

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

Authentic Texts with a Person-Centered Message as an Education Resource for Extensive Reading Textbooks

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Abstract

The paper offers insights into extensive reading issue in connection with a person-centered approach. The major objective of the study was to ascertain the significance of extensive reading not only for the improvement of language skills in learning English but also in the development of a learner's worldview through reading and discussing authentic texts used as an education resource. Empirical data for the study were authentic texts and graded readers as well as workbooks and manuals as support materials. The methodological approach used in the data analysis is a mixed methodology based on comparison of techniques applied in extensive reading in graded readers and in Russian university educators' workbooks and manuals. The research follows a two-side design worked out by the authors, with the analysis of techniques used in extensive reading and of content features of authentic texts. Drawing upon our findings of application of authentic texts for extensive reading, we propose three main recommendations for making an effective extensive reading textbook, which can contribute both to the improvement of language skills and to the appearance of mental and emotional response to the topics raised in authentic texts. This type of response we consider to be a sign of the developments of students' personality while learning English.

Keywords: Authentic text, extensive reading, person-centered approach.

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Published by Moscow City University and peer-reviewed under responsibility of TSNI-2021 (Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity)

Introduction

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With the ever-growing information flow a modern day individual faces certain challenges both personal and professional, so information competence comes to the foreground and it is reading skills and especially extensive reading skills that can help to cope with the massive amount of data. Person-centered approach continues to be an issue in education and it has been referred to frequently during the last decade (Motschnig-Pitrik, Derntl & Kabicher, 2010; Sirazeeva, 2015; Litvinova, 2020). Despite the fact that the very structure of personality is still being debated upon (Asendorpf, 2015; Daljeet, et al., 2017) the primacy of the individual in education is beyond all doubt. In our study, we follow the six-factor structure of personality HEXACO (Ashton et al., 2004) which is unique because of Honesty-Humility dimension. Each of the factors consists of a set of traits that a personality may develop at a high or low level. While learning English as a foreign language (EFL) most of the skills and strategies are trained by studying short texts in detail. However, the use of longer texts such as authentic novels, non-fiction or reference books, and internet articles can develop other skills. These two approaches are termed traditionally as intensive and extensive reading (ER). In EFL learning in Russia, these two types of reading are named as analytical and home or out of class reading. It does not mean that there are just these two contrasting ways of reading. There are many other strategies, which are interrelated and overlapping. Intensive reading is important in preparing students for the ER they can do outside the classroom, as well as for many of the internationally recognised qualifications in English, such as CAE, FCE, IELTS or TOEFL. Intensive and extensive reading are complementary and both are necessary, as well as other approaches that perhaps fit into neither category but which can be met in many English textbooks (Bim, Afanasyeva & Radchenko, 1999).

Purpose and objectives of the study

Language skills are formed and developed in EFL learning. ER is one of the ways to improve language skills and to raise a person's estimation of himself or herself. The level of the development of language skills can reflect a person's evaluation as a personality. The purpose of our research is to prove that ER can be one of ways of realizing a person-centered approach in EFL learning. To achieve the purpose of the study we are going to analyse existing approaches to ER and to describe types and contents of texts and textbooks for ER, and dwell on some techniques used in ER.

Literature review

In EFL learning, reading is often used for purposes that are different from those found in mother-tongue learning. The most typical use of reading in a foreign language is one that helps the teacher to present and practice specific linguistic items – vocabulary, grammar, structures, etc. (McQuillan, 2019; Nation & Waring, 2020). Types of reading used in class (intensive reading) and out of class (extensive reading) differ

in fulfilment of education goals.

The aim of intensive reading is to get a profound and detailed comprehension of the text. Students must understand not only what the text means but also of how the meaning is created. The goal of intensive reading is primarily to train students in reading strategies. Students are supposed to concentrate on vocabulary (individual words and collocations) or structure, and to develop specific reading skills and sub-skills such as scanning, skimming or guessing the meaning of words from context. There is an opinion that to understand the whole book we must understand each of its parts. However, it is also true that we are able to understand the message of a novel without fully grasping every part of it. Many EFL teachers think that this ability of students should be encouraged and developed. This suggests that teachers ought to pay attention to both intensive and extensive reading.

In many recent studies on ER, which is also termed as pleasure reading, self-selected reading, free voluntary reading, wide reading and independent reading, it is highlighted that “extensive reading refers to reading of large quantities of interesting reading materials in order to get pleasure or information, where a reader attempts to obtain a general understanding of what he/she reads rather than to focus on details” (Alshamrani 2003, p. 1). Other researchers state that ER enables students to achieve numerous linguistic objectives, including improved reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, language construction, and better writing skills. In addition to linguistic purposes, students may build confidence and independent learning, creating a positive attitude to EFL learning, increase their general knowledge about the world and people, think about issues raised, etc. (Rong Ng, Renandya & Chong 2019, p. 171-172).

The purpose of ER is to help students to become competent readers, “the more they read, the more their language proficiency increases, the more confident they feel and the more motivated they are” (Macmillan Readers 2014, p. 2). There are some strategies, which can only be trained by reading longer texts. More complex and more important in ER is the ability to discern relationships between the various parts of a longer text, the contribution made by each part to the plot or argument, the accumulating evidence of the writer’s point of view, and others. ER is about contents and meaning and refers to the kind of reading EFL learners may already do in their own language; similar issues are disputable in literature classes.

The choice of reading and support materials that help students to become competent readers is rather various. British education publishing houses such as Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Macmillan Publishers Ltd. and Longman RELOD offer many types of education books for ER, among them are various readers’ guidebooks, workbooks and Readers, all of which are effective in EFL learning.

The most known is The Macmillan Readers series. It was first launched as Heinemann Graded Readers

over 35 years ago, “the series quickly set a new standard in EFL reading programmes, with a wide range of titles and a wealth of support materials to help teachers and learners gain the most from ER” (Macmillan Readers 2014, p. 2). Now this series known as Macmillan Readers, Macmillan Cultural Readers and Macmillan Literature Collections includes adaptations of classic and modern works of fiction, biographies of contemporary figures and non-fiction titles on various topics. The peculiarity of this series is that it consists of textbooks for ER graded into levels of difficulty for learners who are at various language levels starting from Elementary to Advanced.

Methodology

The research is based on the analysis of extensive reading programmes suggested by Macmillan Publishers Ltd., Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press and Longman RELOD and comparing them with extensive reading programmes used in Russian Universities’ curricula. The aim of this stage is to elicit the strong methodological points of both counterparts. The second stage of the research is to analyze the authentic books and textbooks used for extensive reading in Language and Teacher Training Departments in Russian Universities. This analysis aims at detecting the main themes discussed in authentic books that may foster personal and professional growth of students thus implementing person-based approach.

When reading a foreign text language learners usually meet certain difficulties connected with complex or unfamiliar vocabulary or grammar, text organisation and content. To overcome all these difficulties the series of Macmillan Readers offers a variety of activities and exercises. Macmillan educators suggest several techniques employed in ER to develop readers’ skills with the help of graded readers (Macmillan Readers 2014, p. 3-4):

- 1) It is necessary to simplify the language, control the amount of information and repeat new vocabulary systematically and naturally in various exercises to improve students’ reading fluency. The more the key vocabulary is repeated and recycled, the more it becomes familiar to students and they start using it as it were their native language.
- 2) It is advisable to allow the learners to read extensively with a limited vocabulary (words and collocations) in different contexts in order to get a more complete understanding of the meaning of words and collocations and the various contexts. This technique in Macmillan educators’ opinion helps students to extend their vocabulary.
- 3) It is possible in while reading and post-reading activities to improve writing skills by doing various motivating tasks.

4) It is conceivable that by reading longer texts, students learn to see the foreign language as a means of communicating ideas, opinions, or even emotions. ER helps students become aware of how the language is constructed.

5) It is appropriate to design any activities that support ER in the way that they can motivate and encourage genuine feedback and personal opinion, rather than test comprehension.

6) It is desirable to encourage a positive attitude to reading among students in any possible way as recent studies have found plenty of evidence to suggest that attitude or motivation is a key factor in learning a foreign language.

In Russian Universities, the approach to ER in EFL learning is different from that applied by Macmillan educators in graded readers.

Firstly, ER is integrated into a language programme in the curriculum of Foreign Languages and Foreign Philology Departments.

Secondly, ER is a whole-class reading programme in which all the students in one class read the same authentic book and discuss parts (chapters) of this book at the lesson every week. There is an exception for EFL learners for whom English is the second or third foreign language. These students usually start ER with adaptation books; after a year of study, they also choose an authentic book for ER.

Thirdly, ER can also serve as an extracurricular activity, individual, out of class reading. Students choose a book for ER by themselves according to their interest and preferences. While reading an authentic book a EFL learner keeps a reader's diary, writing down key vocabulary (words and collocations), analyzing grammar phenomena and constructions whose acquisition will help students interpret the contents of the novel and express their opinion. A teacher controls individual EFL learner's achievements in ER once or twice a month either at a lesson listening to the student's retelling of an authentic text or asking a student to write a review of what he learned from an authentic text.

Thus, "the purpose of integrating extensive reading in a language program or a course is not only to achieve pleasure, information, and a general meaning of materials read, but it also aims to make a language learner an independent and lifelong reader in the target language" (Alshamrani 2003, p. 1-2).

English language teachers and instructors in Russia work out and publish reading-guides, textbooks, workbooks and reading manuals, which comprise various assignments and help to develop vocabulary acquisition, speech fluency and discussion skills as well as comprehension of the contents and the message

of an authentic novel used for ER. There are textbooks that contain assignments and activities based on the contents of just one novel, for example, *The Workbook of the Novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray"* for ER made by O. Trunova and M. Nikolaeva (2019). The Workbook consists of twelve units, each of which contains assignments focusing on the development of various language skills and strategies. Assignments and tasks are arranged according to the principle of a growing complexity in mastering the language material of the chapters and in perceiving the contents and meaning of the novel. This scheme of arrangement of assignments finds its reflection in their grouping in special sections, named as Focus on the vocabulary, Focus on the text, Focus on style peculiarities, Perfecting the cultural background, Developing discussion or conversation skills (Trunova & Nikolaeva, 2019).

Among other most acknowledged support materials is the textbook for ER *Discuss the Read* by S. Kirsanova (1991). This manual is for undergraduate and graduate students, who have already acquired enough knowledge of English and are able to read authentic English novels in the original. As S. Kirsanova indicates 'The purpose of the manual is to provide systematic management of independent (out of class) and classroom activities of students, aimed at a thorough study and discussion of the work of fiction, in parts and in general, with the use of semantic analysis of its ideological and figurative system' (Kirsanova 1991, p. 3). Four novels, which are the subject of the discussion in her reading manual, are *The Sandcastle* by Iris Murdoch, *The Painted Veil* by W. S. Maugham, *The Great Gatsby* F. S. Fitzgerald, and *Lord of the Flies* by W. Golding. The assignments of the textbook contain many exercises collected in the sections Vocabulary Acquisition and in Questions and Topics for Discussion.

In Russian universities, English and American classic and modern books represent authentic books for ER in the programme for EFL learners. Among them are *Daddy-Long-Legs* by Jean Webster, *Matilda* by Roald Dahl, *Pollyanna* by Eleanor Emily Porter, *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. These books are of Pre-intermediate level of difficulty and used by first-year-students for ER.

These novels are all about the life of little girls. *Pollyanna* tells about an orphan girl who is eager and ready to make everyone comfortable and who believes in a better future for all people and does not spare trouble to find ways out of their deadlocks. The story of growing up and self-education of an orphan girl who finds herself at a girl's boarding school thanks to a financial support of her guardian, a rich young man, who later becomes her husband, is in the book *Daddy-Long-Legs*. *Matilda* tells the story of a smart and talented girl who has to confront a rather harsh world of adults. *The Secret Garden* dwells on a spoiled and lonely girl who after her parents' death comes to live to her uncle. Discovering an abandoned garden by chance, she begins to take care of it, involving her new friends into this activity. All these novels discuss topics of upbringing and growing up; of friendship, and of love for nature, under whose healing power people

change for the better. A person-centered approach is realized in all these books.

The novels for ER of the Intermediate level of difficulty (second- or third-year students) are *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, three novels by William Somerset Maugham – *The Painted Veil*, *Theatre* and *The Moon and Sixpence*, *The Sandcastle* by Iris Murdoch, and *The Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw. These novels describe such topics as *Man and Art*, *Man and Beauty*, *Man and Duty*. Besides these, there are other topics, which can influence upon a person's opinion and worldview and help to develop them as personalities. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the main topics for the discussion are the impermanence of beauty and youth, the juxtaposition of appearance and a person's inner world, the moral degradation of an individual and the topic of the influence and manipulation of a person.

W. S. Maugham's novels are rather popular in ER practice because they touch upon such eternal and disputable topics as love versus passion, a dysfunctional family, prudence, and the importance of a social status. They also discuss social and political issues of colonialism and the antagonism of the East and the West in *The Painted Veil*. The topics of an uncompromising desire for creativity and beauty and the rejection of the former life and family for the sake of creative pursuits are the subject of *The Moon and Sixpence*. In addition to these topics, the novel also raises an issue of the denial of a person's responsibility for another. The novel *Theatre* discusses the topics of acting and a theatrical illusion, of pretense and real life, of external beauty and personality and an issue of vanity.

The Sandcastle belongs to the novel of existentialism that is why behind the usual family-household conflict is the problem of freedom and the disposal of personal life, limited by the Kantian concept of moral duty.

The novels of the Upper-Intermediate and Advanced levels of difficulty for ER for undergraduates and graduates are *The Great Gatsby* by F.S. Fitzgerald, *Lord of the Flies* by W. Golding and *About a Boy* by N. Hornby. These novels touch upon serious moral and social topics, such as the issue of the American Dream, the topic of class and social inequality, of an illusion of the well-being, of postwar years and of the twenties of the twentieth century as an era of rapid economic growth and of the degradation of moral values in *The Great Gatsby*. *Lord of the Flies* is an allegorical novel that contains an opposition of natural instincts and the morals of the civilized society. It also discusses topics of the pressure of society on individuals and their conformity, the contrast of rational and emotional in a person, and the degradation of society exemplified by a group of children on a desert island without any control of adults, the bearers of social and moral norms and values.

The novel *About a Boy* tells us the story of Marcus, a lonely and unpopular boy among his coevals. After

his mother's suicide attempt, Marcus faces the problem of loneliness and tries to attract new people into his family's life. Marcus meets Will, an adult but immature man who is afraid of responsibility and avoids close relationships with people. The main topics of the novel are loneliness, maturity, and mental comfort.

Results

The above-mentioned novels contain many topics that are very important and person-centered as they perfectly fit the HEXACO model of personality structure. As these six dimensions are intrinsic to any personality we can trace them in all characters and follow their development in the novel. Yet we enumerate the novels that most vividly illustrate a certain personality facet and thus can provide students with a certain personal trajectory: Honesty-Humility (*The Secret Garden, The Painted Veil, Theatre, The Picture of Dorian Gray*), Emotionality (*Matilda, Daddy-Long-Legs, About a Boy*), Extraversion (*Daddy-Long-Legs, About a Boy, Pollyanna, The Great Gatsby*), Agreeableness (*The Secret Garden, Lord of the Flies, The Moon and Sixpence, The Picture of Dorian Gray*), Conscientiousness (*Matilda, Daddy-Long-Legs, About a Boy, The Painted Veil*), and Openness to Experience (*Daddy-Long-Legs, The Painted Veil, The Moon and Sixpence, etc.*). It becomes possible to comprehend the writer's message after the students have gained enough language skills in EFL learning.

We doubt the benefit of the technique of simplifying texts in graded readers. The latter can be used for intensive reading in class while ER should prepare students for real-life reading environment which might be confusing. One of the minor aims of ER is to motivate students to read more outside classroom and they may be discouraged when realize that their skills do not fit their actual needs.

Discussions

Our own practical experience of using ER in teaching EFL learners and the analysis of various reading guides allow us to enumerate a system of activities and assignments that may be useful in ER. The observations of this research support the three-stage system of activities: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities (Makeeva, 2016).

Pre-reading activities are to motivate EFL learners to start reading. They may include the issues connected with the choice of an authentic book for ER for the whole class and for an individual reading (a novel or short stories, etc.); the search for the information about the author, the historic epoch described in the novel and the main characters; leading questions for provoking the reader's guess and cultural reference information.

While-reading activities are designed to guide students through the text, providing help and support where

necessary. They are language assignments connected with the key vocabulary, grammar and structure of the text.

Post-reading activities aim to make EFL learners think about what they have read and share their ideas and opinions. The assignments must focus on the contents of the authentic text. They may be comprehension questions, tasks of matching of quotations and situations with characters, retelling of the contents from a character's point of view, several writing assignments, for example, writing a letter from a character of the book. A group online project or collaborative writing work such as writing a play or making questions for the quiz on the contents of the book, etc. can also be effective after completing reading a novel.

Considering the above-mentioned results, we propose three main recommendations for an effective extensive reading textbook: 1) it should be based on an authentic text with a certain person-centered message; 2) it should include elements of intensive reading; 3) it should have a three-stage system of activities.

Conclusion

The analysis of the use of ER in EFL learning allows us to conclude that ER is one of important ways of mastering the language and of realizing a person-centered approach. The ability to comprehend and interpret the contents and the message expressed by authors in authentic texts used as textbooks for ER in English is of an analytical and creative kind of activity. This ability reflects not only the level of improvement of EFL learners' language skills but also of perception and interpretation of the author's message, expressed in an authentic text for ER. The strong feature of reading programme in Russian universities is the use of authentic texts as an education resource in workbooks and textbooks in ER for EFL learning. Besides, ER in Russian universities integrates some features characteristic of intensive reading. This integration of types of reading improves language competence and linguistic knowledge that EFL learners gain in the process of becoming proficient readers able to comprehend and to express their personal opinion about various issues of life.

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