

## **AN APPROACH TO MAKING STUDENTS AUTONOMOUS READERS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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**T**he purpose of this paper is to point out the need to make students autonomous readers through the development of thinking skills such as the ability to classify, compare, deduce, induce and synthesise and reading strategies (prediction, global understanding of a text, inferences, and deduction of meaning through vocabulary).

It is important to conceptualise the new didactic aim of teaching the English language. Such an aim could be established as the teaching of reading comprehension through learning strategies, and the development of thinking skills in order to make the learner an autonomous reader.

Human beings have been defined as “political animals” by Aristotle. That indicates how we all live in community and, therefore, must communicate. This justifies the natural will to understand others, whether or not others speak the same language. According to history, human beings created oral language when the need for communication arose.

It is known that the first manifestations of written language were the cave drawings and the papyrus, then used as a way for humans to convey their feelings and thoughts. Certain expressions allowed the identity of societies to be known, and for written language to come into existence.

Linguistics is the discipline that studies the phenomena of evolution, the development of

languages, and how they relate. Its purpose is to qualify human communication to make it more effective, and to help improve the relationships of the community to which it belongs. Humans are born with phonetic skills and start developing their language as they encounter the need for communication. Therefore, language develops arbitrarily and subjectively, which is the justification for the existence of the various languages, dialects and idioms.

In a school environment, scientific, artistic and critical processes are mostly organised in a written fashion. For this reason, students must be intellectually prepared to comprehend, interpret and possess the information derived from this process, which requires that new strategies be developed for better reading comprehension.

A good reader in his/her mother language has skills and strategies previously acquired and developed in school and family environments which can, consciously or unconsciously, be transferred when learning a new language. For example, when reading a book, the reader can distinguish the diversity of genres, and can easily identify the writer’s points of view. In this learning process, an aim and a purpose must exist, both of which allow the reader to interact with the teacher who, in turn, contributes to make sense of the newly acquired knowledge.

The reader requires many thinking skills, such as the ability to classify, compare, analyse, deduct, induce and synthesise. A comprehensive reading

exercise can itself generate the development of these skills, and if they exist already, it helps improve the growth of the autonomous reader.

In order to read, it is necessary that students have the will and conviction to face the text. A question then arises: "What should be read?". It is important to read things of interest, material that is meaningful to the student at a specific time. That is why reading topics should not always be imposed by the teacher, but be chosen by the students based on what matters to them.

The language teacher can contribute toward helping the student, not only by taking possession of the reading strategies (prediction, global understanding of a textbook, inferences, deduction of meaning through vocabulary), but also by steering the student the development of thinking skills, such as classification, comparison, analysis, deduction, induction and synthesis.

Taking into account the various types of learning, the strategic teacher can predict how students will respond to specific themes and what problems they will have. This principle is believed by Leinhardt (1986), cited by Jones et al. (1987).

Once these skills and strategies are assimilated by the ideal reader, he/she will improve them by establishing analogies between his/her mother tongue and the foreign one. This way the reader will gradually become more autonomous.

Presently, the teaching methodology of foreign languages is very varied. It is a conjunction of distinctive methods and visions. However, the communicative focus is still valid as long as the student is the central subject of learning. He/she must solve problems, and have a critical attitude towards cognitive and social strategies. There are also other aims that focus their principles towards

the development of processes, projects, and in-class research. These tend to enhance and strengthen the students' self-esteem. Such a tendency is now a general concern for all areas and fields in which humans develop.

According to Díaz and Hernández (1998), the reading and learning strategies must be carefully assumed by the teacher. One must learn to classify strategies into the basic, important, and necessary ones, so that the reading comprehension of foreign languages is meaningful. "Making reference to the selected strategies, it is convenient to analyse the following aspects beforehand: Functionality, adjustment to themes, significance to the student's needs, viability and susceptibility to training" (ibid: 1998, 15).

## Conclusions

It is difficult to learn a foreign language while being in an environment where communication does not necessarily happen in this language. Therefore, the teacher must help the student with the process of constructing knowledge, and take advantage of the student's interests, skills and motivations. Learning strategies and thinking skills for the students can be designed to help him/her link previous knowledge to the newly acquired and then to subsequently apply it in any environment to which the learner is exposed. Such a process can guarantee that a student will become a more autonomous reader.

## References

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