A Proposed Framework for Teaching Reading Integratively

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Abstract: This paper has been specifically directed towards the teaching of reading at the secondary school education. Learners at this level need to develop the skills of reading a connected text. The proposed framework illustrates how the teaching of reading skills can be more effective if the teaching perspective is based on the principles that reading and learning are cognitive processes and that reading should be integrated with other language skills. Therefore, the present framework assumes that the type of text (narrative, descriptive or instructive) and its use is of primary concern to the teacher in his/her preparation and pedagogy. The teacher makes transition notes according to the text type as a preparatory for identifying appropriate learning tasks. These tasks determine the nature of the students' output.

Key words: teaching reading, text type, activities, learning tasks

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1. INTRODUCTION

Everyone realizes the importance of training English language learners on improving their reading skills due to the fact that English is an international language and most of the important sources, in science or humanities, are written in English. Further, the expansion of electronic communications and the internet, has enforced the importance and need to be able to read in English. Educators (Bernhardt, 1991; Carrell, 1991; Urquhart & Weir, 1998; Grabe&Stoller, 2002) have attributed the cause of academic success to their reading ability. In this context, Alderson (1984) points out that "a reading knowledge of a foreign language is often important to academic studies, professional success and personal developments" (p. 1).

Carrell (1989) states that "for many students, reading is by far the most important of the four skills in a second language, particularly in English as a second or foreign language"(p. 1). Krashen&Terrel (1983) say that "reading may contribute significantly to competence in a second language. There is good reason, in fact, to hypothesize that reading makes a contribution to overall competence, to all four skills" (p., 131). Therefore, Reading can be considered the 'most extensively researched' language skill (Bachman, 2000, p. x) as it is, according to Kolers (1973, p. 29), one of the "most complex forms of information processing."

English teachers teach reading only to enable students to obtain information that is explicit in a text with comprehension questions which can be answered easily. These questions are mechanical and

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do not require learners to be aware of the linguistic competence and communicative functions. Further, teaching reading is mostly directed to pronunciation practice, vocabulary awareness and reading aloud. In fact, teachers mainly focus on helping their learners prepare to answer the reading questions in English examinations, which are predictable due to their 'literal comprehension' nature and which are easy to be scored. It can be said that the teaching of reading is mostly implemented in this way by the majority of Yemeni English language teachers, since they direct their teaching at routine examinations and most of them do not get any in-service training and if some have the opportunity, the training is conducted by some supervisors or others who themselves are not well trained nor competent.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Grabe&Stoller (2002), define reading as "the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately" (p. 9). Goodman (1998) defines reading as "a psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs" (p. 12). It is held that reading is an active skill which requires the readers to be involved in mental and physical activities in order, based on their purpose and proficiency, to decode what they read. Anderson (1999) points that "reading is … an active fluent process which involves the reader and the reading material in building meaning" (p.1). This is done by employing a set of skills (skimming and scanning) and reading strategies.

Fluent readers are actively involved in a mental process while decoding the messages encoded by the writer. If they fail first to comprehend what is written, they try to find other ways to deal with the text such as self-check and self-correction.

According to Horiba(1996), reading comprehension involves multiple cognitive processes that are related to each other. These processes include 1) recognizing letter, characters, and words; 2) analyzing the syntactic and semantic structure of clauses and sentences, and 3) generating inferences.

In addition to that, readers employ different kinds of reading skills in order to understand what they read (Krashen& Terrell, 1983). They are required to be able to integrate text information with their prior knowledge which leads to the elaboration of a mental representation (Afflerbach, 1990; Meneghetti, Carretti, & De Beni, 2006). That is, when reading a text, readers try to connect between what they already know and the new information and as a result, the process of reading comprehension is facilitated (Anderson and Pearson, 1984). In fact, the reader's prior experience and knowledge of the world have been included in many L2 reading processes' models (e.g., Grabe, 2002; Hudson, 1996). Readers, however, differ in making use of their knowledge of the world because, according to Williams (1984), it " does not only cover knowledge of a particular topic. It may include familiarity with different text types … knowledge of a particular culture or way of life" (p. 7).

That is, during reading comprehension, readers need to use their own syntactic, semantic, rhetorical and prior knowledge as well as necessary cognitive skills to analyze, interpret and understand the writer's thoughts and ideas coded in the reading text (Devine, 1986). Anderson (1999) divides the reading process into three categories: bottom-up, top-down and interactive. The bottom-up process emphasizes 'lower-level' reading skills such as word recognition and letter identification; the top-down process, on the other hand, operates mainly at a 'higher level', starting with hypothesizing and predicting, and then trying to confirm from the printed words. The top-down model according to Lynch & Hudson (1991, p. 218), is to select " the fewest and most productive elements from a text so as to make sense of it". The interactive encompasses both processes. That is, the interaction between the bottom-up and top-down processes and it also recognizes the contribution of the reader and the text (Grabe, 1991). Nutttall (1982) and Rumelhart (1977) point out that reading involves the reader, the text and the interaction between the reader and the text. That is, the decoding of a message calls for active participation between the reader and the writer. For Hudson (1998) " reading is seen as bidirectional in nature, involving both the application of higher order mental processes and background knowledge as well as the text processes itself" (p.48).

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3. THE FRAMEWORK

3.1. Rationale

A successful /proficient reader usually has: a specific purpose, experience, a repertoire of various reading skills which are utilized in accordance with his/her purpose, and is aware of the writer's communicative purpose as well as the conventions of the language.

On the contrary, based on the researcher's experience, Yemeni secondary schools EFL learners may have no purpose to read nor linguistic competence. Some of them are not motivated to read in general; they do not even read in Arabic. Research has pointed out that Arab learners face many problems related to bottom-up and top-down processes (Mustafa, 2002; Shannon, 2003; 2006; O'Sullivan, 2010; Al-Mahrooqi& Asante, 2010).

As mentioned above, the teaching of reading at Yemeni public secondary schools is not effective due to the fact that learners are usually given a text mostly with comprehension questions which they can answer without being sensitive to the function and form of the target language.

Some teachers have been observed following the three stages approach. That is, pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. Although pre-reading activities have limited usefulness (Stott, 2001), teachers spend most of the time of the period on:

i. providing learners with adequate information related to the target text in order to activate relevant background knowledge and schemata, which according to Janzen (2002) has little solid evidence to support it as being useful.

ii. introducing the meaning of all the new words without giving students a chance, for instance, to use some of the most important processes of reading: guessing, which is considered necessary for reading (Oxford,1990), and the process of prediction.

As mentioned above, the teaching of reading at Yemeni public secondary schools is not effective due to the fact that learners are usually given a text mostly with comprehension questions which they can answer without being sensitive to the function and form of the target language.

The proposed framework in this paper assumes that the purpose of EFL readers is, as a matter of fact, totally different; they practice reading to develop and apply their linguistic competence as well as to learn how to read as they find information. By contrast, the proficient readers mainly read to find information using skills and linguistic repertoire they already possess.

An adequate teaching of reading should encourage learners to guess unfamiliar words and to "allow for the development of good comprehension habits. An explanation of the 'new words' should not begin a lesson" (McEldowney, 1988, p,3). This can only be accomplished when EFL learners are involved in reading tasks that resemble to some extent what they are going to encounter in real life communication. Such Tasks which can train them to develop appropriate reading skills and strategies, helping them to employ appropriate language tools to get information from the text that will at the end prove their communicative competence. Nuttal (1982) argues " … we want our students to learn how language is used for conveying content, we want them to develop the skills needed to extract from the language that expresses it" (p.31).

According to Vacca and Vacca (2005), reading instruction should help students realize that reading is actually an interaction between the reader and the writer. The teachers' duty, therefore, is to alert the learners to the significant aspects of reading text variables that will affect second language reading process by, for example, highlighting the differences between narrative and descriptive texts and by drawing learners' attention to make use of linguistic and nonlinguistic clues.

Systematic differences in how people respond to different types of texts such as narrative texts have been observed (e.g., Einstein, McDaniel, Owen, &Coté, 1990; Zwaan, 1994). Grabe (2009) argues that:

Teaching students to become more aware of text structure is a further critical aspect of reading instruction and curriculum planning. Teachers need to be aware that texts have larger units of structure that achieve writers' purposes. Moreover, writers' goals and task requirements determine basic discourse organization, and the specific information that a writer presents has a major impact on how a text is organized (p. 189).

Similarly, Rafik-Galea (2005) ascertains the necessity of the English teachers' awareness regarding the role of linguistic patterns that exist within different text types in facilitating reading comprehension.

Carrell (1985) pointed out that explicit teaching of different aspects of text structure as well as rhetorical organization of expository texts increased significantly the ESL readers' recall regarding the amount of information.

The readers' attention and focus are directed to various aspects of communicative purposes in accordance with the text types. The reader has to be able to make use of each text type's features in processing the information conveyed in the text. He/she has to be able to utilize different related mental activities and strategies.

The present framework assumes that the type of text (narrative, descriptive or instructive) and its use is of primary concern to the teacher in his/her preparation and pedagogy. The teacher analyzes the text and makes transition notes according to its type as a preparation for identifying appropriate learning tasks. These tasks determine the nature of the students' output.

3.2.   The Components of the Framework

The proposed framework principally consists of three components whose role are closely relevant. As seen in Figure 1, it starts with the text which can be descriptive, narrative or instructive (input). The second component is the learning tasks, followed by the last component, i.e. output.

3.2.1.   Input

Input, as mentioned earlier, refers to the reading texts which are mainly narrative, descriptive or instructive. The linguistic level is at best relatively sophisticated, so that learners are in a situation to think and learn new items such as 'words' and 'structures. McEldowney (1982) argues that " our reading and listening texts should contain a proportion of unfamiliar words and relationships which learners are led towards working out for themselves" (p. 4). The teacher then should analyze the text and make notes in accordance with the text type in order to determine appropriate learning tasks. As Rafik-Galea (2005) puts it "for students to comprehend particular texts and to learn a language well, language teaching should begin with an understanding of text structure" (p.91).

3.2.2. Learning tasks

Williams (2000) suggests that explicit teaching of reading requires the teacher to have a clear understanding about the features of texts and the metalanguage to develop a discourse around the text. Similarly, Grabe (2009) adds that " a teacher with some knowledge of text organization and discourse signaling makers can help students build their knowledge of text structure and discourse organization" (p. 189). Thus, before involving students in reading a text, and based on the teacher's analysis by which the main information of each reading text is isolated and classified in accordance with the linguistic features, the teacher is supposed to prepare the reading tasks according to the types of the text as " differences in text structure can lead to differences in reading" (Singhal, 1998, p. 4).

When a text is narrative, students' attention should be drown to the action verbs (*went, visited, bought*) which narrate an event that happened in a sequence. Such verbs carry the core meaning of the

text, and ending with other information labeled by 'who', 'what' and 'where' which are the typical features of a simple narrative text. Students are guided and encouraged to work in pairs/groups to write the verbs which mainly construct the event. This can be done by directing students to find, for instance, *Who went to ...? What X did first?* In this case students are trained in recognizing these features by which they can be aware of using grammar to achieve better comprehension of a narrative text.
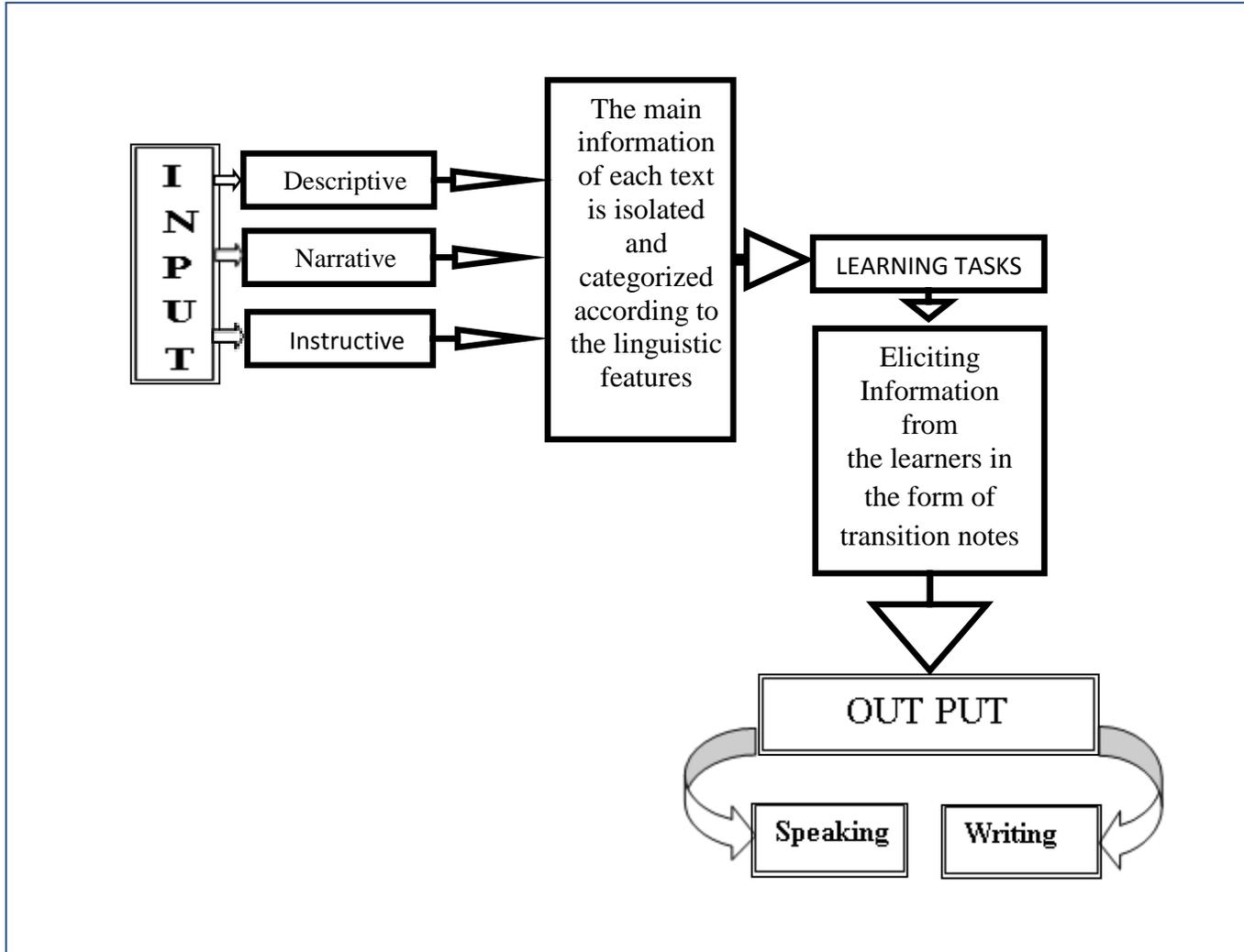

Figure 1. A Proposed Frame work for Teaching Reading Integratively

With regard to a descriptive text, students are directed to focus on nouns and adjectives (e.g. *house, car, blue and beautiful*). The learning tasks related to the text are to be based on such elements, i.e., nouns and adjectives given in a descriptive text. Students are asked to, for instance, find the name of a place and then they are asked to find the adjectives that describe it.

Concerning an instructive text, where there is no subject (a doer), the focus of the learners should be directed to the verbs that are dynamic and which show a sequence of the main points that the text carries. Then the learners' attention should be drawn to the other parts of the sentence, i.e., the object, place, and adverbs which can be replaced by "what", "where" and "how". For example, to teach the following text given below, the teacher can first ask students to read the text and number these words according to the sequence of the steps: stir, place, mix, remove and stir. Second, the learners

are asked to find the "what word", e.g., "brown sugar, butter and 1 cup of water" and "whereword" (a medium size saucepan) for the first step until they complete the text.

Instructive Text

> To prepare syrup that you will not forget in your life, first. - mix the brown sugar, butter and 1 cup of water in a medium size saucepan. Place the saucepan over medium heat. Stir until the sugar dissolves completely. Remove the syrup from the heat, then carefully stir in the maple flavoring.

Following such techniques can prompt students to use their linguistic and non-linguistic awareness to accomplish such tasks. The information resulting from such activities should first be elicited from the learners, accumulated and written on the board or in worksheets in the form of tables, diagrams, hierarchies or notes.

3.2.3.   Output

In this stage, students are involved in practice and communicative activities guided by the information elicited and written on the board or in the worksheets. The students' talking time is maximized via being involved in pair work and group work and problem-solving activities. For instance, they might discuss with each other the information they have already provided during the second stage, thus employing speaking and writing skills and certain associated skills, such as pronunciation, syntax, and social usage. That is, based on the information already obtained in the form of notes, tables or diagrams in the previous stage, students might be asked to summarize the readings in written form to enhance and activate their writing skills on one hand and to help them to obtain generalization of language features and pragmatic functions with respect to each text type on the other. In short,the students' talking time is maximized via being involved in a variety of communicative activities in which they will be engaged in speaking, as well as, in writing and, as a result, integration is achieved.

4. ADVANTAGES OF THIS FRAMEWORK

In comparison to the traditional framework of teaching reading, mentioned earlier, learners , in this framework, can benefit a lot from a reading text as follows:

i. Learners read for a purpose when the teacher, in the second phase, instructs them as to what to read and where to read. The teacher, for example, directs them to read the text to number the verbs according to their order or to find the words that describe a person or a thing.

ii. Learners are trained to follow cognitive process in which they utilize appropriate reading skills and strategies according to the purpose of reading, and linguistic and nonlinguistic clues each text carries based on its communicative purpose, i.e. to narrate, describe/ instruct. According to Davies and Widddowson (1974), " reading comprehension cannot take place unless the reader understands the meaning of the linguistic forms and the communicative functions they fulfill in the text concerned" (p. 167).

iii. Other skills, basically speaking and writing, are involved/integrated in this framework by which the amount of real comprehension and learners' motivation are enhanced. Further, integrating reading with other skills provokes varieties of learning tasks which make class resemble real life communication. According to Cunningsworth (1984), " numerous communicative situations in real life involve integrating two or more of the four skills. The user of the language exercises his abilities in two or more skills, either simultaneously or in close succession" (p.46). Grellet (1981) similarly points out that in few real life cases we do not speak and write about what we read. He, therefor, states that it is "important to link the different skills through the reading activities chosen" (p. 8).

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Oxford (2001) provides an example of integration as follows:

> …in a course on intermediate reading, the teacher probably gives all of the directions orally in English, thus causing students to use their listening ability to understand the assignment. In this course, students might discuss their readings, thus employing speaking and listening skills and certain associated skills, such as pronunciation, syntax, and social usage. Students might be asked to summarize or analyze readings in written form, thus activating their writing skills (p.1).

Integration has many benefits. It motivates students to learn because it involves them in various activities and tasks by which monotony can be eliminated. It also "encompasses students' different strengths, and creates interactive possibilities by focusing on both productive and receptive skills" and it "facilitates students' acquisition of English by providing them with topics to discuss and opportunities to test their language hypothesis" (Zhang, 2009,p. 33).

5. CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to develop a framework that can aspire to guide school teachers to improve their teaching of reading by (1) approaching each text according to its communicative purpose (i.e., narrative, descriptive and instructive) as input, and (2)   develop appropriate learning tasks stemming from analyzing each text and aiming to draw learners' attention to the grammatical items that are associated with such texts, so that they can be trained to tackle the reading text as well as to be sensitized to its language usage, which will provide data written on the board or in worksheets and that will be (3) exploited at the last stage of the lesson (output) to involve learners in practicing other skills especially speaking and writing.

This framework, as indicated earlier, was meant to be introduced in Yemeni English language classroom contexts, which are highly familiar to the researcher. As a tool or an approach, it can, however, also be useful in most English language teaching classrooms in similar contexts around the world, and especially in Arab secondary public schools, due to the fact that most learners in the Arab world in general and in the Gulf, in particular, are similar in terms of their: motivation, teachers' pedagogy, mother-tongue (Arabic), EFL reading problems, linguistic competence and so on.

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