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Складнощі формування англомовної компетентності в читанні в учнів старших класів закладів загальної середньої освіти

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Анотація. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростанням міжкультурної комунікації в сучасному постіндустріальному суспільстві, внаслідок чого виникла потреба в зміні поглядів на формування іншомовної компетентності в учнів шкільного віку задля її ефективного вдосконалення та подальшого використання в професійній діяльності. Метою дослідження є визначення особливостей формування англомовної компетентності в читанні в учнів старших класів закладів загальної середньої освіти та пошук методів подолання складнощів у процесі оволодіння іноземною мовою. У процесі дослідження автором було використано загальнонаукові теоретичні методи, серед яких методи аналізу, синтезу, узагальнення та класифікації. Охарактеризовано основі погляди на формування іншомовної компетентності, в читанні зокрема, в учнів старших класів на основі результатів досліджень українських і зарубіжних науковців. Надано визначення поняттю «читання» та розглянуто основні його категорії, такі як типи читання, рівні розуміння тексту, загальні вміння особистості для досконалого володіння читанням іноземною мовою тощо. Виявлено, що основними складнощами формування англомовної компетентності в читанні в учнів старших класів закладів загальної середньої освіти є мовні, зокрема орфографічні, та психологічні, що базуються на відсутності мотивації до вивчення мови. Представлено поради для вчителів англійської мови, зосереджені на вдосконаленні формування англомовної компетентності в читанні в учнів, серед яких використання автентичних матеріалів, інформаційних технологій, а також застосування практичних вправ, що сприяють покращенню читання вголос. Перспективи подальших досліджень вбачаємо в емпіричному обґрунтуванні методики подолання складнощів формування англомовної компетентності серед учнів старших класів

Ключові слова: іншомовна компетентність у читанні, навички, вміння, знання, комунікативна здібність, етапи, вправи, засоби, контроль

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Difficulties in Forming English-Language Reading Competence Among General Secondary Education Students

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Abstract. The relevance of the study is conditioned by the growth of intercultural communication in modern post-industrial society, as a result of which there is a need to change views on the development of foreign language competence among students of middle school age for its effective improvement and further use in professional activities. The purpose of the study is to determine the features of the development of English-language competence in reading among general secondary education students and to search for methods to overcome difficulties in the process of mastering a foreign language. In the course of the research, the author used general scientific theoretical methods, including methods of analysis, synthesis, generalisation, and classification. The study describes the main views on the development of foreign language competence, in particular in reading, among high school students, based on the results of research by Ukrainian and foreign scientists. The term «reading» was defined and its main categories were considered, such as types of reading, levels of text comprehension, general skills of the individual in reading in a foreign language, and so on. It has been identified that the main difficulties in the development of English-language reading competence among general secondary education students are linguistic ones, in particular spelling, and psychological, based on the lack of motivation to learn the language. The study presents tips for English language teachers, focused on improving the development of English-language reading competence among students, including the use of authentic materials, information technologies, as well as the use of practical exercises that help improving reading aloud. The prospects for further research consist in the empirical substantiation of the methodology for overcoming the difficulties of forming English-language competence among high school students

Keywords: foreign language reading competence, skills, abilities, knowledge, communication ability, stages, exercises, means, control

INTRODUCTION

The variability of the modern world determines the growing demand for foreign language competence, which becomes almost the main one in the process of training a future specialist since school years. State standards, basic secondary education in particular [1], describe in detail the mandatory learning outcomes of students, which include "perception of oral and written information in a foreign language in conditions of direct and indirect intercultural communication, interaction with other persons in oral and written form in a foreign language,

as well as expressing their own thoughts in a foreign language" [1]. At the same time, in practice, the situation is somewhat different: students do not have either reading or communication competences since they do not have any motivation to learn a foreign language, English in particular. Eventually, the question arises what causes such difficulties in the process of forming English-language competence in high school students and how to facilitate learning English through reading.

Many Ukrainian and foreign scientists focused their attention on research on the development of foreign language competence in school-age students and created their own methods of teaching English. For example, the researcher N.D. Galskova noted that when learning a foreign language, a student must acquire communicative language skills, rules for using language material, a set of special skills that indicate practical abilities, as well as the cultural features of the country whose language is being studied, through the use of authentic texts [2]. The scientist M.V. Biboletova in her works considered a separate aspect of the development of English-language competence in primary school students, namely the grammatical component of speech [3]. Furthermore, the researcher A.A. Parshikova noted the importance of communication and game techniques in learning a foreign language [4]. Especially important for the study are the views of S.Yu. Nikolaeva [5]. The author in her studies focused on the development of a foreign language teaching plan according to the state educational standards based on a competency-based approach [5]. At the same time, L.Ya. Zenya formed the main tasks of learning English in a high profession-oriented school considering the aspect of teacher's professional training [6].

Notably, the development of English-language reading competence is an extremely urgent issue today. For example, Ukrainian researchers O.V. Davydenko and O.V. Ponomarenko considered "the development of reading competence among first-year students based on the materials of English-language Internet news and provided their original methodology for working with the text in three stages" [7]. At the same time, the results of foreign scientists' developments in this aspect are interesting. L. Bunting, Yu. H. Segerstad and V. Barendregt described the experience of learning English in Swedish schools [8]. Scientists conducted a study in the context of the "iRead" project, funded by the European Union, the essence of which was to develop personalised teaching technologies for reading in foreign language classes. Owing to interviews with primary school teachers, considerable differences in students' knowledge of English were confirmed and the latest method of using personalised technologies was proposed [8].

As can be seen, modernity puts forward new requirements for professional training of specialists, as a result of which the search for new methods of teaching and learning English always remains relevant. It is the use of reading as one of the methods of mastering a foreign language that becomes the key to further improving language skills and self-development of the individual. Given this, *the purpose* of the author's study is the identification of the features of the development of English-language reading competence among general secondary education students and the search for methods of overcoming difficulties in the process of mastering a foreign language. Achieving this purpose involves performing the following *tasks*: to give a general description of the reading process as a method of mastering a foreign language; to identify the difficulties of forming English-language reading competence and to find new methods to facilitate and encourage students to learn English.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To achieve this purpose and complete these tasks, the author used general scientific theoretical research methods. These methods include: analysis, synthesis, generalisation, and classification method, respectively. Thus, the method of analysis was used in the processing of Ukrainian and foreign scientific and methodological literature, as a result of which the subject of this study, namely English-language reading competence, was determined. Moreover, the analysis method allowed considering such aspects of the reading phenomenon as types, levels of comprehension, and skills of reading techniques in English. The synthesis method allowed collectively considering such concepts as "English-language competence", "reading", "student motivation", and "pedagogical activity", etc. Due to the use of the classification method, the study considered such types of reading as introductory, learning, and search; comprehension levels upon learning to read in a foreign language, and also noted the main difficulties in the development of English-language competence, including linguistic and psychological. The generalisation method helped to systematise all the analysed aspects of the study, namely the phenomenon of "reading", "English-language competence", "difficulties in forming English-language competence", etc., and provide comprehensive advice on facilitating the learning of a foreign language by general secondary education students, focused on the use of authentic sources and information technologies.

The study of the difficulties of developing English-language competence in general secondary education students was conducted according to the following stages:

1. Processing of scientific publications over the past 3-5 years to confirm the relevance of research on the topic of English-language reading competence and provide an

exhaustive definition of this concept.

2. Study of the main approaches to the interpretation of the term "reading", as well as its key characteristics for the possibility of further substantiating the reasons for the appearance of difficulties in the process of reading English-language sources based on the works of Ukrainian researchers.

3. Development of a list of the main groups of difficulties that arise when learning English among high school students based on the material developed above.

4. Research of methodological practices of Ukrainian and foreign scientists used in English lessons to provide advice on improving the development of English-language competence in high school students.

5. Generalisation of experience, selection and use of English-language resources in the educational process for learning to read.

Notably, to confirm the need to improve foreign language competence in future specialists, a regulatory document was used as a theoretical basis, namely the State standard of basic secondary education [1], which made it possible to characterise the main learning results of students, including the development of reading and communicative competence within foreign language competence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reading as a Means of Acquiring a Foreign Language

As is known, reading is one of the most common methods of foreign language communication practiced among secondary education students. However, each student faces certain difficulties when learning a foreign language and in the process of reading foreign-language sources, as a result of which the motivation to further improve the level of language proficiency disappears. Therefore, to identify such difficulties and find ways to overcome them, it is necessary to consider in detail the features of the reading process itself, in a foreign language in particular, and justify its need when acquiring a new language.

Reading is usually interpreted as a special type of linguistic activity, wherein synchronous perception and comprehension of the text being read occurs. This is a deeply internal process consisting in the interpretation of the text, which implies verbal, subject, and semantic comprehension [7]. Reading as a receptive speech activity comprises stages of perception and comprehension of written speech. The stage of perception occurs through the visual and auditory channels. The stage of comprehending the text is based on subject and language competence, that is, pronouncing the material in the form of internal speech or detailed speech while reading aloud [9; 10]. These processes are closely related since the comprehension of the text depends on perception quality. Such errors in perception as misreading of words lead to distortion of meaning. At the same time, miscomprehension contributes to incorrect guessing of the word form.

Reading as a means of acquiring speech material has its own characteristic features. First of all, unlike listening, the comprehension of information upon reading occurs in more comfortable conditions, which are conditioned by the greater expressiveness of visual images. Notably, the content of the material during reading is usually more complex. The choice of topic for oral speech, as a rule, falls on aspects that are close to the speaker or on those that directly relate to the communicant. Reading covers a much more diverse range of issues, especially at the middle and senior stages of learning a foreign language. For example, a review of authentic texts or popular science fiction of the country whose language is being studied involves references to topics that reproduce everyday life and historical facts, which, at the same time, contributes to the assimilation of cultural values of the country.

Any reading of foreign sources has a specific purpose and level of comprehension of the text. As an example, according to this aspect, introductory, learning, search, or review reading is distinguished [11]. *Introductory reading* or reading with an understanding of the main content of the text is performed on authentic sources with a focus on the subject content of the language for grades 4-6, reflecting the characteristic features of the culture of countries of the language being studied. This type of reading involves visual perception of the text, recognition of familiar terms and grammatical phenomena, brief and logical reproduction of the topic, the content of the text by title, as well as the ability to divide the text into independent parts and establish their logical sequence. *Learning reading* or reading with a full comprehension of the text is carried out using authentic materials, pragmatic texts focused on the subject content of the language at each stage. Such reading is focused on a complete and accurate understanding of the content of the text, a detailed presentation of the content, expressing one's own opinion about these facts, as well as analysing the structure and individual parts of the text, taking into account all the structural differences between the reader's native and foreign languages. At the same time, reading with a selective understanding of the necessary information, or the so-called *selective or search reading* involves the ability to view a text or several short texts, and select the necessary information that interests the reader for further use in the process of communication or expanding knowledge on the problem of the text. Evidently, the level of comprehension of the source context depends on the tasks that the reader sets for themselves.

However, there is a classification of degrees of text comprehension when learning to read in a foreign language. Thus, the researcher N. Dobrovolska identifies seven comprehension levels when learning to read in a foreign language, which are reproduced in Figure 1 [10]:

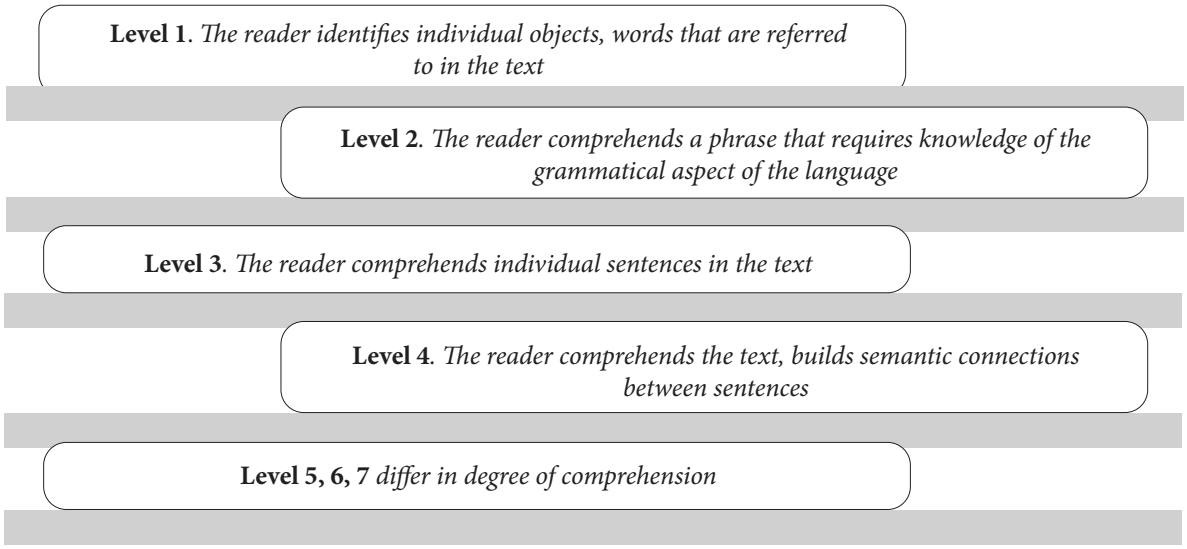

Figure 1. Comprehension levels upon learning to read in a foreign language
Source: developed by the author based on the source [10]

Notably, the levels of understanding of information when learning to read in a foreign language are not a gradual and structural system. A student reading one text can be, for example, at the first level, while reading another text – at the third.

One way or another, the use of reading for extracting the necessary information requires the reader to possess certain skills and abilities that directly provide the reading process itself, namely:

1) "perception of graphic signs and correlation with meaning, i.e. transcoding of visual signals into semantic units;

2) establishing semantic connections between language units of different levels and according to the content of the text, it is these skills that ensure the understanding of the text as a complete speech utterance" [12].

At the same time, to master English reading at A2+ level, primary school students must acquire the following skills: understand the rules formulated in simple language; understand simple instructions for equipment that is used in everyday life; be able to find special provided information in simple everyday materials such as advertising, menus, reference lists, and schedules; set the location of special information in lists and understand the necessary information; understand everyday inscriptions and comments: in public places (on the streets, in restaurants, at railway stations), at workplaces (instructions, warnings); find special information in simple written material that the student meets in everyday life: letters, brochures, and short newspaper articles describing events [7].

Difficulties of Developing English-Language Reading Competence and Methods of Overcoming Them

The development of English-language reading competence is accompanied by numerous difficulties, the solution of which requires specific methods. First of all, when reading aloud, students usually face difficulties associated with the spelling component of speech. These include, for example (Fig. 2):

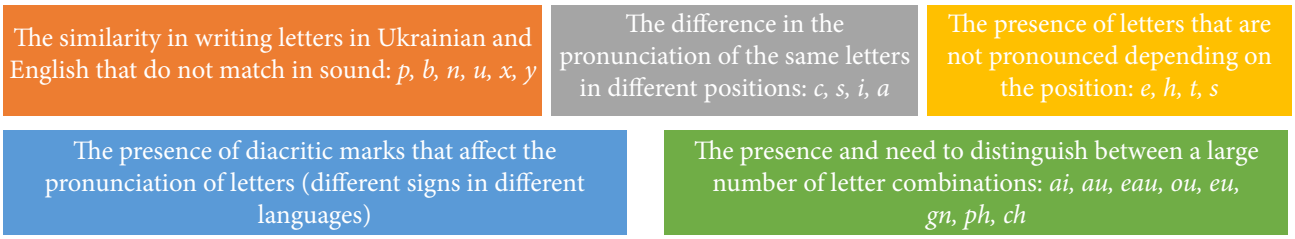

Figure 2. Groups of spelling difficulties that occur when reading in English
Source: developed by the author based on the source [13]

These spelling difficulties arise quite often among general secondary education students since they do not receive the necessary linguistic skills in primary school for a certain reason. To overcome such problems, first of all, the teacher is faced with the task of using practical exercises in English lessons in the process of learning new words, which involve "reading graphemes in different positions, literary and sound analysis, pronunciation of sounds similar to letters, reading words and voicing them without relying on the text", etc. [13]. It should be understood that incorrect pronunciation leads to a distortion of the semantic charge of the word, and sometimes to the replacement of the word in general, as a result of which the meaning of both the sentence and the entire text is lost.

Along with the spelling difficulties of forming English-language reading competence, there are also psychological ones that are associated with a lack of motivation. When learning to read, it is very important to analyse the process of comprehending a foreign-language text. The characteristic feature of comprehending the text is that along with direct understanding of the familiar, one has to linger on the unfamiliar and difficult, comprehend it, evoke the necessary images, representations, experiences in one's mind [14]. Poorly selected material for English lessons leads to the fact that the student gets tired of looking the words up in the dictionary every time, as a result of which curiosity and motivation disappear. The purpose of the teacher should be not only to maximise the student's vocabulary, but also to interest the student in exploring a new culture. Sometimes, it is advisable to use a journalistic text with fewer unknown words, which will interest the student and provide them with a lot of new facts, than a scientific paper aimed only at learning new words [15]. In addition, sometimes the reason for difficulties in forming English-language competence is an underdeveloped reading mechanism in students. This aspect is manifested in the desire of students tocomprehend the meaning of each word, not being able to separate the primary from the secondary, which does not have a semantic load. In this case, the teacher needs to explain to students the use of a particular type of reading, according to which different comprehension levels are developed.

Evidently, the English-language reading competence among secondary education students is developed based on both the individual student component and the component of pedagogical activity. If the student is incapable of self-motivation, a teacher should help using the features of that student's activity and steering the language learning in the right direction. Upon teaching a foreign language, the teacher should most importantly pay attention to authentic texts that are a means of learning the cultural identity of the country whose language is being studied. In this way, one will acquire not only lexical features or grammatical construction, but also form their personal view of the cultural values and traditions of native speakers of the language under study. Finally, teaching a foreign language involves the development of both communicative and cultural competence [16]. At the same time, according to researcher M. Rybakova, another means of increasing motivation to learn a foreign language is the use of information technologies [17]. Virtual excursions, web quests, watching movies, defending projects, communicating with native speakers of a foreign language – all this not only introduces interactive content for learning a new language but also facilitates the process of acquiring information during English lessons.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the study has considered the development features of the English-language reading competence among general secondary education students. The analysis of scientific and methodological literature allowed describing various approaches of Ukrainian and foreign scientists to the methodology of developing foreign language competence, as a result of which the relevance of improving the pedagogical activity of teaching English was confirmed. Eventually, the research focused on studying the phenomenon of reading as one of the means of cross-cultural communication, which made it possible to form the main features of the reading process, types of reading, levels of comprehension, as well as the skills and abilities necessary for reading in a foreign language. Since the purpose of the study was to identify the difficulties of developing English-language competence and search for methods to overcome them, the article described the main groups of difficulties, which include speech, spelling, and psychological difficulties, i.e., motivational. Spelling difficulties arise due to insufficient language acquisition in primary school and, ultimately, unwillingness to further improve speech activity. Motivational difficulties arise due to ineffective presentation of the material by the foreign language teacher and the inability of the student to self-motivate. Some of the methods for solving these problems were examples of practical exercises, as well as tips for using authentic and interactive material during English lessons.

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