Review of Read to Succeed: A Thematic Approach to Academic Reading (2nd Edition)

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Abstract: In second language acquisition, reading is an essential skill, which provides a solid foundation for students' further success in language learning and academic achievement [1]. Academic reading, especially for university students, is very demanding. It is even more challenging for ESL students in English-speaking countries such as the U.S. and Canada [2]. Read to Succeed: A Thematic Approach to Academic Reading (2nd Edition) is aimed to motivate future academic readers to become active in reading, and "engage them in academic reading by fostering intellectual inquiry through an exploration of contemporary themes related to popular academic disciplines" (p. xii). The objectives of this book are met by motivating students with interesting readings of which to read from. The various disciplines prepare students with the vocabulary and terminology specified in different academic fields, and providing them with opportunities to express their own ideas toward readings. Read to Succeed is appropriate for ESL students applying for English-speaking universities since academic reading is fundamental an academic learning environment. It can also be used for native English speakers to better prepare them for what is expected academically in a college atmosphere.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition; Academic Reading; ESL

1. Introduction

Read to Succeed has a thematic organization based on high-interest academic disciplines, various authentic readings in a diversity of genres, as well as progressive academic vocabulary building. Motivation is vital in academic learning and L2 acquisition [3]. It affects the learner's performance in language acquisition; learners are more inclined to succeed in attractive readings [1]. Bearing this philosophy in mind, the authors organized the textbook with ten popular academic disciplines such as; education, health, business, environmental science, and psychology. The diverse categories of Read to Succeed such as various articles, textbook readings, memoirs, and interviews ensured the authenticity of reading provisions. The variety of academic fields collaboratively creates the basic motivational conditions and generates such enthusiasm [1, 4]. Each chapter is cyclically structured by replicating a specific format that is followed strictly. This cyclical structure can provide students with multiple opportunities to explore and revisit content and its related language points [5].

2. Main Features

University students are in need of developing academic literacy practices that can prepare them for further study in disciplines [6]. In Read to Succeed, each chapter contains five to seven readings in diverse genres within the discipline along with various practices, which lays a foundation for students' academic learning. The academic focused topics and authentic reading materials as mentioned previously triggers student's motivation. The length of each reading varies averagely from 500 to 1500, which enables students get familiar with varies discipline- focused readings. The sources of Read to Succeed range from paper based newspaper/magazine/ novel, discipline-specific textbook, interview, online forum/advice column, to Internet blog. In addition, at the end of each chapter, the authors listed extended sources to stimulate students to self-explore the field they might be interested in.

The compact layout of each chapter helps the student schematically build their reading skills progressively. Basic knowledge of subjects and clear objectives are necessary in academic study [7]. The introduction of discipline and objectives in the beginning of each chapter assist students in understanding the subject as well as language points. Vocabulary and terminology are introduced afterwards with related exercises to prepare students for the followed readings. L2 vocabulary exercises should be focused on form, meaning, and use [8]. In Read to Succeed, students not only learn the vocabulary, practice the use of it, but also make expansions. "Language is learned most effectively when it is used as a medium to convey content of interest to the students" [7]. From the interaction standpoint, the authors embedded interaction activities such as group discussion or classmate survey which enables student-student interaction, and further promoting second language improvement [9].

Skill focus is designed in each chapter for students to scaffold reading strategies. Each reading is followed by a pre-, while-, post-reading activity sequence. This step-by-step comprehension process applied in high-interest reading and reinforced by reading strategy can surely make reading effectively. The critical thinking activity – reading with a critical eye is embedded in each chapter. It is very beneficial for students to further their academic reading, fundamentally for their speaking/writing skills improvement, because

it allows students to think critically and have their own thoughts. The step-by-step pre-, while-, post-reading comprehension process applied in high-interest reading and reinforced by reading strategy can surely make reading effectively.

3. Discussion

Read to Succeed, as designed to teach language for academic purposes under a thematic approach, is a form of content-based instruction, which integrates the language learning and academic preparation, provides natural content for language study [7]. Meanwhile, under the notion that the strong version of the Communicative Approach asserts using English to learn [7], the thematic approach of Read to Succeed provides students with access to various authentic academic readings, enable students to use discipline vocabulary and reading skills in academic learning.

The methodological innovations, cooperative learning, and multiple intelligences are considered in Read to Succeed as well, which can better meet the diverse needs of learners, instructors, and educational institutions [10]. The text correlated pictures and graphs can meet the visual learner's preference (e.g. in the reading "Teaching in a Changing World", p.36-41). The note-taking blanks are provided for the verbal learner (e.g. p.89-91). Debate topic such as "should students be allowed to bring cellphones into schools?" (p. 251) helps the debate learner brainstorm. Group work such as in the paraphrasing activity "crediting your sources" (p. 258) can meet the interpersonal learner's preference. The reading comprehension check exercise (e.g. p.308) provides individual learner self-learning opportunity.

There is also emerging use of technology in Read to Succeed which provides autonomous learning experience for students [7]. For instance, after reading Steve Jobs' biographical profile, students are asked to do an Internet research on another prominent figure in Telecommunication. Anderson (2012) advocated that the integration of bottom-up and top-down approaches could help students reach the goal of comprehension. Under this notion, the authors activated the modified interactive approach because this approach meets both complexity and flexibility, which didn't lie in either bottom-up or top-down approach. For instance, preview questions (p.182) triggers students' top-down knowledge, whereas the word definition in margins (p. 188) realizes the bottom-up approach.

4. Conclusions

Read to Succeed is a great book for students preparing for college study. Its strategic-reader training method rather than segregated strategy guidance, is most likely to benefit EAP readers [11]. By vocabulary building, critical thinking, coherent strategy learning as well as other schema building activities, students can reinforce their comprehension of the reading together with developing learning skills in the EAP community of practice. If the quantity of readings can be reduced and integrate more practices of strategy in readings, Read to Succeed could be more friendly for ESL students.

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