

THINK ALOUD TECHNIQUE WITH INTERCULTURAL TOPICS TO PROMOTE MORE STUDENT'S SPEAKING AND DEVELOP THE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCEAUTHORS: Carlos Humberto Chancay Cedeño¹María Dolores Chávez Loo²Karina Luzdelia Mendoza Bravo³ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: luzdelia_7@hotmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The present study was focused on how the technique *think aloud* could help students to get strategies to improve their reading and speaking skills, relating cultures around the world and compare them with the local culture. The study was conducted with the research-action methodology, having a population of 18 students from second semester. As results, the study showed that students did not have reading strategies to handle short reading (for their level, A2). They also had problems in speaking. They could not express their opinion from what they had read and bad habits of translating words not according to the context. Students were trained into some reading strategies. The readings selected were based on cultural aspects in order to develop cultural awareness. At the end of the study, students could improve their reading skill, express their opinion from the text they had read and develop awareness with the cultures discussed in the readings. They also could learn how to guess the meaning of the words in context, which was the most difficult part for the students.

KEYWORDS: aloud reading; intercultural communicative competence; foreign language teaching; reading strategies.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, the development of linguistics competences were the mayor goal of English Foreign Language (EFL) teachers (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Collier, 2015). As a result, teachers tend to develop the productive (speaking and writing) and receptive (listening and reading) skill into their students in order to they can speak English fluently. Thus, some skills are probably more developed that others because of lack of strategies which could contribute to have a better performance of linguistics competences. One example is the reading skill. Reading is one of the four skills that any person who studies English as a Foreign Language must develop.

¹ PhD. Department of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages. Universidad Técnica de Manabí. Ecuador.

² PhD. Department of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages. Universidad Técnica de Manabí. Ecuador. E-mail: mdchavez@utm.edu.ec

³ PhD. Department of Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages. Universidad Técnica de Manabí. Ecuador.

For Harmer (2007) indistinctly the reasons students have for reading, they need to know strategies which provide a better understanding of what they are reading. In the last two decades, some techniques about how to teach English have been discussed by different authors (for instance, Gower et al., 2007; Grellet, 1981; Scrivener, 2011). Between them they make emphasis on extensive and intensive reading strategies: *extensive*, *intensive*, *reading aloud* and *reading silent* (Patel & Jain, 2008). This study was focused on *reading aloud*. Reading aloud is a strategy that consists on read orally. Patel y Jain (2008) explain that this reading strategy permits to increase very well the speaking skill, improve pronunciation and make the reading process more enjoyable. Unfortunately, it is believed that teachers do not work with their students using this reading strategy (Hedge, 2000; Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009; Nikou et al., 2015). In some cases, reading strategies are limited and just focused in one or two of them (Yayli, 2010).

About reading aloud technique

Aloud reading can be used to share with learners, topics related to cultures around the world and compare them with their local culture (Davey, 1983). This strategy has five techniques for presenting readings to enhance poor level of reading comprehension in students. In the teaching-learning process, the *think aloud technique* provides different stages where learners can monitor what the text is about. The first technique for applying ,think aloud: (1) make predictions, (2) description of pictures students have in their minds, (3) share an analogy of the story (4) verbalize a confusing point from the story and (5) demonstrate fix-up strategies.

The stage 1 “make predictions” refers about the way to develop a hypothesis. Teachers can start with asking their students reading the title of the text and predict what the story is about. After that, creative comes by “describing the picture you’re forming in your head from the information” (stage 2). In this stage, students draw images that they have in their minds from the story. In stage 3, teachers help students to link prior knowledge with new information from the text. In stage 4 called “verbalize a confusion point”, learners check their understanding of the story by clarifying those parts which are more complex for them. And finally in stage 5 “demonstrate fix-up strategies students compare their first ideas of the story with the new they have after finishing reading the text.

Reading and culture for developing the intercultural competence

In the reading process, culture issues are inserted in most of the texts directly or indirectly. According to Hall (1959) cited by Moran (2001) culture is viewed as communication, where people of a particular culture used to communicate verbal, nonverbal. In the teaching field, this is *intercultural competence* (IC), the process where people communicate appropriately in different cultural contexts. Byram (1997) considers the Intercultural Competence as the process where learners interact between their own culture and with people from a different

one. He also expresses that with Foreign Language Teaching has the purpose to "...prepare learners to communicate and interact with foreigners who are 'other' and accepted as such, rather than being reduced to people assumed to be (almost) 'like us'" (p.4). By other hand, Corbett (2003) says that intercultural language learning is the capacity to discover different cultures and to intervene in situations of cultural misunderstanding.

Some experts had contributed with theories which help to understand the complex process of integration between language and culture, for instance Deardorff (2006); Corbett (2003) and Moran (2001), however, there is that is focused on the teaching and learning process developed by Michael Byram (1997) with four dimensions or *savoirs*: knowledge, attitudes, cultural awareness and the skills of interpreting and relating as well as the skills of discovery and interaction.

Table 1: Intercultural dimensions from Byram's theory

Dimensions	Refers about...
Attitude	curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own (Byram, 1997, p.50).
Knowledge	how much people know about their "social group and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country" (Byram, 1997, p. 51).
Skills of interpretation and relating	the ability to "interpret documents or events from another culture" (Byram, 1997, p. 52).
Skills of discovery and interaction	the ability to acquire new knowledge of different cultures and "cultural practices and the ability to operate the knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (Byram, 2007, p. 52)
Critical cultural awareness	the ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and places

In the *think aloud* process, these dimensions of Byram (1997) could help to develop the IC through the exploration of readings focused on cultural aspects. In addition, they provide a better comprehension between the local context and the context that is involved in the text. Thus, students can contrast the information by comparing information from two or more cultures. On the other hand, according my observations, the process of language teaching, particularly the development of reading skills through the technique "think aloud" could help students to develop different strategies in order to the could be successful interpreting intercultural information in the classroom.

Methodology

This study aims to know how students develop the reading skills through the *think aloud* technique through texts of intercultural themes. The research was carried out at Universidad Técnica de Manabí with 15 students of second semester from Language and Linguistics School. The group was made up of 18 students whose ages range from 19-28 years old. An action-research design was chosen based on the guidelines given by Glanz (1998): (1) select a focus (background of the problem), (2) collect data, (3) analyse and (4) interpret data and (5) take action. For data collection were chosen two instruments: no-structure observation (for taking notes about how the reading process follows in the classroom) and an interview (for participants).

Stage 1: select the focus (background of the problem)

This study started with the observation of the problems students had in the classroom. At the beginning of the semester, they showed some inconvenient in reading comprehension. Most of the students of pre-intermediate level could not express what they read and how to give a personal point of view. After a reading diagnostic, a reading program of 6 week was conducted as an action plan to help students to improve reading comprehension while the develop the IC. A set of some readings related to cultural aspects of places around the world were selected in order to contrast them with Ecuador's culture to develop also a hand-in-hand IC. The reading came from the different English textbooks for pre-intermediate level.

Stage 2: collect data

For data collection, there was a plan of 6 week for gathering information about how students improve their reading comprehension and also how intercultural they become with the topics analysed. A no-structured observation research instruments was needed to take note about the reading process. In each reading practice students had 20 minutes for completing the reading worksheet designed by the teacher. At the end of each lesson, feedback was given.

Stage 3: analyse

After a reading practice, students had an individual interview with their teachers about how important was the process of reading for them, what kind of inconvenient they faced during the process and what cultural aspects they learned for contrasting with the local culture.

Stage 4: interpret data

Qualitative information provided from the interviews was analysing with the software Atlas.ti 8, following the grounded theory for coding the information and create categorical analysis.

Stage 5: take action

A reading plan of 6 weeks was designed for the participants. The reading planning included texts with intercultural topics taken from different resources books.

Results

The diagnostic test started with a reading worksheet which contained 5 reading skills used with the technique *think aloud*. Each reading working worksheet had included the following techniques: previewing, skimming, scanning, contextual guessing and summarizing. For each one, students had to complete information from the text. At the beginning, the majority of students from pre-intermediate level spent between 15-18 minutes for reading a text of 60-80 words and then write their own opinion. 15% of them spend around 45 minutes. As we can see in table 2, the results suggested that students had low reading level skills. They spent a lot of time for reading text which had no more of 80-100 words.

Table 2: results of diagnostic test

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% of the students spent between 15-18 minutes to read a text.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15% of the students wrote more than 45 words, the rest of the students got no more of 20 words and some of them no more of 10 words. Ideas in general were redundant and did not refer about what they understood from the reading.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral ideas were short, most of them needed fluency and were not related to the reading.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Feedback was provided.

A *reading aloud technique* was conducted as an action plan to help students to improve their reading skills with a reading program of 6 weeks. A set of some readings related to cultural aspects of places around the world were selected in order to contrast them with Ecuador's culture to develop also a hand-in-hand IC.

The first and second weeks were spent on control practice. It consisted on explaining students the reading strategies (previewing, skimming, scanning, contextual guessing, and summarizing). All of them were practiced with examples. Reading topics were about parties around the world, discovery of America, greetings around the world, tales, and other cultural aspects from abroad in order to match information between other cultures and students' own culture to develop IC. Every week students had 20 minutes of reading in the classroom. Optional readings were suggested to practice at home, students chose texts or passages according to their English level.

The following 4 weeks included free practice. Free practice refers about reading without control time and remember them the reading strategies. At the end of the week, a reading test was applied with the following instructions: when you see the green sign paper up on teacher's hand, start reading the text, and stop

reading when you listen to a song playing on the type recorder. Later, write some lines on the reading worksheet about what you understood the most from the text. After that, form groups of 4 students and contrast the information you have read with cultural aspects from Ecuador.

As a result of the 6 weeks of reading training, in table 3 there is summarized the conclusion we got each week to measure how students improved their reading skills:

In the following chart is explained the students' progress:

Table 3: student's progress in the reading training

Reading strategies	Previewing	Skimming	Scanning	Contextual guessing	Summarizing	Conclusion
Week 1: diagnostic	Not good.	Skimming was good	Lack of understanding from the text	Seriously problem.	Summary was done with clear ideas.	Test 1 showed mainly how students got problem with contextual guessing
week 2 diagnostic	Test previewing was better than test 2	Skimming was better, students spent less time doing it.	The understanding of the text was better, students could solve all the comprehension questions	It was a little better. Students could guess at least two words with the meaning in English	Summarizing was better. More than 40 words were written with clear ideas. Grammar mistakes were less than the first test.	Students could understand how important is reading and the easy way to apply the reading strategies.
week 3	Previewing was faster than others	Skimming was more connected with the text.	Understanding of the text was really good.	There were not so many words, but the guessing of the meaning of the words in context was better.	Clear ideas were showed in the summary.	Students now can understand better a text when they use the reading strategies.
week 4-6	Students can relate the picture and the	Ideas are better developed in other	Reading comprehension was better. Students express the	Contextual guessing is really better. Now	Student's summarizing was beyond the simple way to say	Now students are able to use the reading

topic of tests. the reading.	most important key points from the text.	students can guess at least 3 or 4 words according to the meaning.	what the reading was about. They expressed a message that the reading gave them.	the strategies. Reading speed is better. Speaking improved in a 35%.
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CONCLUSIONS

At the end, the study got as result that students had some problems to work with contextual guessing, in order to guess the meaning of the words in context. Speaking skill was improved, students could express their opinions from the texts they read. They also developed empathy and respect about other cultures and their own culture in order to develop the IC. In conclusion, students could understand how the reading strategies work to improve the speaking skill and the benefits it has to improve the speaking skill. Some opinions were gather from students:

"I learned to read a little faster than before. Give the opinion of a reading now is easier for me, and at the same time, I loved to contrast my own culture with the cultures from the reading"

- *Student 1*

"I had some problems to guess words in context, I didn't do it before. I think next semester, with more practice, I can improve a lot

- *Student 2*

"I understood the importance that reading has, to improve vocabulary and speaking"

- *Student 3*

"My favourite part was to compare different topics of culture from some countries and how they are similar to us"

- *Student 4*

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