

Introduction

Readings for General English is a text in reading comprehension for university students in Iran whose major field is other than English. The course, therefore, is prepared to be used by a wide range of learners whose need can be described as EAP (English for Academic Purposes) as distinct from ESP (English for Specific Purposes). Student exposure to the former @ -@ the concern of the present volume @ -@ is meant to ease his way into the latter when he becomes engaged in his major field of study. This text is written to primarily help students in all non-English disciplines develop their reading skills and extend their reading comprehension ability.

Reading experts view reading as a communicative process rather than as a language learning process. The theoretical support for this view comes from what is known as Schema Theory which assumes that meaning does not reside in the written material. Instead, the reader recreates the author's intended message based on the interaction that takes place in his head between the text and his background knowledge or schemata.

Communication always takes place in a known context. For this reason the authors of this volume have tried to choose reading texts with which students @ -@ or at least the majority of them @ -@ have some content familiarity. The readings in this book encompass some common kinds of non-fictional prose. In subject matter they cover many of the important areas of interest and intellectual need of the incoming students to Iranian universities. Their interests naturally and necessarily cover an enormous range of topics making the job of the textbook writer very difficult, indeed. However, the topics that we have selected and included here are entertaining personal experience, travel accounts, observations on nature and natural life, amusing discoveries, inventions, historical wonders and the like. These familiar topics should, we hope, activate the readers' background knowledge to recreate the writer's intended meaning.

In order to exploit students' background knowledge and help the desired interaction for comprehension be realized, we have designed and included such class activities as pre-reading questions, contextual clues, word formation, matching, synonyms, antonyms, contextualized vocabulary, cloze paragraphs, cross-word puzzles, mapping activities, comprehension questions and some

others. All these activities are helpful for the development of the reading skills of the students and increase their power of comprehension.

The pre-reading questions at the start of each unit of the book are meant to serve as means of activating students' knowledge base as well as generate interest and perhaps enthusiasm for the content of the selected readings. These strategies enhance students' motivation and increase their level of comprehension. Furthermore, some questions are raised that can be answered after reading the texts. This is done to make reading purposeful and also facilitate reading comprehension. Therefore, teachers are recommended to make sure that students participate in answering these questions. They are not to be ignored.

Another communicative reading strategy which we recommend our students to follow for the sake of better comprehension is the model below suggested in Chastain (1988: 225):

1. Read for meaning.
2. Do not look up every word.
3. Predict meaning.
4. Use context.

This book consists of twenty-three units each of which is based on a reading selection culled from an authentic source which has a definite communicative purpose. The selections are graded which means, for example, that unit five is of a lower readability score than is unit six. Thus, the order of the presentation of the material in the book should be observed.

The book is to be covered in one full academic term of 16-17 weeks of instruction for three hours a week. At the discretion of the instructor, however, some of the exercises may be assigned to be done by students as homework.

With Aspirations for Divine Grace

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