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TEACHING READING TO SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS AT B2+ LEVEL THROUGH TASK-BASED LEARNING

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Abstract. This article examines a methodology for teaching reading to second-year university students in Uzbekistan who are studying foreign languages and possess a B2+ level of English proficiency. It outlines the content of reading instruction, the characteristics of the learners, and the methodological approach employed—task-based learning—including its stages, types of text-based tasks, and an example of a lesson. The article also provides a list of resources (with specific page references) and describes methods for assessment.

Keywords: teaching reading, B2+ level, second-year students, reading strategies, task-based learning, foreign languages university, English language teaching methodology.

1. Introduction

Reading is the main source of new vocabulary and academic knowledge for students of foreign language universities, yet many second-year students still read slowly, translate word by word and stop at every unknown item. At B2+ learners are expected to read with a large degree of independence, adapting the style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 54–61). This article describes how second-year B2+ students can be taught to read in this way, which content and resources are suitable, and which single method organises the work in the classroom.

2. Learners and the aims of the course

The course is designed for second-year students of a foreign language's university in Uzbekistan, usually 18–20 years old. Their first languages are Uzbek and/or Russian, and they have a solid grammar base and a wide receptive vocabulary after a year of intensive study. Typical difficulties are slow reading speed, dependence on a dictionary, little reading for pleasure, and difficulty in understanding the writer's attitude, inference and text organization. Because the students are future teachers and translators, they also need to be able to read authentic academic and journalistic texts quickly and to report what they have read.

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For this reason, the aims of the course are for students to read different text types for different purposes, to use strategies consciously, to widen their vocabulary through reading, and to discuss and summaries what they have read.

3. Content of the course

Grabe (2009, pp. 187–207) shows that fluent reading rests on the combination of word recognition, vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of text structure and the use of reading strategies. In line with this, the content of the course is organised in four areas.

- Reading skills and strategies: skimming for gist, scanning for specific information, reading for detail, predicting, inferring meaning from context, and recognising the writer's attitude (Nuttall, 2005, pp. 36–60).
- Text types: articles, essays, reports, blog posts, short stories and extracts from academic books, at the length of 600–900 words.
- Vocabulary: academic and topic vocabulary, collocations, word families and linking words that signal the organisation of a text.
- Responding to texts: oral and written summaries, opinions and discussion based on the text.

4. Method: task-based learning

One method organises the whole course: task-based learning (TBL). In TBL the lesson is built around a task, that is, an activity in which learners use the text and the language to achieve a clear non-linguistic outcome, such as completing a table, ranking arguments or solving a problem. The text is therefore not an object for answering questions but a source of information that students need in order to do something. This changes the purpose of reading and encourages students to read for meaning, quickly and selectively, instead of translating word by word. Willis (1996, pp. 52–58) describes three phases, and each of them has a clear role in a reading lesson at B2+.

Pre-task. The teacher introduces the topic and the task, activates background knowledge, and presents only the few key words without which the text cannot be understood. Students predict the content from the title and pictures. They also read the task instructions and decide which strategy suits the task, for example skimming or scanning.

Task cycle. Students read and do the task in pairs or small groups while the teacher monitors and helps only when necessary. Then they plan a short oral or written report on what they found and decided, and the teacher acts as a language adviser. Finally, groups report to the class, and the others listen in order to compare their results. Because the report is public, students must understand the text accurately and present it clearly (Grabe, 2009, pp. 187–207).

Language focus. After the meaning-based work, students analyse features of the text: linking words, reference words, collocations and the vocabulary they guessed from context. The teacher draws attention to useful items and typical errors, and students practise them. In this way, language is studied after learners have felt the need for it, and strategy instruction becomes part of the lesson (Nuttall, 2005, pp. 36–60).

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Throughout the course students keep a short reading log in which they note the strategy used, its effect and the new vocabulary, which helps them to become independent readers.

5. Types of tasks and a sample lesson

Willis (1996, pp. 26–28) distinguishes six types of tasks. All of them can be built around a reading text at B2+:

- listing: find and list all the arguments for and against a statement in the article;
- ordering and sorting: put jumbled paragraphs in the correct order, or rank the writer's arguments from strongest to weakest;
- comparing: compare two texts on the same topic and find similarities and differences;
- problem-solving: read several pieces of advice and choose the best solution to a problem;
- sharing personal experiences: read a short story or blog post and discuss similar experiences;
- creative tasks: write a new title, a final paragraph or a reply to the writer.

A jigsaw reading is especially effective: each member of a group reads a different part or version of the text and then shares the information with the others to complete the task. A sample 80-minute lesson based on the topic "Do we still need universities?" is as follows.

1. Pre-task (10 min): students discuss the title; predict three ideas the writer might mention and learn five key words; the teacher explains the task.
2. Task (20 min): in groups of three, each student reads a different section of the article for six minutes (scanning for arguments), then they share information and complete a table of arguments for and against.
3. Planning (10 min): each group prepares a two-minute report on which side the writer supports and whether the group agrees.
4. Report (15 min): groups report to the class; the others compare their conclusions.
5. Language focus: analysis (10 min): students find linking words and reference words in the text and guess the meaning of three unknown words from context.
6. Language focus: practice (15 min): short exercises on the selected vocabulary and linkers; students complete the reading log.

6. Resources

Printed resources: the reading sections of a B2+ coursebook (for example, Cambridge Empower Upper-Intermediate or Speakout Upper-Intermediate) and the methodological books Willis (1996, pp. 26–28, 52–58) for task design and lesson phases, Nuttall (2005, pp. 36–60) for reading skills and text selection, and Grabe (2009, pp. 187–207) for strategy instruction. Day and Bamford (1998, pp. 7–13) offer guidance for extensive reading, which can supplement the course with graded and authentic books read at home. The CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 54–61) gives descriptors for goal setting. Digital resources: BBC Learning English, The Guardian and National Geographic for authentic articles, Cambridge Assessment English sample papers for exam-style reading tasks, and the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries website for vocabulary work.

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7. Assessment

Progress is assessed through short reading tests with tasks of the same types as in classwork, timed reading to monitor speed, summaries, and the reading log. Criteria include accuracy of understanding, the ability to find information quickly, and the quality of the summary. Self-assessment checklists help students notice which strategies they use.

8. Conclusion

Second-year B2+ students need to move from reading as translation to reading as a purposeful and strategic activity. Task-based learning achieves this by giving every text a clear outcome, by moving from reading to a spoken report, and by turning the language of the text into material for study afterwards. Together with suitable resources and regular assessment, it makes reading faster, more accurate and more independent.

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