.com

International Journal of Recent Scientific Research
Vol. 7, Issue, 7, pp. 12287-12291, July, 2016

International Journal of Recent Scientific Research

CASE STUDY

ENHANCING READING SKILLS WITH PRE, WHILE, POST READING ACTIVITIES: A CASE STUDY

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 29th April, 2016
Received in revised form 19th May, 2016
Accepted 25th June, 2016
Published online 28th July, 2016

Key Words:

Reading, pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading, activities, learner-centered

ABSTRACT

In the present day education system the ability to read and comprehend is crucial to success. It's disheartening to see students going through the motions of reading and identifying confusing parts, and yet lacking a deep involvement with text and strategies to help them cope with parts of text that seem difficult. Teachers have the responsibility to equip the learners with appropriate reading strategies that will help them become better readers. This paper presents the pre, while and post reading activities designed for a particular lesson titled 'Water: The Elixir of Life' from the text book SURE OUTCOMES prescribed for I. B.Tech students of JNTU, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh, India. These activities have been designed with an objective to assist the learners in successfully reading, understanding, learning, and enjoying a particular selected text and make reading more communicative.

INTRODUCTION

In engineering education, a need for effective receptive skills has increased besides productive skills. It is universally perceived that reading, the receptive skill, is one of the most important skills for L2 learners to master as it increases learners' knowledge, comprehension and aptitude. In the present day education system the ability to read and comprehend is crucial to success. Reading comprehension, which broadens learners' knowledge, has always played a central role in the curricula at various levels. Developing reading skills for all academic purposes in ESL learners is one of the most challenging aspects of second language learning as reading is a complex process involving the use of linguistic knowledge, background knowledge or schema, cognitive and meta-cognitive reading strategies along with reading sub-skills. Inadequate reading skills hinder the progress of a student in both academic and professional domains. This problem needs to be addressed and from an educational point of view, teachers have the responsibility to equip their classrooms, and familiarize their learners with appropriate reading strategies that will help them become better readers.

Learners face difficulties in reading academic texts at the undergraduate level due to the specific nature of the discourse, the density of information and the technical vocabulary present in the texts. At this level, learners need to read prescribed materials and subject-related reference books. They also have to read journal/research articles to keep themselves abreast of the developments on their field of specialization. If learners do not have the necessary comprehension of what they read, they will not be able to reach content specific goals. This makes a demand on their self-study skills and strategies. In order to enhance reading skills in learners and enable them to read more effectively in a variety of ways, the teacher has to design activities. One of the most recommended methods is to design activities that follow the format of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities. These activities have an objective to assist the learners in successfully reading, understanding, learning, and enjoying a particular selected text and make reading more communicative.

This paper focuses on pre, while and post reading activities designed for a particular lesson titled 'Water: The Elixir of Life' from the text book SURE OUTCOMES prescribed for I. B.Tech students of JNTU, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh, India. The context of the ESL class is a common one: 60 students per class, immovable seating arrangements, mixed ability group with diversified motives to take up B. Tech as their course of study. All the activities mentioned below were executed in I B.Tech class rooms with much involvement from the students' side.

Pre-Reading Activities

Pre-reading tasks are intended to prepare the learners for comprehending a reading text better. They also help in

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activating their schema related to the content that help overcome the blocks caused due to unfamiliar content while reading. By developing pre reading activities the teacher becomes a bridge builder activating learners' prior knowledge of the text topic, mainly through text topic discussions, and text previewing techniques rather than prediction making.

Activity1

Picture1

Picture 2

Learners are divided into groups of 5 members each (12 groups in a class) and are given these pictures. They are asked to discuss the differences between these two pictures and make a note of them in the table given.

	Picture 1	Picture 2
Colour		
Life		
Reasons (not less than 2) for the differences		

After completing the table, one member from each team comes and makes a presentation on their observations. After three teams complete their presentations, the rest of the teams are given a chance only if they have new ideas to add to the list (This is to save time and avoid repetition and boredom in the class. The group numbers and members are taken note of by the teacher and in the next activity other members are given chances)

Activity-2

Peer group discussion

The same group continues to complete this activity also. Now, they are asked to discussion on:

1. What is a Nobel prize?
2. How, who and for what is a Nobel prize given?
3. Who are the Indians who won Noble Prize and for what?
4. Who is the first of all of them? Why did s/he get the Nobel prize?

Now another three teams are given chance to come up and present their team's answers to the rest of the class. Others are encouraged to contribute if they have new information besides the presented answers. The teacher makes a note of the points on the board. As part of the discussion and presented information, students would have come up with the name C.V. Raman, the first Indian to win Nobel Prize in Physics. The teacher adds a few missing points to their discussion. At the end based on the discussion the teacher links the discussion to the author of the text "Water: The Elixir of Life".

Activity-3

Probable Passage Activity: This activity engages learners in contextual study of vocabulary before reading the passage, which is much more effective than giving learners a list of words and requiring them to use a dictionary to define them one by one. In the Probable Passage activity, the teacher chooses some seminal terms and new vocabulary from the text. Then, she asks the learners to work collaboratively to include the list into various categories determined by her. Some of the terms might be familiar to learners while others might be new. The word list from the lesson WATER includes: elixir, draught, immortal, teem with vegetation, potent, quench, silt-laden, great tracts of land, vital, soil erosion, gully, ravine, terrace, contour cultivation, check bunds, harnessing, systematic planting and appropriate vegetation.

Learners would then need to group those words into the following categories: Amazing qualities, constructive role, destructive role, well planned action and unknown Words.

Amazing qualities	Constructive role
Destructive role	Well planned action
Unknown words	

Then, learners are asked to use the terms/words/phrases to create a "gist statement" that summarizes what they predict the reading text will be about.

Through these pre-reading activities, the learners will come to know the lesson they are going to read, the author and the key words and phrases used in the lesson. These activities connect what the learners already know to what they are going to learn from the lesson and lighten their cognitive burden.

While-Reading Activities

While reading activities sustain the learners' interest and help them understand the specific content. Their purpose is primarily to aid comprehension by highlighting the main ideas and other key information in the text. In the while-reading activities, the learners' interaction with the text improves. These activities make the class learning-centered by allowing learners to develop their own reading comprehension ability through a more personalized relationship with the text. Such while-reading activities give learners a structure for continual, active engagement with a text and force them to grapple with comprehension while they are reading, as opposed to simply moving their eyes down the page.

Activity-1

The teacher asks the students to read the text individually. As they complete reading each paragraph, they are to answer the question(s) that is/are related to that paragraph.

Answer the following

1. From paragraph-1 pick the word that is the antonym of 'weak'.

2. From paragraph-2 pick the words that fit to this phrase: Water adds beauty
3. Read paragraph-3 and define the term 'Precipitation'.
4. What are the measures that can be used to check soil erosion?
5. What are the various sources of water?
6. From paragraph-6 find out the synonym of the word 'thriving'.
7. The forests alone cannot fully regulate and ---------- the waters of the arid regions. (Fill in the blanks with a suitable word from paragraph-7)
8. In para-1 the word 'speck' is closest in meaning to
   a) Spot b) Molecule c) Bit d) Color
9. Fill in the table while reading paragraph-8

Water	Commonest of liquids	Most uncommon of liquids
WHY?		

Activity-2

By this time, the learners would have completed reading the text once. To complete the following task, they are asked to refer to the text once again.

Match the following

1.	Silt-laden water mixes with salt water	A.	Soil erosion
2.	Systematic planting of suitable trees	B.	Moisture in the soil
3.	Great tracts of land formed	C.	Existence of ruts
4.	Water rapidly gathering momentum	D.	Precipitation
5.	Imperative for the life and growth of plants and trees	E.	Untold wealth
6.	Dangerous to agriculture	F.	Silt deposited

Activity- 3

Now, the students are completely familiar with the text, at least with the topic/idea of each paragraph and the key terms. Now the students are to read the text for the third time. As repeating the same activity would also call for some deviation, this activity should call for their higher order thinking skills. Hence, coding the text is chosen.

Coding the text helps learners to practice the meta-cognitive processes that happen naturally for independent readers. This is highly effective while- reading activity that helps learners engage in meta-cognitive comprehension strategies. A set of codes are explained to learners and while reading they are asked to fill the table.

✓Confirms what you thought X Contradicts what you thought
* Strikes you as very important? Puzzles you
?? Really confuses you **R** Reminds you of something
→ Is new or interesting to you **A** Answers a question you had

Now a chart is given to learners and while reading the text learners need to fill in the chart.

Code	Sentences from the text that reflect the code
✓	
*	
X	
?	
??	
→	
R	
A	

These three activities enable the students to understand the writer's purpose, the language structure and the logical organization of the text. Students will be able to use their own inferring and judging abilities and find contextual clues for meaning and guess the meanings of unfamiliar words.

Post-Reading Activities

Post-Reading activities are tasks in which learners, after reading, verify and reflect on the knowledge acquired in the reading. In these activities learners reflect, argue and give their points of view. These activities help learners to develop additional reading skills such as summarizing, reacting and responding, understanding the author's view point, and critical thinking. Learners are given opportunity to continue to flex their meta-cognitive thinking skills by debating themes in the text and summarizing the key points after they have completed while-reading.

Activity 1

The students are asked to work in the same groups as they were in the pre-reading activities. They are to fill in this table by jotting down all the responses given by all the members in the group. As the questions are open-ended, all the responses could be acceptable provided they are appropriate.

Discuss in groups and answer the following.

Question	Answer
1) What is the author's main purpose?	
2) Does the author discuss an idea/argue for or against/explain/evaluate and provide suggestions?	
3) What is the author's tone? Is it opinionated/argumentative/descriptive/factual/even handed?	
4) Has the author given substantial evidence to prove his/her ideas? Give examples.	
5) 'Far from being an exhausted field of research', Explain.	
6) What measures would you suggest to conserve water and check soil erosion?	

Activity 2

After completing the table, the same group would work on designing a poster on the title of the text: "Water: The Elixir of Life".

Activity 3

Now the students are asked to work in pairs to develop a dialogue between two friends discussing the benefits of making rain water harvesting mandatory. The best three dialogues that cover the theme of the text with the seriousness and importance are presented by the teacher and later they are asked to role-play the dialogues.

Gaining new information from the while-reading stage, these post-reading activities bring about a change such that the students would know more, or think or feel differently from before. They help students connect the new information they are now familiar with and their lives. Students not only process their knowledge obtained from the text but also communicate this new knowledge to peers.

Findings

1. The students were able to comprehend the text completely by reading independently and also with the help of peers where ever their individual skills did not support them to comprehend the complexity of the text (peer group activities).
2. For teachers it takes 3 to 4 classes (150 to 200 minutes) to complete teaching in the traditional method (teacher

reading and paraphrasing). But with all the activities, the time taken to complete the teaching-learning process of the text is only 120 minutes.

3. It ensured that all the learners took part in the learning activity without leaving out a few even in a large class of 60 learners.
4. Referring to the text for almost 5 to 6 times to complete the while and post reading activities helped the learners to retain the text for a longer time.
5. In the process, new vocabulary became part of their active vocabulary where they did not find difficulty in using them in their writing or speaking activities.
6. Besides reading, the activities gave much scope for improving speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

Reading, actually a complex activity involving both perception and thought, is important at all stages of education. The ultimate goal of reading is not just sounding the words one reads, but instead understands the inherent meaning. Therefore, language teachers should improve their students' ability to read multiple texts and comprehend them by actively engaging them. Pre-while-post activities of such type are a great way to build student's comprehension of a text. These activities enhance the reading ability of students, and provide good models for writing, construction of phrases, sentences, paragraphs and whole texts.

Also they stimulate discussion and encourage creative responses. When teachers apply these stages carefully, students learn how to use them in different texts they read without teacher and are boosted to read different kinds of material.

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Selected Lesson

Water- The Elixir of Life

Humankind has always searched in vain for an imaginary elixir of life, the divine Amrita, a draught of which was thought to confer immortality. But the true elixir of life lies near our hands. For it is the commonest of all liquids, plain water! I remember one day standing on the line which separates the Libyan Desert from the valley of the Nile in Egypt. On one side was visible a sea of billowing sand without a speck of green or a single living thing anywhere visible on it. On the other side lay one of the greatest, most fertile and densely populated areas to be found any where on the earth, teeming with life and vegetation. What made this wonderful difference? Why, it is the water of the river Nile! Geologists tell us that the entire soil of the Nile valley is the creation of the river itself. Egypt, in fact, was made by its river. Its ancient civilization was created and is sustained by the life-giving waters of the Nile. This common substance which we take for granted in our everyday life is the most potent and the most wonderful thing on the face of our earth. It has played a very significant role in shaping the course of the earth's history and continues to play the leading role in the drama of life on earth.

There is nothing which adds so much to the beauty of the country side as water, be it just a little stream trickling over the rocks or a little pond by the way side where the cattle quench their thirst. The rain-fed tanks that are so common in south India are a cheering sight when they are full. They are, of course, shallow, but this is less evident since the water is silt-laden and the bottom therefore does not shoe up. These tanks play a vital role in south Indian agriculture. In Mysore, for example, much of the rice is grown under them. Some of these tanks are surprisingly large, and it is a beautiful sight to see the sun rise or set over one of them.

One of the most remarkable facts about water is its power to carry silt in suspension. This is the origin of the characteristic color of the water in rain - fed tanks. The color varies with the nature of the earth in the catchment area and is most vivid immediately after a fresh inflow following rain. Swiftly flowing water can carry fairly large and heavy particles. The finest particles, however, remain floating within the liquid in spite of their greater density and are carried to greater distances. When silt-laden water mixes with the salt water of the sea, there is a rapid precipitation of the suspended matter. This can be readily seen when one travels by steamer down a great river to the deep sea. The color of the water changes successively from the muddy red or brown of silt through varying shades of yellow and green finally to the blue of the deep sea. Great tracts of land have been formed by silt thus deposited. Such land, consisting as it does of finely divided matter, is usually very fertile.

The flow of water has undoubtedly played a great part in geological processes. The same agency, however, under appropriate conditions, can also play a destructive part and wash away the soil. The problem of soil erosion is of major significance in various countries and especially in many parts of India. Soil erosion occurs in successive steps, the earliest of which may easily pass unnoticed. In the later stages, the cutting up and washing away of the earth is only too painfully apparent in the formation of deep gullies and ravines which make all agriculture impossible. Sudden bursts of excessively heavy rain resulting in a large run of surplus water are the principal factor in causing soil erosion. The slope of the land, removal of natural protective coat of vegetation, the existence of ruts along which the water can flow with rapidly gathering momentum, and absence of any checks of such flow are also causes of soil erosion. Soil erosion is dangerous to agriculture. The terracing of the land, construction of bunds to check the flow of water, the practice of contour cultivation and the planting of

appropriate types of vegetation are the measures that can be used to check soil erosion.

Water is the basis of all life. Every animal and every plant contains a substantial proportion of free or combined water in its body, and no kind of physiological activity is possible without water. Water is, of course, necessary for animal life, while moisture in soil is equally imperative for the life and growth of plants and trees. The conservation and utilization of water is thus fundamental to human welfare. Apart from artesian water, the ultimate source in all cases is rain or snowfall. Much of Indian agriculture depends on seasonal rainfall. The problems of soil erosion and of inadequate or irregular rainfall are closely connected with each other. It is clear that the adoption of techniques preventing soil erosion would also help to conserve and keep water where it is wanted.

Collection and utilization of rain water is, therefore, of vital importance. Much of it flows down into the streams and rivers and ultimately finds its way to the sea. Incredibly large quantities of the precious fluid are thus lost to the country. The harnessing of our rivers, the waters of which now mostly run to waste, is a great national problem which must be considered and dealt with. Vast areas of land could be turned into fertile and prosperous country by courageous and well-planned action.

The systematic planting of trees in every possible place is one of the most urgent needs of India. Such plantations would directly or indirectly prove a source of untold wealth to the country. They would check soil erosion and conserve the rainfall of the country from flowing away to waste.

In one sense, water is the commonest of liquids. In another sense, it is the most uncommon of liquids with amazing properties which are responsible for its unique power of maintaining animal and plant life. The investigation of the nature and properties of water is, therefore, of the highest scientific interest and is far from being an exhausted field of research.

- C.V.Raman

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How to cite this article:

Dr.M.Srilakshmi and Dr.G.Suvarnalakshmi.2016, Enhancing Reading Skills With Pre, While, Post Reading Activities: A Case Study. *Int J Recent Sci Res.* 7(7), pp. 12287-12291.