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ONLINE NEWSPAPERS AS LEARNING RESOURCES IN ELT CLASSROOMS

Victoria FIODOROV
PhD, University Lecturer
Moldova State University, Faculty of Letters,
Department of English and French Languages for Specific Purposes
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The present article focuses on the impact of using newspapers in teaching language skills to the second language learners of English. Moreover, the paper also discusses the importance of online newspapers in the English classrooms in this digital era, when teachers, as well as learners, can access unlimited resources on the Internet, for free, that can be successfully implimented for promoting literacy through reading, writing and dialogues, which are the hallmarks of effective and efficient use of language. Lastly, it gives some useful suggestions to the teachers as well as the learners of English as a second language how to develop their teaching-learning skills by presenting numerous methods and techniques of teaching these aspects. Our experience in using newspapers to enhance integrative writing and reading in language as well as the way learning English through news articles may enlarge students' vocabulary will be shared in this paper.
Keywords: *journalism, online newspapers, online news, learning resources, ELT classroom.*

Newspaper in Education is not a new concept. It dates back to June 8, 1795, when the Portland (Maine) Eastern Herald published the following editorial:

Much has been said and written on the utility of newspaper; but one principal advantage which might be derived from these publications has been neglected; we mean that of reading them in schools, and by the children in families. Try it for one session - Do you wish your child to improve reading solely, give him a newspaper - it furnishes a variety, some

parts of which must infallibly touch his fancy. Do you wish to instruct him in geography, nothing will so indelibly fix the relative situation of different places, as the stories and events published in the papers? In time, do you wish to have him acquainted with the manners of country or city, the mode of doing business, public or private; or do you wish him to have a smattering of every kind of science useful and amusing, give him a newspaper - newspapers are plenty and cheap - the cheapest book that can be bought, and the more you buy the better for your children, because every part furnishes some new and valuable information!

Today, English teachers around the world know that online newspapers provide excellent material for learning English and can be used as useful tools to enhance reading, writing, speaking and listening skills.

There are many reasons and benefits of using newspapers in the classroom. It is a known fact that almost all the students who enter the university are literate in English, that is, they are able to read in English, but many of them are not in the habit of actually using this ability to practice reading outside the demands of the ESL classroom. Hence, functional literacy is confined to reading so as to be able to answer comprehension questions, complete grammar-based exercises or write a composition/ essay. Our objective is to encourage the students to read any of the newspapers published in English. Besides the fact that newspapers bridge the gap between general academic subjects and the real world, they also motivate positive and practical attitudes toward reading. Students who learn to enjoy reading the newspaper now will more likely be readers as adults. Adult newspaper readers are more likely to be involved in their community and aware of the world. Besides, reading is a critical skill that is essential for the undergraduates, not only in preparing them for various English language examinations, but also for ensuring their academic success. We have to explain to the students the fact that by developing their reading skills, they can better later discuss ideas as well as read and understand a variety of texts. They can also internalize a full range of world background knowledge, language conventions and vocabulary by exposure through reading. Reading is also important because in an academic setting like a university, it is essential to develop their reading skills because they have to carry out research work and write assignments, term

papers and reports. And finally, we have to emphasize the fact that if they want to excel, their reading must go beyond the content lecturer's notes and recommended books. They must read journals, newspapers and reference books as well as related information available on the Internet, all of which is in English. Therefore, there is a dire need not only to equip themselves with the necessary reading skills but also to train themselves to read and understand texts in English independently.

Nowadays, if used in a more inspiring way, newspapers are ready-made ESL teaching materials available online, that can help students to develop not only reading skills but also writing, grammar, vocabulary and speaking skills. In this digital era teachers, as well as learners, can access unlimited resources on the internet; one of the resources available for free and at all times is online news. Most newspapers have an online version, where you can print off articles. Below are the official sites of some British and American newspapers which can be successfully used in teaching English especially for advanced students:

- The Times and Sunday Times http://www.timesonline.co.uk/
- The Independent http://www.independent.co.uk/
- The Financial Times http://ft.com
- The Guardian http://www.guardian.co.uk
- Los Angeles Times www.latimes.com
- The Washington Post www.washingtonpost.com
- USA Today www.usatoday.com

Newspapers can be used in ESL classroom with learners at all levels. At a beginners' level - basic structure, headlines, symbols, pictures and cartoons can be the focus of attention. At an intermediate level - vocabulary, sentence structure and punctuation can be the focus of attention. At an advanced level - skimming, scanning, top-down processing, critical thinking, cultural and "native speakers' perspective" skills can be developed.

This article presents different activities that can be used in the classroom and focuses on raising the level of involvement and participation that the students have in the lesson.

- ***Guess the headline***

Choose several headlines and from each one remove an interesting word (e.g. Missing Painting Found In ____). Stick the incomplete headli-

nes on a piece of paper, photocopy and distribute to teams of 3-4 students. Ask each team to come up with two possible answers for each headline: the most likely word and the funniest word. Collect all the responses and give each team a point for any correct answer, and for the funniest answers. Get everyone involved by holding a vote for the funniest / most original answer for each headline.

- ***Guess t10he article***

Select an interesting newspaper article, preferably one which involves an exciting / unusual story. Choose eight key words from the article and write them on the board. Ask students to work in teams of 3-4 to come up with a story including these words. When they have finished, read out / tell them about the original article. Get students to read aloud their own versions - this can create a lot of laughs!

- ***Newspaper lies***

Ask students to select a short item of news and to summarise it to a partner / team, changing some of the details. Partners need to try and guess which of the facts are true and which have been changed.

- ***Wall quiz***

Write a list of questions based on a selection of newspaper articles, and distribute the quiz to teams of 2-3 students. Pin up the articles around the room and ask students to walk around the room trying to find the answers. The winning team is the first to find all the answers. This can be quite a lively activity!

- ***Presentations***

To encourage students to read newspapers in English on a more regular basis, organise short presentations at the beginning of each class. Ask a different student at the end of each class to find an interesting newspaper article and to summarise it to the other students during the next class, explaining why they chose it. This can lead to interesting discussions about current issues.

- ***Newspaper treasure hunt***

For this activity you will need a longer period of time, it can be done even as a project, during which you will choose and read several online newspapers. Then ask your students to write a list of articles / words / pictures which they need to find, and give team a copy of the list. Tell

them to cut out their 'treasures' and glue them next to the appropriate word in the list (or make a note of the page number). Possible list:

- A job advert
- Some good news
- Some bad news
- Reference to a famous political figure
- News about a star
- Weather forecast
- News about a sport
- Name of a country
- Favourite news item

- ***Gossip***

This is an easy activity for helping students to summarise articles. For this activity it is best to use tabloid newspapers or articles involving a bit of scandal, perhaps about famous people. Teach students useful phrases for chatting or gossiping, e.g. 'Have you heard about…?', 'Did you know that…?', 'Guess what?' etc. Use appropriate gestures and intonation. Ask students to choose an article of their choice, underline or jot down important parts of the article and report it to a friend, as though having an informal chat. They could then go round the class, chatting with different people about their news article. You could also teach students some useful phrases for responding, e.g. 'Really? I don't believe it!', 'Are you joking?', 'How / when did it happen?'

In order to make these activities useful, it is important that you choose your news article wisely. You should consider the following criteria:

- *Appropriacy of topic*

Will your students be interested in the topic? Will it be upsetting for some students? Is it suitable for the age group?

- *Length*

Be careful to avoid articles that are particularly long. Reading a news report in a second language is demanding, and if the article is too long it will discourage students. If the news report is lengthy, do not be afraid of editing. The style of news articles often means that entire paragraphs can be omitted without affecting the overall sense of the piece.

- *Language content*

Besides the general interest in the topic, this may well be the most important selection criteria. Does the article contain a useful lexical set (crime, money)? Are there some good grammar exponents (past perfect, reported speech) or interesting syntax and sentence style? These will provide the basis of your language work on the text, how can the language be exploited?

- *Generative?*

Can you think of a good way to follow up the basic textual work? Does the topic lend itself to discussion or role play? Can you practise the language further?

- *Task suitability*

When working with authentic material there are issues concerning the authenticity of the tasks. The most authentic task is for students to simply read the article. Although we usually look to exploit the text a little more in the classroom, it is important to keep tasks as realistic as possible.

There are lots of opportunities to extend the work done on the article, and to use a different skill such as speaking or writing. This gives students a chance to use the language they have learnt from the text.

- *Role play based on text*

e.g. an interview with a protagonist from the story

- *Discussion of topic/ideas/argument of the text*
- *Design something / task*

e.g. following an article on a new housing initiative, students plan a dream house

- *Research project*

e.g. following an article about Homelessness in UK, what is the situation in the students' own country

- *Writing*

e.g. the next day's story, someone involved in the news event writing to a friend

- *Debate*
- *Comparison activities*

A topical story will appear in several different places, and comparing how different sources deal with the news event can be very revealing.

This could focus on content/style/critical analysis of reporters' attitudes/ politics

- A comparison with the same subject in the students' own press.
- A comparison with radio or TV reports on the same event.
- A comparison between different newspapers e.g. a quality paper and a popular paper.

In addition, lexis as well as meaning can be learnt or taught through a simple edition of an online newspaper. According to Cheyney (1992) the acquisition of vocabulary is of great importance in learning to read. [1] If a person does not understand the meaning of the words he or she reads, then the skills of decoding, making inferences, understanding story structure and so on are of little use. In this regard, the teacher can list out new words and then explain their meanings to the students. The students can be introduced to journalese, the language of news writing in a systematic way. Also, Crossword Puzzle in the entertainment column of newspapers has obvious value for developing vocabulary. Newspaper crossword puzzles are often difficult, but with patience and encouragement, the teacher can lead the students to success. Class time can be set aside to check answers in the next day's newspaper.

To a large extent, there are many advantages of using newspapers in the ESL classroom. For one, an attempt is made to encourage students to read in English outside the ESL classroom. At the same time, they are provided with experience in reading a variety of authentic texts of current and general interest to supplement the teaching materials, which are specifically written for pedagogic purposes. For their part, the students become familiar with a variety of genres, like advertisements, reviews, reports, and statistics. Reading newspapers also provides an avenue through which the students can expand their knowledge and develop their reading skills.

Using newspapers can also expand your vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. In addition, newspapers are excellent resources to use for teaching critical reading. Through newspaper study, students can develop expertise in reflecting on their ideas justifying their responses. Besides this, it can to a large extent motivate the students to read ready available and relatively cheap source of discourse in English, which con-

tains texts that offer high interest content ranging from sensational news, gender biased articles to content- based information. Finally, to some extent, learner autonomy is being encouraged among the students, albeit in a modest way, by giving them a choice when it comes to selecting the articles for their reading projects.

References:

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