



Skills and Strategies for Developing Reading Comprehension

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Abstract:

This research article on “Skills and Strategies for Developing Reading Comprehension” aims to present the skills and strategies for developing reading comprehension for the learners of English as a second language (ESL). There are two types of comprehension – reading and listening. Both the comprehension skills require the skill of understanding the text. I have discussed reading comprehension.

Keywords: English language, ESL, Understanding, Reading Comprehension, Skills

1. Introduction

Man is a social animal. Man does majority of social dealings with the help of a language. Different people in the world use different languages. Formal education is given for the overall development of a child. As a part of formal education, languages are taught. Mother tongue is highly effective in quenching the eagerness and curiosity of the children at the initial stage. On the other hand, one cannot avoid the importance of the second language like English.

Now-a-days, English is considered a major global language for effective transference of the ideas in the international periphery. In today's world, English is an effective tool for communication. English is important because it is the only language that truly links the whole world together. In countries like India, where the land is so vast with people of various cultures live, the language of each part of the country also differs. Under the circumstances, English can be the only link as people in each place will not be able to learn all the other languages to communicate with the people. English bridges this gap and connects the people. Moreover, globalization, liberalization, information communication technology, internet, education, studies, business have prompted the usage and acceptability of English language in every part of the world. In fact, English plays a role of second language. That is why, English is taught to the students in our formal education system.

In this system, Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking skills of a language are developed. Out of these four skills, Reading is the chief source of gaining knowledge. Reading is an important factor in contemporary world for the development of any person. If comprehension does not take place while reading, it turns to be only a mechanical process. Reading without comprehension is meaningless.

2. Definition of Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is defined as the level of understanding of writing. Proficient reading depends on the ability to recognize words quickly and effortlessly. If word recognition is difficult, learners use too much of their processing capacity to read individual words, which interferes with their ability to comprehend what is read. Commenting on Reading Comprehension Anderson(1976)¹ states that Reading Comprehension is defined from a Psycholinguistic viewpoint as “the correspondence between the way in which a message is encoded by the writer and the way in which a message is encoded by the writer and the way in which it is decoded by the reader.”

When a text is read, both mechanical and intellectual processes take place. Along with the mechanical process of vision recognition and reproduction intellectual processes of recalling, remembering, judging, appreciating, evaluating etc. go on. The product of the mechanical processes is the technique and that of the intellectual processes is the comprehension.

Comprehension carries the understanding of a word or phrase beyond recognition to the understanding of the meaning intended by the author. This involves determining the meanings of words in their language setting and at the same time linking the meaning into larger language patterns and fusing them to a chain of related ideas, usually those that the author had in mind. Understanding a paragraph is not a simple task. It is like solving a problem in mathematics where the reader has to select, repress, soften, emphasize, correlate and organize all under the influence of right mental set or purpose in demand. The skills of comprehension are basic to a grasp of meaning. Moreover, the degree of understanding depends upon many factors, such as, the difficulty of the passage read, the clarity with which it is expressed, the reader's background and experiences.

3. Reading Comprehension Skills

The skills involved in reading comprehension are numerous and interrelated. They are mutually dependent. These skills may be classified according to the reader's purpose as follows:

- **Reading to find main idea**

Reading of fiction is usually done for this purpose. Here the learner may select a sentence or a title that best expresses the main idea, tell which word of a series describe a character, note the first and the most important phase or a word.

- **Reading to Answer Question**

The teacher asks some questions pertaining to the given paragraph. This will lead the learners to read the paragraph and find the suitable answers.

- **Reading to select significant details**

Here the reader should not only differentiate between main points and supporting details but also decide the important point which he has in mind. The learner learns to find those details that support the main idea or assist in arriving at a conclusion.

- **Reading to arrive at generalization**

Here the learner frames and guesses riddles, finds out the right conclusion out of many, formulates, discuss the effect of certain events etc.

- **Reading to summarize and organize**

According to this, learner performs many activities, answering questions, drawing pictures to tell main events of a story, arranging the correct items with answers given in a mixed up order, studying the table of contents etc.

- **Reading to follow directions**

The learner follows written direction e.g. 'keep to the left' reads directions for a game and then follows them, draws a picture from given directions etc.

- **Reading Graphs, Table, Charts and Maps**

The learner answers questions from a given data on a calendar or graphs or tables or maps. He also makes graphs on individual or group achievements.

- **Reading to predicate outcomes**

This shows that learners discusses why things happened as they did in a paragraph or a story, estimates the answer in some type of arithmetic problems, evaluates the plan in terms of expected outcomes etc.

- **Reading to evaluate critically**

According to this, the reader applies some standard of judgment or makes comparisons and appraisals to determine the relevance validity of the material and sincerity of author's views. The

learner decides whether the story is real or fanciful, determines whether the author is qualified to conclude that way, gives book reviews etc.

4. Reading Comprehension Strategy

A reading strategy is an activity used to help reading comprehension. They are specific actions, behaviours, steps, techniques for even thoughts such as seeking out conversation partners or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task used by learners to enhance their own learning. Strategies can help learners improve their own perception, reception, storage, retention and retrieval of language information. Thus, reading strategies are specific actions or techniques taken to perform the act of reading comprehension.

5. Benefits of Using Reading Comprehension Strategies

Good readers use strategies naturally. Reading comprehension becomes easier for struggling readers when strategies are used consciously. The use of strategies aids struggling readers to become proficient users of language. Reading comprehension strategies make reading fun and more meaningful. Strategies help one develop into independent readers.

6. Reading Comprehension Strategies

There are many reading comprehension strategies used by different types of readers. The effective strategies are discussed and listed as below.

6.1 Inference

Inference means making use of syntactic, logical and cultural clues to discover the meaning of unknown elements. If these are words, then word-formation and derivation will also play an important part. When dealing with a text, it is better not to explain the difficult to the learners beforehand. The learners would only get used to being given 'pre-processed' texts and would never make the effort to cope with a difficult passage on their own. The learners should be encouraged to make a guess at the meaning of the words they do not know rather than look them up in a dictionary. Thus, inference will greatly help the learners to understand a text in a better way.

6.2 Understanding relations within the sentence

In order to understand relations within the sentence, it is important and necessary to look first for the 'core' of the sentence (subject + verb). In order to do that, the learners can be asked to divide passages into sense groups and underline, box, or recognize in some other way the important elements of each sentence in a passage. Thus, understanding relations within the sentence will help to comprehend a text.

6.3 Linking Sentences and Ideas

Reference covers all the devices that permit lexical relationship within a text (e.g. reference to an element previously mentioned- anaphora – or to one to be mentioned below- cataphora, use of synonymy, hyponymy, comparison, nominalization etc.). It is important for the learners to realize that a text is not made up of independent sentences or clauses, but that it is a web of related ideas that are announced, introduced and taken up again later throughout the passage with the help of references. Thus, linking of sentences and ideas will greatly help to comprehend a text.

6.4 Improving Reading Speed

Learners who read too slowly will easily get discouraged. They will also tend to stumble on unfamiliar words and fail to grasp the general meaning of the passage. One of the most common ways of increasing reading speed is to give learners passages to read and ask them to time themselves. A conversion table, taking the length of the text and the reading time into account, will tell them what

their reading speed is and this will make it easier for them to try and read a little faster every time. Reading should also be followed by comprehension questions or activities since reading speed should not be developed at the expense of comprehension. Thus, this will also help to increase reading speed and to comprehend a text.

6.5 Skimming and Scanning

Both skimming and scanning are specific reading techniques necessary for quick and efficient reading. In skimming, a learner goes through the reading material quickly in order to get the fist of it, to know how it is organized, or to get an idea of the tone or the intention of the writer. In scanning, a learner only tries to locate specific information and often even do not follow the linearity of the passage to do so. He simply wanders over the text until he finds what he is looking for, whether it be a name, a date, or a less specific piece of information.

Skimming is therefore a more thorough activity which requires an overall view of the text and implies a definite reading competence. Scanning, on the contrary, is far more limited since it only means retrieving what information is relevant to our purpose. For instance, a learner may well skim through an article first just to know whether it is worth reading, and then read it through more carefully because a learner has decided that it is of interest. It is also possible afterwards to scan the same article in order to note down a figure or a name which a learner particularly wants to remember. Thus, both skimming and scanning are of great use in order to comprehend a text.

6.6 SQ3R

One strategy for reading comprehension is the technique called SQ3R. This stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review. In order to get an understanding of the text, a learner should survey the chapters. This consists of quickly looking at the title, headings and any subheadings. Look at any end of chapter questions, teacher made questions and in the titles or subtitles of the chapter. After reading a portion or section of the book, recite what a learner has read aloud. By orally summarizing what you just read, it helps to cement the content in your memory. The last technique is top review what you have read again. By writing down key facts from the chapter and reviewing it, you will better understand the information.

Apart from the above discussed strategies, there are some other key reading comprehension strategies which have been listed below.

- Making use of the context to understand the meaning of a word
- Predicting
- Previewing
- Anticipation
- Paraphrasing
- Understanding relations within the sentence by paying attention to linkers
- Understanding relations between the parts of a text through lexical cohesion devices
- Understanding relations between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion devices
- Translating
- Analyzing word components to find the meaning of a word, for instance, by breaking it up into familiar parts, identifying prefixes or suffixes.
- Reading to confirm
- Reading ahead or back for clues
- Self-correcting
- Building mental pictures as you read on
- Underlining and other forms of highlighting

Thus, reading comprehension is about understanding or comprehending texts. It is a complex activity that involves several stages and processes that act simultaneously to achieve comprehension. Making learners aware of reading comprehension strategies can make them better ESL (English as a Second Language) readers. If good and effective reading comprehension strategies are employed for ESL learners, it will certainly bring about fruitful results in them.

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