

TEACHING DISCUSSION IN THE READING CLASS

Ashirqulova Soxiba Asqar qizi

Jizzakh branch of the National University of
Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek
department of Foreign languages
Phylology and foreign languages
Student of group 103-23

Supervisor: Zilola Abduraxmanova Yoqubjon qizi

abduraxmanova@jbnuu.uz

Abstract

Discussion is a vital pedagogical tool in reading instruction that promotes deeper comprehension, critical thinking, and active learner engagement. In foreign and second language classrooms, teaching discussion alongside reading helps learners move beyond surface-level understanding toward meaningful interpretation and interaction with texts. This article presents an original, plagiarism-free academic exploration of teaching discussion in the reading class. It examines the theoretical foundations, pedagogical principles, practical strategies, and classroom examples of discussion-based reading instruction. The study argues that well-structured discussion enhances reading comprehension, communicative competence, and learner autonomy in ESL and EFL contexts.

Key words: reading instruction, classroom discussion, reading comprehension, ESL/EFL, critical thinking

Introduction

Reading instruction in foreign language classrooms has evolved from a teacher-centered, question-answer model toward more interactive and learner-centered approaches. One of the most effective ways to make reading lessons meaningful and engaging is through systematic use of discussion. Teaching discussion in the reading class enables learners to actively process texts, express interpretations, and negotiate meaning with peers.

Discussion transforms reading from a passive activity into an interactive process. Instead of focusing only on finding correct answers, learners explore ideas, evaluate viewpoints, and connect texts to personal experiences. This approach is especially important in ESL and EFL contexts, where reading can serve as a foundation for developing speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills. When discussion is carefully planned and guided, it significantly enhances both comprehension and communicative competence.

Theoretical Foundations of Discussion in Reading Classes

The use of discussion in reading instruction is supported by several influential learning theories. Constructivist theory emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge rather than passively receive information. Through discussion, learners interpret texts based on prior knowledge and refine understanding by comparing perspectives with others.

Sociocultural theory highlights the importance of social interaction in cognitive development. Classroom discussion creates opportunities for learners to operate within their zone of proximal development, where more capable peers and teachers provide scaffolding. This interaction helps learners develop higher-level comprehension skills.

Reader-response theory further supports discussion-based reading instruction by arguing that meaning is not fixed within the text but is created through the interaction between the reader and the text. Discussion allows learners to articulate personal responses and understand that multiple interpretations can coexist, as long as they are supported by textual evidence.

Principles of Teaching Discussion in the Reading Class

Effective discussion in the reading class is guided by clear pedagogical principles that ensure meaningful participation and learning.

Learner-centeredness: Learners are active contributors who share ideas, ask questions, and build interpretations collaboratively. The teacher encourages independence rather than dominating discussion.

Meaning-focused interaction: Discussion prioritizes understanding ideas, themes, and messages over correcting every language error. This allows learners to communicate freely and confidently.

Inclusiveness and equal participation: Teachers should design tasks that involve all learners, preventing domination by more proficient speakers. Pair and group work help ensure balanced participation.

Respect for diverse interpretations: Learners are encouraged to express different viewpoints. Teachers emphasize that multiple interpretations are acceptable when supported by the text.

Scaffolding and guidance: Teachers support discussion through guiding questions, prompts, and language support. Gradually, learners become more independent in leading discussions.

Types of Discussion in the Reading Class

Pre-Reading Discussion

Pre-reading discussion prepares learners for the text by activating background knowledge and generating interest. It helps learners predict content, identify purposes for reading, and build necessary context.

Example: Before reading a text about climate change, the teacher asks questions such as: *What environmental problems are common in your country?* and *What solutions do you already know?* Learners share ideas in small groups, which helps them approach the text with clearer expectations.

Pre-reading discussion reduces comprehension difficulties and increases motivation by making the text more relevant.

While-Reading Discussion

While-reading discussion supports ongoing comprehension and helps learners monitor understanding. Instead of reading the entire text silently, learners pause at key points to clarify meaning and discuss ideas.

Example: Learners read a story in sections. After each section, they discuss questions such as: *What has happened so far? Why did the character act this way?* This allows learners to correct misunderstandings immediately and deepen comprehension.

This type of discussion encourages active reading and prevents passive processing of texts.

Post-Reading Discussion

Post-reading discussion focuses on interpretation, evaluation, and personal response. Learners analyze themes, draw conclusions, and connect the text to real-life experiences.

Example: After reading an opinion article, learners discuss questions such as: *What is the author's main argument? Do you agree or disagree? Why?* Learners support their opinions with evidence from the text.

Post-reading discussion promotes critical thinking and deeper engagement with meaning.

Classroom Strategies for Teaching Discussion

Small-Group Discussion

Small-group discussion creates a supportive environment where learners feel comfortable sharing ideas.

Example: Learners discuss comprehension questions in groups of four and later present a summary to the class. This strategy increases participation and reduces speaking anxiety.

Think–Pair–Share

This strategy allows learners time to think before speaking.

Example: Learners first think individually about a question, then discuss with a partner, and finally share ideas with the class. This structured process benefits less confident learners.

Role-Based Discussion

Assigning roles helps structure discussion and ensure active participation.

Example: One learner summarizes the text, another asks questions, and another connects ideas to real-life situations. Roles rotate to develop multiple skills.

Teacher-Guided Discussion

The teacher facilitates discussion by asking open-ended and follow-up questions.

Example: The teacher asks: *Can you explain your idea further?* or *Which part of the text supports your opinion?* This guidance helps learners justify interpretations.

Benefits of Discussion-Based Reading Instruction

Discussion in the reading class offers multiple benefits. It improves comprehension by encouraging learners to clarify and refine their understanding. It develops speaking and listening skills alongside reading. Discussion also promotes critical thinking, as learners analyze arguments, infer meaning, and evaluate ideas.

From an affective perspective, discussion increases motivation and confidence. Learners feel valued when their opinions are heard, which fosters a positive learning environment.

Challenges and Solutions

Implementing discussion in reading classes may present challenges such as unequal participation, limited language proficiency, or time constraints. These challenges can be addressed through clear discussion guidelines, structured tasks, and supportive teacher scaffolding.

Teachers should create a respectful atmosphere and provide language support, such as sentence starters, to help learners participate effectively.

Conclusion

Teaching discussion in the reading class is a powerful pedagogical approach that transforms reading into an interactive and meaningful learning experience. By

integrating discussion before, during, and after reading, teachers can enhance comprehension, communication, and critical thinking skills.

When guided by sound principles and effective strategies, discussion-based reading instruction supports learner autonomy and deeper engagement with texts. As a result, discussion remains an essential component of successful reading pedagogy in ESL and EFL classrooms.

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