

# **Evaluation of Teaching Reading Materials For Second Year Student Teachers at the Department of English in the Teacher-Training Institutes**

**Fawziaya Abid Mahdi**

## **Summary**

This paper is concerned with evaluating teaching reading materials for second year student teachers at the department of English in the Teacher-Training Institutes. This evaluation is done in terms of certain criteria proposed by Krashen & Terrell (1983). In the light of this process of evaluation and in an attempt to help teachers derive the utmost utility out of the given teaching reading materials so as to enhance their students' comprehension process, some pedagogical suggestions for dealing with the given materials are offered. The work consists of four sections:

Section One presents certain concepts regarding the skill of reading comprehension.

Section Two presents certain criteria proposed by Krashen & Terrell (Ibid) on the bases of which the given material is evaluated.

Section Three executes the process of evaluation.

On the basis of the findings of the process of evaluation and in an attempt to help teachers derive the utmost utility out of the given materials to enhance their students' reading comprehension process, I present some pedagogical suggestions for dealing with the given materials. Two sets of suggestions are made. The first set is practical; relating to the findings of the process of evaluation, and takes the form of adaptations. The second set, on the other hand, consists of general suggestions intended to highlight some of the prerequisites for enhancing the students' reading comprehension process. These are dealt with in Section Four.

## **Introduction**

This paper aims at evaluating the teaching of reading materials in the textbook: *A Course of General English and Comprehension* for second year student teachers at the department of English in the Teacher-Training Institutes. This evaluation is done in terms of certain criteria proposed by Krashen & Terrell (1983).

The paper also attempts to offer some pedagogical suggestions for handling the given reading materials so as to overcome their deficiencies. I think, at practical level in the classroom, the teacher can make use of these suggestions without waiting for Ministry of Education to implement them in a formal way. It is a commonly noticed fact that “an enterprising teacher can produce remarkable result with the most slender resources, while the finest materials often become as nought in the hands of an unimaginative one” (Bamber, 1981: 7). Thus, we can say that “it is often the teacher who determines the success or otherwise of the materials at his disposal” (Ibid).

## **Section one**

### **General Considerations**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This section starts with a definition of reading skill then a discussion of its importance and its place among other language skills. After that, some of the general concepts which the teacher has to bear in mind when dealing with reading comprehension activity are presented and briefly discussed.

#### **1.1 A Definition of Reading Skill & its Importance**

Reading is not a passive process, i.e. it is not a process of merely recognizing what is in the text or taking something out of the text without any effort. Reading is instead “an active process, in which the reader must make an active contribution by drawing upon and using concurrently various abilities that he has acquired” (Wardhaugh, 1969 quoted by Eskey, 1973: 71).

Reading is considered as a skill of great importance to the learner. Stevens (1977: 64) lists two main reasons why reading is important: (1) it gives a window on the world and onto the normal means of pursuing personal education, and (2) it gives access to a great quantity of further experience of the target language as used by its native speakers. Likewise, Bright & McGregor (1970: 52) state that “where there is little reading, there will be little language learning.” Kolers also states that reading is the only means of acquiring control of an adequate English vocabulary (cited by

Eskey, 1973: 75). Furthermore, reading contributes, as Krashen & Terrell (1983: 130) suggest to “overall competence, to all four skills and not just to written performance”. Reading retardation, on the other hand, often makes the learner unable to do his assignment and participate in the class discussion, and feel hopeless and inferior to others (Strang, 1978: 64).

### **1.2 The Place of Reading Among Other Language Skills**

For more than a quarter of a century, language teaching has tended to focus on teaching the oral skills: listening and speaking, while written skills: reading and writing have been given less emphasis. Though this emphasis is essential as it goes with the dominated belief “Speech is the primary form of language, writing is secondary” (Stevens, 1977: 109). But the pendulum, as Stevens (Ibid) states, has swung too far in the direction of oral skills at the expense of the written skills. Hence, many language teachers seek to increase the effort required for learning and teaching a command of the written skills especially reading skill. At this juncture, it is essential to point out that “one can not simply increase the amount of reading .... Without concomitant changes in how the reading is done” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983: 12). It is also essential to point out that these changes in how the reading is done should be compatible with the nature of the reading comprehension process.

### **1.3 Teachers’ Concept of Reading**

A teacher’s concept of reading is not just an academic concern but rather, it influences every action he takes in the classroom (Clymer, 1968: 44). Therefore, teachers have to bear in mind the following considerations when they deal with reading comprehension activity.

### **1.3.1 Text Meaning**

The meaning of a sentence is not the sum total of the isolated words of that sentence. And similarly the meaning of the text is not the sum total of the isolated sentences. Thus, the teacher has to focus on global understanding and to require his pupils to work on the text level rather than on sentence level. Furthermore, he has to avoid the misconception which is based upon the assumption that a text has predictable meanings, but rather it has, as Widdowson (1979) suggests, potential for meaning which varies from one reader to another, depending on many factors. Apart from knowing the meaning of words and code of the language, the interpretation of the text varies according to the purpose and reader's expectation from the text and his previous knowledge (Grellet, 1981: 9). Since a reader makes a sense of a text in the light of his background knowledge and his anticipation, so such relevant knowledge needs to be activated before its contributing to understanding. Among the other factors that may influence comprehension process are: interest, relevance and motivation.

### **1.3.2 Reading Comprehension Process**

Reading comprehension process consists of three basic strategies revealed by miscue analysis (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984):

- 1) Prediction - the reader predicates what the text is about.
- 2) Sampling - the reader selects and uses the minimum information from the text in an attempt to confirm the prediction. In this regard, Krashen & Terrell (1983: 135) state that good readers "use many

sources of information”; they sample various linguistic cues (graphic, syntactic, and semantic) and have recourse to utilizing their knowledge of the world to arrive at a hypothesis about the meaning of the text.

- 3) Confirming - the reader tests and checks the prediction against the sample in various ways (reading on, re – reading). Then if the prediction is not confirmed by the sample, he creates another prediction.

### **1.3.3 Reading Comprehension Levels**

Reading comprehension is not one level. Rather, it can be divided into five major levels as treated in Barret’s ‘Taxonomy of the cognitive and Affective Dimensions of Reading Comprehension’ in an attempt to provide both a manageable and understandable means of teaching comprehension (Clymer, 1968: 55). These levels of comprehension are: 1) literal comprehension; 2) reorganization; 3) inferential comprehension; 4) evaluation and 5) appreciation. Now let us describe these levels of comprehension in this order:

#### **1) Literal Comprehension**

The aim of literal comprehension is to focus on explicit ideas and information in the text. Thus, a simple task in it may be to identify or recall a single fact or incident. A more complex task, on the other hand, might be to identify or recall a series of facts or the sequencing if incidents in a reading text (Ibid).

#### **2) Reorganization**

This level of comprehension requires the student to analyse, synthesize, and / or organize explicit ideas or information in the text. Thus, reorganization tasks may take the form of classifying, outlining or summarizing. Such tasks entail either the utilization of the statements of the author verbatim or paraphrasing the author's statements (Ibid).

### **3) Evaluation**

This level of comprehension requires the student to make an evaluative judgment by comparing ideas presented in the text with external criteria provided by the teacher or other sources, or with internal criteria provided by the reader's experiences, knowledge or values. In general, evaluative thinking may be demonstrated by asking the student to make judgment of reality or fantasy, judgments of worth, desirability and acceptability.

### **4) Appreciation**

This level of comprehension calls for the student to be "emotionally and aesthetically sensitive to the work and to have a reaction to the work of its psychological and artistic elements" (Ibid: 60). Thus, appreciation includes "both the knowledge of and the emotional response to literary techniques, forms, styles, and structures" (Ibid).

### **5) Inferential Comprehension**

At this level, the student is required to utilize the ideas and information stated in the text and his background knowledge as a basis for drawing inferences. These inferences might be either convergent or

divergent in nature. Tasks in inferential comprehension may take one of the following forms (Ibid):

**a) Inferring Supporting Details**

In this case, the student is required to conjecture about additional facts that the author might have included in the text.

**b) Inferring Main Ideas**

In this task, the student is required to infer the main idea, general significance, theme, or moral which is implicitly stated in the text.

**c) Inferring Sequence**

In this instance, the student may be asked to conjecture as to what action or incident might have taken place between two actions or incidents explicitly stated in the text, or he may be asked to conjecture about what would happen next if the text had been extended and had not ended as it did.

**d) Inferring Comparisons**

Tasks in inferential comparisons require the student to infer similarities and differences in characters, times, or places.

**e) Inferring Cause and Effect Relationship**

The student, in this case, is required to hypothesize about the motivation of characters or to conjecture about the reason of including certain ideas, words, characterizations, and actions in the text by the writer.

**f) Inferring Character Traits**

The student is required to hypothesize about the nature of characters using explicit clues presented in the text as a basis for his hypotheses.

**g) Predicting Outcomes**

The student, in this case, is required to conjecture about the outcome of the text on the basis of reading initial portion of the text.

**h) Interpreting Figurative Language**

In this instance, the student is requested to infer literal meanings from the author's figurative use of language in his writing.

## **Section Two**

### **The Proposed Criteria for Evaluating the Teaching of Reading Materials**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

Krashen & Terrell (1983: 131) have suggested two main types of reading programs: those that can be described as “interventionist” programs which attempt to teach many aspects of the reading skill directly. The others, on the other hand, do very little with regard to giving deliberate instruction. However, little empirical research exists, as Krashen & Terrell (Ibid) state, to help us to decide which type is better. Nevertheless, it is proposed that all that is needed for “learning to read” is *appropriate texts, some goals, and possible points of intervention aspects of the reading process* that may be deliberately taught to advantage. I shall discuss these elements of the proposed reading program in turn.

#### **2.1 Appropriate Texts**

Krashen & Terrell (Ibid) have stated two main criteria for a text to be appropriate for a reader: first, it must be at an appropriate level of difficulty. Second, it must be interesting for the reader.

With regard to the first criterion, Eskey (1973: 73) states that it is preferable to strike a balance between too easy and too difficult. He maintains that it can be challenging but not frustrating, but to be too easy is

better than too difficult. Krashen & Terrell (1983: 132) attribute complexity in a text to three main sources: (1) Vocabulary; too many unfamiliar words in a text will render it incomprehensible. However, the number of unfamiliar lexical items which can be tolerated depends on the interaction of this and other sources of difficulty. (2) Syntax; it is difficult to determine how much unfamiliar syntax can be tolerated. Nevertheless, it is certain that long sentences, especially with embedded clauses are more difficult to comprehend. However, research with second language acquirers suggests that lexical and semantic factors can outweigh syntactic factors. (3) Semantics; this type of difficulty can arise from two main sources. The first source is the degree of familiarity readers have with the topic. Research with second language acquirers provides evidence that familiarity with the topic facilitates comprehension (Krashen, 1985: 23). The second source for semantic difficulty is the inherent complexity of the topic discussed in the text. For instance, a discussion of economics will be more demanding than a description of a trip. Thus, appropriate texts for teaching reading must not be so cognitively demanding that the complexity of the topic hinders the process of comprehending. Concerning the second criterion of a text to be appropriate, Krashen & Terrell (1983: 134) suggest that “if readers are genuinely interested in content, this interest can outweigh other factors to a large extent”. Thus, they regard interest in content as the most important consideration in selecting appropriate text. On the other hand, this criterion is, as Krashen & Terrell (Ibid) maintain, “the most difficult requirement to satisfy”. However, I think this can be achieved if the students’ views and attitudes towards English have been taken into consideration. In support of this view, Niederhauser (1997: 9) remarked that “helping students to connect

language learning to their personal goals is a great way for teachers to begin addressing the motivation issue in their classrooms”.

In addition to the criteria outlined above, Eskey (1973: 73) has set another one for a text to be appropriate; the length of the text must not be so intimidating that it kills the enjoyment.

## **2.2 Goals and Reading Skills**

Reading is purposive. We read in order to get a message other than just language practice. Hence, reading comprehension is concerned with meaning rather than form. Furthermore, “different goals require different kinds of reading skills” Krashen & Terrell, 1983: 134). Thus, the use of one type of reading skills rather than the other is determined by one’s purpose for reading. Hence, efficient reading entails high flexibility on the part of the reader in switching reading speed and technique according to the purpose (Grellet, 1981: 17). Regarding the types of reading skills, four main ones are distinguished in the literature on reading:

- 1) Scanning whereby the reader makes a quick overview of a passage looking for specific information.
- 2) Skimming whereby the reader uses the same approach of scanning except that he looks for the main idea or the general gist of a text instead of focusing on specific information.
- 3) Extensive reading which is rapid reading for main ideas of a large amount of text.
- 4) Intensive reading which is reading for thorough comprehension of an entire text (Krashen & Terrell, 1983: 134). Thus, teachers have to avoid the misconception that comprehension is “a single unitary skill” (Clymer, 1968: 55).

### **2.3 Intervention Aspects**

Intervention for Krashen & Terrell (1983: 138) means “stimulating the development and use of efficient meaning-getting strategies in reading”. Two types of intervention programs are suggested: 1) mild intervention programs and 2) heavy intervention programs.

Mild intervention programs aim at teaching more general strategies; strategies that may unlock other more specific strategies. Such programs contain just these two strategies: 1) “Read for meaning” and 2) Don’t look up every word”. At this juncture, it is essential to point out, as Krashen & Terrell (Ibid: 139) state, that such instruction will not work unless reading assignments call for skimming, scanning and extensive reading in addition to intensive reading assignments with detailed comprehension questions. Heavy intervention programs, on the other hand, aims at teaching the specific strategies explicitly and providing more actual practice in their use. Thus, they will teach a more specific strategy, the prediction of meaning and may provide more practice. Furthermore, the teacher may encourage readers, as Goodman & Flores (cited by Krashen & Terrell, Ibid) suggest, to predict what is going to happen next at a significant point in the text. Two techniques are recommended to develop prediction strategies: 1) pre-reading questions and 2) the “cloze” technique. In a “cloze” reading students are presented with a text from which every nth word (usually **n** is between 5 to 10) is omitted and the reader must use the contextual clues and any relevant ones (lexical, syntactic or stylistic) in order to predict the missing word. Thus, the cloze procedure, as Hatch (quoted by Krashen & Terrell, bid) points out, “(1) forces the reader to be active and constructive; (2) requires

guesses based on both semantic and syntactic clues of the language; (3) requires retention of content in order, for the reader, to continue guessing". Likewise, Eskey (1973: 78) states that the cloze procedure "forces the hesitant reader to think, to attack his reading problems actively by drawing on his several kinds of knowledge about English". He maintains that it has also the important pedagogical virtue of its gamelike appeal in that it creates a series of puzzles which the restless student mind finds it hard to resist. Hence, the "cloze" technique is basically used to develop prediction strategies. Pre-reading questions technique, on the other hand, is basically used to "help students focus on the crucial points of a passage" (Krashen & Terrell, 1983: 139). But it may also be used to "develop prediction strategies" (Ibid). Heavy intervention programs may also give students more explicit help on using context. This can be of two kinds. First, text-related strategies that encourage readers to use information found in the text itself. Some students may profit from being explicitly instructed to utilize headings and illustrations in comprehending the text and to look ahead in the text for cues to meaning of unfamiliar words. Second, outside knowledge - related strategies; strategies that use knowledge outside the text: the student's knowledge of the world and his knowledge of the language. Concerning the importance of language learning strategies (LLS), Lessard-Clouston (1997) states that LLS are important for language learning for two reasons: first, because "they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence". Second, because "research suggests that training students to use LLS can help them become better language learner". Finally, it is essential to emphasize that we recommend a compromise between the two types of the intervention programs outlined above.

## **Section Three**

### **Evaluation of the Existing Reading Materials**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

In this section, I shall attempt to evaluate the existing reading materials in the light of the three criteria discussed in the previous section: (1) text appropriacy, (2) goals & reading skills, and (3) intervention aspects. Before executing the evaluation, I find it appropriate to start with a brief outline of the material.

The material consists of six units (from unit 10 to the end of unit 15) intended for the second year student teachers at the department of English in the Teacher-Training Institutes. Each unit contains almost the same type of activities. The breakdown of each unit is as follows:

- a) A reading passage of moderate length with exception of unit 14 which is about 4 pages.
- b) A glossary which gives the meaning of new / difficult words and expressions in Arabic.
- c) Word study exercises.
- d) Word formation exercises in the units 12, 13 & 14 only (see 12. 4, 13. 3 & 14. 8).
- e) Filling black spaces with words chosen from a list supplied for this purpose.
- f) Yes / No questions based on the content of the passage in unit 14 only (see 14. 5) or true / false items in unit 13 only (see 13. 5).

- g) Completing tables with information from the passage as in units 10, 11, 12 & 15 (see 10. 4, 11. 4, 12. 4, & 15. 4).
- h) Further comprehension exercises based on the content of the passage in units 12 & 13 only (see 12. 5 and the table on page 167).
- i) Exercises aim at sharpening the students' skills and ability to understand and use the devices of language such as cohesive devices, contextual references, etc. (see 10. 6, 10.7, 11. 6, 13. 6A & B, 14. 6 & 15. 5).
- j) Rephrasing exercises (see 12.10, 13. 7 & 14. 7).
- k) Structures and usage (see 10.8, 11. 9, 12. 11, 13. 8, 14. 10 & 15. 6).
- l) Composition exercises – most of their topics provide further practice in using the reading materials (see 10. 9, 11. 10, 13. 9 & 15. 7). Some topics, on the other hand, have made extensive use of pictures and charts (see 12. 12 & 14. 11). Some of these exercises are guided in that they take the form of question and answer format as 10. 9, 11. 10, 14. 11 & 15. 9 while others are not.
- m) Dialogues - some dialogues are related to the themes of the reading passages as 11. 12 & 13. 10 while others give some practice in using some expressions or expressing some language functions such as preferences as in 14. 12 or finding the way as in 15. 10.

Now let us embark on evaluating the reading materials:

### **3.1 Text Appropriacy**

Text appropriacy of the existing reading texts will be evaluated in terms of the two criteria stated early in section 2. These two criteria are: (1) Level of difficulty and (2) Learner's interest.

### **3.1.1 Level of Difficulty**

The author of the reading material course has stated in his introduction that the materials are suitable for student teachers as their stated focus is on teaching “language acts needed by the learner in his teaching career”. However, I find the stated focus of the materials is not on teaching language needed by the learner in his teaching career, but rather on teaching language needed by the learner in doing his course especially in studying methodology. On the whole, the materials have been found moderate in their level of difficulty. That is, they strike a balance between easy and difficult with the exception of the texts of units 13 & 14. The complexity in the texts of these units can be attributed to the following sources:

- a) **Vocabulary:** The texts are loaded with too many unfamiliar words. An examination of the texts and their appended glossaries reveal that.
- b) **Semantics:** Another source for the complexity in these texts is the inherent difficulty of the topics discussed in them. Discussion of political and economic topics is more demanding in their own nature than reporting an anecdote or a discussion of education for instance. However, the difficulty of the appended exercises is not so clearly pinpointed as much would hinge on the way in which they are handled by the teacher.

### **3.1.2 Learner’s Interest**

This criteria is, as Krashen & Terrell (1983: 134) think, “the most difficult requirement to satisfy”. My experience in teaching has shown that students do not react in any marked fashion to the texts but rather to the ways of dealing with them. Thus, the degree of interest is likely to depend on how they are going to handle the materials and on what they are asked to do with the materials rather than on any inherent properties of the materials themselves. Furthermore, the lack of learner’s interest can be due to the length of the text as in the case of the text of unit 14. Therefore, the length of the text must be so intimidating that it kills the enjoyment (Eskey, 1973: 73). However, the relevance of some topics to the students’ academic subject; methodology, arouses their interest to some extent as in the case of unit 10 “Theories of Learning”; unit 11 “The Psychology of Language” & unit 15 “The Development of Knowledge”.

### **3.2 Goals & Reading Skills**

It appears that the author ignores the necessity of specifying a communicative purpose for reading the passage itself. Thus, he does not seem to be aware that the student needs a purpose to do the reading task more than just learning the language itself. As a corollary for that, the program does not call for utilizing the different skills of reading. Hence, it becomes the teacher’s job to make every reading task as meaningful as possible for the students by specifying a communicative purpose for it. As the choice of the type of reading skill is determined by the purpose for doing the reading, the students will be provided with opportunities for practicing the different types of reading skills. Therefore, we will attempt, in the next section, to propose a communicative purpose for reading a text as an example to follow in dealing with the other texts. Moreover, we will show

how the purpose for reading determines the required type of reading skill. Thus, the student would be trained on switching reading skill and speed according to the purpose for reading the text.

### **3.3 Intervention Aspects**

In his introduction to the course (p. 6), the author claims that:

**The exercises set on the passage aim at helping students to acquire strategies of reading in English and to put these strategies to use when dealing with similar topics.**

An examination of these exercises reveals that some of tasks of exercises call for scanning such as word study exercises and exercises that make use of charts. And some tasks, on the other hand, call for extensive reading such as composition exercises that are based on the reading passages and question answer items. However, these exercises are void of any explicit teaching for strategies whether they are general strategies or specific ones. Thus, they are less of learning value as some students may profit from being explicitly instructed to utilize text-related strategies and outside knowledge-related strategies. Moreover, all the exercises are supposed to be done after thorough comprehension for the passage. Thus, the materials fail to call for utilizing the different skills of reading. Hence, the teacher has to find his own way of using the materials in such a way so as to provide practice in utilizing the reading strategies.

In the next section, some pedagogical suggestions will be presented showing how to deal with the texts and their appended exercises so as to make them meet the intended requirements.

## **Section Four**

### **Pedagogical Suggestions**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

Before embarking on offering pedagogical suggestions to help the teacher do his job effectively and realize the objectives of the course, it is important to outline the findings of the process of evaluation. I shall refer to the negative aspects of the materials as well as the positive ones. While we attempt to suggest techniques to overcome the first aspects, the second ones have to be emphasized by the teacher and to be aware of them.

#### **4.1 The Negative Aspects**

1. The texts of units 13 and 14 can be regarded as inappropriate texts as they do not suit the level of the intended students.
2. The length of the text of unit 14 is so intimidating (about 4 pages) that it kills the enjoyment.
3. Some exercises are too difficult for the students. This difficulty is due to the lack of sufficient guidance. For example in 11. 8 the material presented is not related to the text; it neither reinforces the information presented in the text nor the structures presented in the unit. And in 11. 11 some essential clues have to be offered. The difficulty in 12. 5, on the other hand, is due to the instructions which are in such a mess that the students get confused and can not understand what to do. Other examples of difficult exercises are 13.

9 which suffers from inadequate guidance and 15. 6 which suffers from inadequate presentation of the structure being presented.

4. Although some exercises aim at providing opportunities for practicing scanning strategy for reading such as the use of diagrams and charts, yet they fail to achieve that aim as the students are supposed to do them after fully comprehending the passage. Furthermore, the word study exercises are just exercises in teaching synonyms rather than developing meaning prediction strategies.

5. No communicative purposes are specified for reading the texts. As a corollary for that, no training in utilizing skills and strategies for reading is offered.

6. The course is void of any explicit teaching for strategies of reading in English, whether they are general strategies or specific ones.

#### **4.2 The Positive Aspects**

1. The texts suit the level of the intended students with the exception of the texts of units 13 & 14.

2. Most of the texts are relevant to the students “academic communicative needs”. Such “content” texts in Krashen & Terrell term (1983: 123) are evident in the texts of unit 10 “Theories of Learning” and unit 11 “The Psychology of Language”. Thus, the students are stimulated and their interest in the texts is aroused. Furthermore, the efficacy of using “content” texts and activities has been demonstrated in immersion programs in Canada and the United States (Krashen & Terrell, Ibid: 124).

In an attempt to help the teacher overcome the deficiencies specified in the given reading materials and implement the program in a more successful

way, some pedagogical techniques will be suggested for handling the given materials.

### **4.3 Pedagogical Suggestions**

#### **4.3.0 Introduction**

Two sets of pedagogical suggestions will be offered. The first one will be practical; dealing with the reading materials which we are concerned with. The second one will constitute general pedagogical suggestions for teachers to help their students develop their reading comprehension process.

#### **4.3.1 Practical Suggestions for Adaptations**

I would like to point out at the outset that the suggestions given here will take the form of activities which are intended to serve as a model for adaptations. And they are by no means intended to serve as a series of prescriptive instructions as the scope of adaptation is “as wide as the experience and creativity of each individual teacher” (Cunningswroth, 1984: 66).

1. Having found the texts of units 13 and 14 to be “over the students’ heads” I may suggest the following techniques to help the student comprehend the texts. Concerning unit 13 the following activities may be suggested.

#### **Pre-reading Activities**

1. Lead the students into a class discussion on the theme of Iraq’s revolution and Army by raising the following questions:

- a) Has your father or brother joined the army or is he going to join it?
- b) When was the Iraqi Army founded?
- c) How is the relation between the Iraqi people and army?

- d) What is the main reason for the success of the Iraq Revolution of July 17 / 30?
- e) The Iraq Revolution of July 17 / 30 has carried out numerous achievements in all fields of life. What is the most important one?
- f) When did Iraq decide to nationalize its oil?
- g) When did the decision bear fruit?
- h) What was the effect of the nationalization of oil on the foreign oil companies?
- i) What were its effects on the Iraqi economy and the Iraqi man?

2. Imagine that you have a visitor from England or you yourself visit England and you have been asked about the Iraqi's Revolution of July 17 / 30 and Iraqi's Army, what will you tell them?

- a) Make a list of the things that you want to tell them.
- b) Make a list of what you already know.
- c) Discuss and exchange the information you have written down in pairs.

**Comment:** Activities 1 and 2 are mainly intended to activate and draw on outside knowledge-related strategies; strategies that use knowledge outside the text: the student's knowledge of the world and his knowledge of the language. At the same time, they are intended to prepare the student to think about the theme of the passage before working on it. It is essential to focus on these intentions as "what we already know about the subject and what we are looking for are probably just as important as what we actually draw from the text" (Grellet, 1981: 18). Furthermore, if these activities succeed in generating genuine interest for reading the text "this interest can outweigh other factors to a large extent" (Krashen & Terrell, 1983: 134).

Concerning unit 14 I may suggest the following activities:

**Pre-reading Activity:**

1. Before starting reading the text “The happiest man in the world” and working on it, lead the students into a class discussion on the theme of the title of text by raising the following questions:

- a) Who do you think is the happiest man in the world?
- b) What do you expect the text will be about?

**Comment:** This activity is mainly intended to provide purpose for reading the text and to prepare the students to think about the theme of the passage before working on it. It is also intended to train the students in using the title to get an idea of the kinds of information that the text could hold in store for them. Eventually the students are trained in prediction strategies in order to assist them in approaching and comprehending unknown texts.

**Intext Activity:**

Now let us read the text and see what it is about.

1. After reading the first page of the text, hold a discussion about the text by raising the following negotiable questions (open questions):

- a. What do you expect Jess would do when his brother-in-law, Tom Brackett, refused to offer him a job after he came walking from his home in Kansas City in two weeks?
- b. What would you do if you were Jess?

**Comment:** This activity is mainly intended to activate the student's interest in the text and to provide reason for reading text.

2. Having attributed the difficulty of the exercise 11. 11 to the lack of guidance, we suggest that each picture have to be followed with a set of questions on it.

3. As the exercise 11. 8 seems not to be related to the text nor to the structures presented in the unit, we find no need to include it in the unit. Thus, we suggest just leaving it out.

4. As the instructions of the exercise 12. 5 are found to be so confusing, we may suggest the following instruction as a substitute for them:

(Put the following sentences in order so as to retell the story leaving out the irrelevant ones).

5. As the exercise 13. 9 suffers from inadequate guidance for writing the composition, we suggest the technique of question & answer format. That is, to give the students a series of questions on the topic, the answers to which form the composition (see for example 10. 9 in the course).

6. As the exercise 15. 6 suffers from inadequate presentation offering one example in isolation about the use pattern being presented, we suggest giving more examples on it in context so as to enable the students to comprehend the structure and learn it.

7. To achieve the aim set for the use of diagrams and charts, we suggest introducing such types of activities before the texts to act as purpose for reading the texts. At the same time, this technique will provide the students with opportunities for practicing scanning strategy for reading; a skill which involves reading through a text with the purpose of obtaining specific information.

8. In an attempt to develop meaning prediction strategies, students can be explicitly advised to look ahead in the text for cues to meanings of unfamiliar words. In addition, they have to be encouraged to use real world information and knowledge of the language. Suppose, for example, that none of the students had ever come into contact with the word ‘apes’ in the following sentence which has been extracted from the reading passage of unit 10 “Theories of Learning”:

**Wolfgang Kohler, a German psychologist carried out a series of experiments with apes to show that learning involves thinking.**

Teacher talk like the following might encourage prediction on the basis of the text, knowledge of the world and their acquired knowledge of English:

**What sorts of words could be used after the expression ‘experiments with’? (Students will give an assortment of nouns like animals, cats, dogs etc.). Now, what is the purpose of Wolfgang Kohler’s experiments? (Students’ reply will be “to show that learning involves thinking”). Then, what animal is supposed to have a high ability of thinking like a human being? (Some students may say “monkey”) yes. So, what does the word ‘ape’ mean? (Students will answer “monkey”). Yes, ‘ape’ is tailless monkey.**

At this point, it is important to emphasize that “prediction strategies will not always result in completely correct answers” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983: 141). Likewise, Goodman states that “no readers read material they have not read before without errors” (quoted by Krashen & Terrell, Ibid). therefore,

we as teachers, must strive to “reduce the learner’s fear of error by removing the penalty ..... and by stating plainly that some wrong inferences are unavoidable but that without inferences, reading is impossible” (Cates & Swaffer quoted by Krashen & Terrell, Ibid).

Concerning the development of prediction strategies in general, two techniques are recommended:

1- Pre-reading questions technique may serve to develop prediction strategies by helping students focus on the crucial points of a text (Krashen & Terrell, Ibid: 139). Thus, the teacher may ask the students a set of questions related to the text before working on it to help them predict the theme of the text, to predict the conclusion, or to predict what is going to happen in the second paragraph after reading the first one.

2- Another technique which is suggested to be successful in helping students develop prediction strategies is the “cloze” technique (see page 13 - 14).

9. As no communicative purposes are specified for reading the texts, it is the teacher’s job to do so. For instance, the following purpose can be suggested for reading the text in unit 11 “The Psychology of Language”:

*What would you say if, in an interview with you as a student teacher in the department of English, they asked you the following questions about language:*

*1) What is language? 2) How do we learn language? / How does the child acquire language? 3) How does environment affect language learning?*

Thus, providing a purpose for reading the text would offer the students an opportunity in utilizing scanning strategy for reading.

### **4.3.2 General Pedagogical Suggestions To Enhance Students’ Reading Comprehension Process**

1. Create a situation to provide a purpose for reading the text.

2. Direct the student to utilize the reading skill that is appropriate for achieving the purpose.
3. Don't let the students depend wholly on the appended glosses and try to encourage them to guess the meanings of unknown words especially those words meaning of which can be predicted from the context in which they occur. In support of this view, let us quote Bright & McGregor (1970: 31):

**Every time we tell a pupil what a word means we are robbing him of a chance to practice this skill (inferencing). Questions about the meanings of words should be countered by questions aimed at helping the pupil to make intelligent guesses.**

Another thing the teacher can do is to encourage the students to use the dictionary and choose the meaning that suits the context in which the word occurs. However, as Champeau de Lopez (1987: 14) suggests, "the dictionary should be used as a last resort". That is, using a dictionary should be reserved for those cases in which a word's meaning seems to be vital for comprehending the text and the contextual clues are not adequate to help to infer the meaning. In line with this view, Bright & McGregor (Ibid: 39) state that:

*The interest and usefulness of dictionary work should not be allowed to obscure in the pupils' minds the even greater importance of intelligent guesses.*

They maintain that:

*Even when they have firmly decided to look up a word 'to make sure', they should have a shot at guessing first. Apart from anything else this makes them more likely to choose the right sense.*

4. Start with pre-reading activities to help the students comprehend the text better by preparing them to think about the topic of the text before they start

working on it by drawing on their background knowledge. Thus, the students are trained in utilizing outside knowledge-related strategies.

5. Introduce activities which require global understanding of the text and may lead to discussion and reflection on the text as a whole. Thus, the students will be provided with the opportunities to practice their ability of appreciation and evaluation (c. f. Grellet, 1981: 8).

6. Introduce questions which encourage students to anticipate the information in the text from its title or from reading the first paragraph, or to anticipate the next paragraph or chunk from reading the preceding one. Thus, the students are trained in utilizing prediction strategies.

7. Provide instructions in the various types of skills required at each level of the reading process. In support of this suggestion, Gardner (1978: 77) states that “it was shown that reading gains were obtained when the pupils received constant practice in adopting ‘reading strategies’”. Likewise, Otto (quoted by Layton, 1979: 200) has stated that “when comprehension is taught, rather than left to chance, students’ critical skills are sharpened”.

8. Inculcate in your students the habit of reading. For many foreign students, as Eskey (1973: 73) states, “the problem is not only to learn to read but to develop a reading habit”. Thus Affagnon (1990: 33) suggests that “the master should stimulate his students to read English books for enjoyment after class”.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

What I have tried in this paper is to evaluate the teaching of reading materials for second year student teachers at the department of English in the Teacher-Training Institutes. This evaluation is done in terms of certain

criteria proposed by Krashen & Terrell (1983) so as to identify the negative aspects as well as the positive ones.

In an attempt to overcome the negative aspects so as to enhance the students' reading comprehension process and to help them approach and comprehend unknown texts, some practical suggestions have been offered for handling them so as to enhance the students' reading comprehension process.

Finally, I have to mention that I have never intended to blame or criticize the author as I am quite sure of the fact that he has done his best in preparing the materials. Rather, I have intended to throw the light on some inadequacies of the materials and show how to overcome them.

One further point needs to be added is that "teaching is a pragmatic process and we should use whatever method brings the best results" (Cunningsworth, 1984: 33). Thus, as Bamber (1981: 7) states, "it is often the teacher who determines the success or otherwise of the materials at his disposal". Furthermore, as no coursebook can be totally perfect, the teacher himself has to find his own way of handling it and adapting it if necessary (Cunningsworth, 1984: 8). It is a commonly noticed fact that "an enterprising teacher can produce remarkable results with the most slender resources, while the finest materials often become as nought in the hands of an unimaginative one" Bamber (1981: 7). Hence, almost all the suggestions that have been offered to overcome the deficiencies specified throughout the evaluation process deal with the ways of handling the texts rather than the contents of the texts.

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