# Using Instructional Reading Strategies to Prepare ESL Students for Academic Life

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**Abstract**

Reading is the most important skill for academic success. For such education to be effective, ESL classrooms in English institutions need to address the concerns of their students since there are many complaints about the method of teaching in certain English institutes. Additionally, many ESL students graduate from language institutes with little knowledge of the English language and continue to have trouble when they go to university. This paper investigates some of the issues affecting the efficient teaching of English as a second language in the English institutes and provides propose solutions to develop ESL pedagogical strategies, especially in reading, that would prepare the students for academic life..

**Keywords:** English as a Second language (ESL); Pedagogical strategies; Lectures and repetitive practices; literary genres; Daily interactions

## Introduction

English is the most popular language in the world because it is spoken by people of many countries and is the main language in academia. Those who have not learn English during their elementary and secondary school years-because of a variety of reasons, mostly geographical location-need to learn the language when they go to other English-speaking countries for higher education, or for work. Many people from around the world come to study English Language in the U.S., and they are called English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Most of them graduated from high schools and they will enroll the college. They study in the English Institutes to develop their English language skills before going to the college. According to the Acheson [1], the number of international students has increased in higher education in the U.S.; over 50% international students enrolled in Institutes of English Language. The important skill that ESL learners need to master in an academic setting is a strong reading ability. Although many instructors assert that reading comprehension is the most important skill for academic success, still there are many students in colleges who have poor reading abilities. Seabi, Cockcroft, Goldschag, & Greyling [2] asserted that with English language proficiency so critical for success in education, ESL students need to learn effective reading. For such education to be effective, ESL classrooms need to address the concerns of their students since there are many complaints about the method of teaching in certain

English institutes. Additionally, many ESL students graduate from language institutes with little knowledge of the English language and continue to have trouble when they go to university. The purpose of this paper is to investigate some of the issues affecting the efficient teaching of English as a second language in the English institutes and propose solutions to develop ESL pedagogical strategies, especially in reading, that would prepare the students for academic life.

## Issues Affecting Effective Teaching of Reading ESL

Reading comprehension is critical for ESL students to successfully negotiate higher education. From my professional experience when I studied reading at the language institutions and from the observation of reading classrooms at English language institutes, it is evident that the curriculum followed in these places is not based on the actual instructional approaches to reading for many ESL students. For example, some of the prescribed textbooks are difficult for ESL students-the language of these textbooks itself is tough for the learners. The main problems are that there are unfamiliar words and difficult concepts, so ESL students fail to grasp the meaning of words that are unknown to them, and often not even suitable to their English language levels. Also, there is a lack of background knowledge of concepts. For instance, some Teachers use literature books to teach ESL

reading. The language used in such books is theoretically difficult to understand, structurally complex, and especially meant for a particular culture, making it hard for ESL students in a reading class who were there to just learn English Traore & Kyei-Blankson [3]. International students without prior knowledge of literary genres such as fairy tales, legends, myths, or tall tales thus falter at the outset.

Another issue is ESL students faced challenges when they wrote about what they read such as summarizing and paraphrasing. Some students had anxiety toward this writing because they didn't understand how to write in a scholarly manner. According to Ismail & et al., [4], "many ESL students are fearful of writing and face difficulty in the writing process even at the tertiary level" (p.479). This curriculum woe slowed down the educational learning process. The third major issue is that most ESL teachers use traditional instructional strategies in reading classes; however, these strategies are not effective for some students. According to Bietenbeck [5], researchers and teachers have long debated about what the best teaching strategies for learners are; however, the teachers use traditional strategies such as lectures and repetitive practices such as asking questions and answering these. Even when they adopt modern methods, these are mainly to promote students' reasoning skills rather than improve their factual knowledge and routine problem-solving skills. Additionally, Gladwin & Greany [6] argued that traditional strategies for teaching reading include repeat reading, reading from bottom to top, and simplifying and analyzing texts. Therefore, ESL teachers should also try to change their traditional ways of teaching reading because these are not effective in preparing students to read and understand scholarly literature. Researchers have argued time and again that ESL students need to read in English but many of them are still unable to do so because their teachers use traditional practices in classrooms, thus failing to provide the ESL students with effective knowledge.

## Overview of Best Instructional Practices for Teaching Reading in ESL Classrooms

There are many solutions to address these problems, the foremost being that teachers should consider adopting different teaching methods.

### Cooperative learning

This is the most effective strategy in ESL classrooms, especially in reading classes. Wright, Zyto, Karger, & Newman [7] asserted that collaborative learning in a reading class promotes peer interaction and creates a powerful environment where all students can participate in discussions about texts. For example, the teacher can form a panel to discuss a chapter or passage from a text the students have just read. The panel can have groups of five students with one person leading the discussion. The students can give their opinion about what they read/understood about the text - one student can talk of the vocabulary, and they can all discuss their understanding of the same. Another student

can highlight the most interesting parts of the text, which would guide everyone's attention to what makes it worth reading. Such discussions would allow students to utilize their language skills during the interactions in the classroom, they end up learning more from both teachers and peers. Larson & Keiper [8] confirmed that classroom discussions provide many educational purposes because they result in a unique form of classroom talk that can help develop students' higher-order thinking skills. Thus, classroom discussions have manifold benefits to improve ESL students' English skills.

### Vocabulary comprehension skills

There are many kinds of vocabulary comprehension skills that teachers can use. Karim & Qanwal [9] stated that the teacher can teach students how to understand denotative and connotative meanings using context clues in the text and using parts of speech for understanding the meaning of words. In reading classes, ESL teachers can develop students' reading skills by teaching them certain academic words before the lessons. For instance, when students face too many difficult words in a book, they cannot understand their meaning. However, when they learn these words before they read the book, the meaning becomes clear, and they can follow the book better. According to Mihara [10], if the teacher can teach vocabulary—especially key words-before the text, the reading will become clear to students. Often, especially in academic books that form part of the required reading in higher education, sentence constructions are complex, and words used in common parlance are placed in a manner that changes their meaning completely. Gill [11] stated in her research that teaching vocabulary in reading usually focuses on the meaning of new words and concepts. The readers also need to learn about word parts, such as prefixes, suffixes, and root. Using this strategy in reading helps students read and spell long words, so they gain important strategies for vocabulary development as well as knowledge of word parts. This helps students enhance their vocabulary skills.

### Technology

It plays a significant role in the classroom. ESL teachers should use multiple technologies in reading and writing classes to help students improve their comprehension levels. Many ESL students become more able to pronounce the difficult words in a novel by listening to its audio CD, and they understand it better by watching it in the movie format. According to Traore & Kyei-Blankson [3], "Audio materials encourage listening skills while the visual presentation not only provides a focus of attention but also makes it easier for language learners to fill in any information they do not understand" (p. 563). Thus, technology aids students by making sense of what they are reading, because the pictures and sounds help them. This strategy encourages students to combine reading literature and writing about it. Also, technology encourages students to become stronger readers Traore & Kyei- Blankson, [3], so they can write a summary or

paraphrase a paragraph easily. The teachers also should try to use a smart board to engage students in visual explanations of key terms. "The smart board also helps to support visual learners as students can see touch and move abstract concepts on the board increasing their understanding" Oigara & Wallace, [12], p. 300. The ESL teachers can also access the internet via the smart board to show students pertinent websites or images that are related to the vocabulary. The students can play games or watch videos on it, so the smart board can make the classroom more active. Additionally, many students use the Internet to write blogs or comments on social media. ESL students can also learn to write paragraphs on educational forums via the practice of online activities in the classroom. According to Chandrasegaran & Clara Kong [13], an online forum can encourage students to write their opinions freely. Teachers can also use the smart board/internet to provide examples of written work that the students can emulate. This will increase students' interest in writing and motivate them to produce better written.

## Conclusion

Learning English language is important to ESL students to be successful in higher education. The ESL educators are responsible for meeting these students' needs adequately. However, they often try to improve students' skills by following methods that are not effective enough. In addition to their knowledge of pedagogical methods, ESL teachers need to adopt other means to make their lessons more useful so that the students become better at reading comprehension. The suggested strategies in this research paper should be followed in ESL classrooms because the recommendations given herein are vouched for by existing research too. The teachers should use approaches that combine knowledge building and hands-on activities in their classrooms to ensure that students can react to the lesson and increase their understanding of the language. Adopting all, or some, of these strategies would help ESL students fare better in learning the English language and aid them in their navigation of the higher education system, as well as their daily interactions with people from all over the world who speak English.

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