THE EFFECT OF PRE-READING ACTIVITIES ON ENGAGEMENT AND COMPREHENSION

EFECTUL ACTIVITĂȚILOR DE PRELECTURĂ ASUPRA IMPLICĂRII ȘI ÎNȚELEGERII

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Abstract: *In teaching English, it is very important to know how to structure the reading process so that students can understand the text. It is a big problem when gaps remain after reading it. The reading process consists of three stages: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. One of the most important stages in reading is pre-reading, which is like a catalyst that helps with effective reading comprehension. Pre-reading should not only have some simple activities before the text but should also stimulate students' attention to actively participate in it. The research problem of this study stems from the need to plan pre-reading activities as thoughtfully as possible in order to arouse students' interest and understanding of the written material. For this, different methods are used, such as Prediction, Brainstorming, Pre-questioning and Vocabulary Teaching. The main goal of this research is to investigate and validate the causal relationship between structured pre-reading activities and the improvement of students' ability to decode, comprehend, and actively engage with English texts. During the teaching period, an experiment was conducted on students in the 2nd and 8th grades of the "Ioan Vodă" Theoretical High School in Cahul. In total, 31 students aged 8–14 participated in the experiment. From these experiments conducted on both classes, it could be confirmed that vocabulary plays a primary role, and the success of text comprehension depends on how pre-reading activities are structured.*

Keywords: *reading, pre-reading, reading comprehension, pre-reading activities*

Rezumat: *În predarea limbii engleze, este foarte important să știi cum să structurezi procesul de citire astfel încât elevii să poată înțelege textul. Este o mare problemă atunci când rămân lacune după citire. Procesul de citire constă din trei etape: pre-lectură, lectura per se și post-lectură. Cea mai importantă etapă în citire este pre-lectura, care este ca un catalizator ce ajută la o înțelegere eficientă a textului. Pre-lectura nu ar trebui să includă doar câteva activități simple înainte de text, ci ar trebui să stimuleze și atenția elevilor în vederea implicării active în lectură. Problema de cercetare a acestui studiu rezidă din necesitatea de a planifica activitățile de pre-lectură cât mai atent posibil pentru a stârni interesul elevilor și înțelegerea materialului scris. Pentru aceasta se utilizează diferite metode, cum ar fi: Predicția, Brainstormingul, întrebări și predarea vocabularului. Scopul principal al acestei cercetări este de a investiga și valida relația cauzală dintre activitățile structurate de pre-lectură și îmbunătățirea capacității elevilor de a decodifica, înțelege și interacționa activ cu textele în limba engleză. În perioada de predare a fost realizat un studiu experimental cu elevii din clasele a II-a și a VIII-a din cadrul Liceului Teoretic „Ioan Vodă” din Cahul. În total, au participat 31 de elevi, cu vârste cuprinse între 8 și 14 ani. Din aceste experimente, efectuate pe ambele clase, a reieșit că vocabularul joacă un rol primordial, iar*

succesul înțelegerii textului depinde de modul în care sunt structurate activitățile de pre-lectură.

Cuvinte-cheie: *citire, pre-lectură, înțelegerea lecturii, activități de prelectură*

Many researchers (Farrell 2026, Hashemi Mobini, and Karimkhanlooie 2016), have analysed the reading process and its effects. It was concluded that reading is a collaborative process between the reader and the written text, ultimately providing meaning. Reading is also facilitated by prior knowledge. Reading comprehension is the result of what was to be understood from the text and what was known before the text. For effective reading comprehension, preparation before the text is also required, which is called the pre-reading stage. This aims to make the topic more familiar and capture students' attention, which is why it is very important.

The human mind needs a hook to hold onto new information. The student, through various activities before the text, develops his ability to recognise and think. This helps him connect the written information with his own experiences or thoughts. The knowledge obtained from the pre-reading stage must not only be understood but also applied in the following stages. This stage prepares the student for the tasks he will solve and increases his confidence, thereby boosting his motivation. It should be noted that without such activities, the text may not be fully understood. In short, this stage combines what is already known and what is to be learned.

In this study, the effect that pre-reading has on students' understanding and participation was specifically investigated. Pre-reading can include several activities, not just one; a single activity would be insufficient. The lesson plan must be very well thought out in order to increase students' reading comprehension as a product. This study also aims to show the differences between the methods used and the results they produce. It focuses specifically on the difference between using a single technique and several in the pre-reading stage. For this purpose, 4 techniques were chosen: Pre-questioning, Brainstorming, Prediction and Teaching Vocabulary. Each technique, according to the researchers, has its benefits, although some were somewhat doubtful. In the present experiment, these 4 techniques were taught, results were obtained and analysed. From these results, some conclusions were made, and it was discussed which techniques have a stronger effect and a higher success rate.

Several methods were used to research this topic. Firstly, the theoretical part was based on a review of various sources, including books, articles, and other electronic sources. This helped clarify the definition of reading comprehension and the various types of pre-reading strategies. Secondly, qualitative data were collected from observation sheets completed during other teachers' lessons. Thirdly, quantitative data from tests administered to students in the post-reading stage were examined. Finally, these data were analysed and compared to create conclusions.

Some findings resulted from the observed classes. It was observed that students in higher forms understand vocabulary better when it is presented differently from traditional methods that involve direct word-for-word translation. In matching exercises and gap-filling, students have the opportunity to learn the meanings of words by themselves through discovery and by putting new words in appropriate contexts. For younger forms, however, it is less effective; they require more special attention: the words and the chunks need to be translated and repeated in chorus to be memorised. Another very important observation is that students' attention is stimulated by the use of visual materials, such as images and presentations. Students become more active and eager to participate when the lesson is not limited to the textbook. Additionally, reading comprehension is not only based on what

happens in pre-reading but also on how that text is read in the while-reading stage. A better understanding emerged when students read the text in groups or pairs. Pre-reading and while-reading must align harmoniously for the reading comprehension to be ensured. Finally, several essential observations were made in the reading process, specifically in the pre-reading stage.

To collect qualitative data, a teaching experiment was conducted with students to demonstrate differences in pre-reading teaching techniques. Students from the 2nd and 8th forms of the “Ioan Vodă” Theoretical High School in Cahul participated in this study. The students’ ages ranged from 8 to 14 years. Since the groups had different levels of English language proficiency, the results were compared separately for each form. For both forms, 4 sets of tests were used: 2 for the 2nd form and 2 for the 8th form.

For the experiment, 2 lessons were chosen in the 8th form. It should be mentioned that the 8th form students were learning English as a foreign language. In the first part of the experiment, in the pre-reading stage, the vocabulary was taught in the traditional way with translation, followed by a task in which students had to predict what would come next in the text based on images. In the second part, only a pre-reading technique was used; students made predictions based on a set of words previously learned in the unit without translation, and at that time, the vocabulary was missing. Additionally, in the first part of the experiment, during the while-reading stage, the text was read in a group, but in the second part, it was read aloud. In both cases, in the post-reading stage, worksheets with exercises based on the reading text were given. The average results of the worksheets assessment were: in the first experiment, 7.346; in the second, 6.607.

It turned out that the method used in the first part of the experiment was the most useful, as the results showed that not all students understood all the words without translation. Obviously, the accuracy of this data is not guaranteed; for an experiment of this kind, a little more time is needed. But the result demonstrated the difference between these types of structuring of the pre-reading activity. It is observed from the figures that pre-reading is an important stage in teaching and that it should not be neglected; the more developed it is, the more the reading comprehension efficiency increases. And after these results, it was shown that using a visual material, like an image, suddenly changed the result. However, not only must the pre-reading method be well structured, but it also depends on the way the text is read. In the first part of the experiment, everyone was involved in the reading process, but in the second part, some students were not paying attention while the text was read aloud. Ultimately, several factors determine the quality of text comprehension, but pre-reading plays the most important role; it should not be forgotten that it collaborates with the other stages of the reading process.

The second experiment took place in the 2nd form, where 2 sets of tests were also offered in the post-reading stage in 2 different English lessons. In the pre-reading stage, in the first lesson, only one technique was taught: the pre-questioning technique, in which questions were given before the text to activate prior knowledge. And in the second lesson, the vocabulary was taught with translation and repeated aloud several times. This was followed by the presentation of images representing the learned words, and the students named what each represented, after which sentences were built with those new words. And the second activity in the pre-reading stage was brainstorming based on an image. In essence, a lot of work was done on vocabulary. During the while-reading stage, the text was read aloud and translated because the students were beginners in English. This reading method was used in both parts of the experiment. And the post-reading stage involved completing worksheets with exercises. The final results were: for the first part, 8.625, and for the second part, 8.125.

In this second experiment, the results show another difference, although it is not a large one; it differs from what is expected. First of all, in the early phase of the experiment only one pre-reading technique was used but the result was higher than in the second part of the experiment where the pre-reading was more developed, according to logic the results should have been the opposite but they are not because in the first part a test of a much easier level was offered compared to the second where sentences from the direct text were introduced in the item and the students chose true or false, but in the second test the students had the same type of exercise but with a higher degree of difficulty, in which the sentences were not only written exactly from the text but paraphrased. Through this experiment, it was intended to demonstrate that, even if the test is at a higher level, with good preparation in the pre-reading and while-reading stages, it is possible to achieve almost the same results as in the case of an easy test.

Overall, the study demonstrates that integrating well-structured pre-reading activities improves reading comprehension. Moreover, it increases students' motivation and makes the learning process more interactive. Therefore, teachers need to use a variety of pre-reading strategies to enhance both engagement and understanding in the English classroom.

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