

Effective Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading Skills at Secondary Level

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Abstract

Reading is an essential skill of language that should be taught at every level extensively. It is as important as any other skills of the language. So the question is what is the role of reading in learning the language and student learning? Educational institutions around the world teach reading to promote literacy abilities among the students. The important aspect of reading is to create mental images of the text and context into which one can incorporate new ideas and information. This process of creating images is essential to understand the conceptual underpinnings that are often made about reading and their implications for teaching. And this pattern of making mental images in the subconscious mind benefit students and teachers to critically assess how to learn effectively through instructional innovations.

Reading is purely a cognitive process that allows someone to interpret the existing information from the text. It is a complex skill because it is considered as a process which is ongoing for a student. Because of its complex nature, it is the need of the hour is to think and re-think how it can be taught effectively and efficiently so that the learners can grasp more and more information while reading.

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The present article aims to develop a effective process of teaching reading skills at secondary level. It also aims to help the pedagogues that why and how students are facing problem when it comes to comprehension and understanding of the text and their context.

Key Words: Reading Skill, Comprehension, Schema, Instruction Method, Cognitive Process.

Introduction

Reading is an essential skill of language that should be taught at every level extensively. It is as important as any other skills of the language. So the question is what is the role of reading in learning the language and student learning? Educational institutions around the world teach reading to promote literacy abilities among the students. But most importantly, reading is the only skill of language that provides ample of perspective about any idea, topic, or subject area. It also develops and fosters the critical thinking of the students. Reading provides believes that goes in the long run and develop context and contextual meaning.

The important aspect of reading is to create mental images of the text and context into which one can incorporate new ideas and information. This process of creating images is essential to understand the conceptual underpinnings that are often made about reading and their implications for teaching. And this pattern of making mental images in the subconscious mind benefit students and teachers to critically assess how to learn effectively through instructional innovations. The process of making mental maps through reading instructions

offers teachers to evaluate and engage in curriculum planning, course design, materials development or adaptation projects. William Grabe and Fredricka L. Stoller writes in the book titled *Teaching and Researching Reading*:

Reading can be thought of as a way to draw information from a text and to form an interpretation of that information. However, this ‘definition’ does not really tell us much about what happens when we read and how we comprehend a text. Reading comprehension is remarkably complex, involving many processing skills that are coordinated in very efficient combinations. Because one also read

for different purposes, there are many ways to read a text, further complicating any definition. Seen in this light, the ability to read is a remarkable type of expertise that most humans develop; it is not generally well understood, nor is its development widely recognized for the significant cognitive achievement that it is. (xiii)

Reading is purely a cognitive process that allows someone to interpret the existing information from the text. It is a complex skill because it is considered as a process which is ongoing for a student. Because of its complex nature, it is the need of the hour is to think and re-think how it can be taught effectively and efficiently so that the learners can grasp more and more information while reading. Reading is a skill that can be practiced effectively and extensively to learn the meaning of the text. Above all behind every reading, there is a purpose that what, why, and how someone is reading the particular text because every individual requirement is different from others. To teach reading skills at any level whether it is primary, secondary, or senior secondary first of all it is important to formulate a framework of pedagogy that can guide

teachers, materials writers, practitioners, teacher trainers and curriculum developers in designing effective reading instruction. The direction for teaching reading and making framework for teaching is best formulated by identifying the critical component skills necessary for reading development, exploring major implications from research that supports effective curricular design, and developing a coherent set of instructional practices.

Reading is a process-oriented task that should be learnt by making proper effective efforts by learners. There is a number of abilities that should be developed or teachers need to teach those abilities in the classroom. These abilities make students skilled readers. They are discussed below.

To Decode Graphic Forms for Efficient Word Recognition

Language has its own system of graphic representation which is known as morpheme, the minimal unit of the word and these minimal units formulate a word which has certain meanings. These words all together formulate sentences which learners often read and they have to recognize individual words in a sentence to formulate the particular meaning in order to understand the context of the text. So the teacher role is to make students efficient in recognizing words and graphic forms. This is the first step in teaching reading skills in a class.

Access the Meanings of a Large Number of Words Automatically

When the first step is done, then the teacher should target to teach the vocabulary system of the language because this is the vehicle through which one can learn how to infer meaning from the text. The knowledge of the words

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and its meaning allows students to access the extract the meaning from the sentences. To activate the conscious creativity of the student's teacher can make use of word puzzles in the beginning so that the students can learn individual words and their meaning.

Draw Meaning from Phrase and Clause-Level Grammatical Information

Grammar is an important component of language and serves as a system which gives meaning. In English grammar, sentence structure is the arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses in a sentence. The grammatical meaning of a sentence is dependent on this structural organization, which is also called syntax or syntactic structure.

Additionally, when students know the words and their meaning and started comprehending the context of the sentences then the next step is to teach students syntax and the grammatical system through which they can draw meaning from phrases and clauses in the sentences they read.

Combine Clause-Level Meanings into Larger Networks of Text Comprehension

Reading skills primarily consists of an understanding of text meaning and comprehension of contextual meaning. The teacher should focus to teach how to combine clause and phrase meanings in a sentence to determine the text comprehension and to infer contextual meaning. Judi Moreillon writes in the book titled *Collaborative Strategies for Teaching Reading Comprehension: Maximizing Your Impact*:

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Brains seek out patterns and thinking involves making connections. Understanding the importance of background knowledge to comprehension is critical because one connect new information with prior knowledge before one integrate and organize the new information. Background knowledge is always behind reader backing up the comprehension. Each reader brings his own feelings, personality, and experiences to the text and that each reader is different each time he revisits a particular text. Background knowledge is what the reader brings to the reading event. Each reader's interpretation and each reading of the text are potentially unique. (19)

Learners who are at the initial stage of learning reading skills should make use of background information while reading a text. It will help them to understand and comprehend a text in a better way.

Recognize Discourse Structures that Build and Support Comprehension

The next step is to teach discourse markers which can serve as a support for the learners to comprehend a text. Discourse markers are words that usually connect sentences. They are also called linking words or linking phrases. For example, however, although, nevertheless and so on.

Additionally, it binds the sentences and ideas in a text or piece of writing. Without sufficient discourse markers in a piece of writing, a text would not

seem logically constructed and the connections between the different sentences and paragraphs would not be obvious.

Use Reading Strategies for a Range of Academic Reading Tasks

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At the secondary level, it is important for the teacher to develop the motivation and creativity of the learners by asking them to use different strategies while reading a text or completing a task. For example, strategies like skimming and scanning can be frequently used in classroom procedures to improve the level of the students. Jane Oakhill, Kate Cain, and Carsten Elbro emphasize in the book titled *Understanding and Teaching Reading Comprehension: A Handbook* that:

Reading comprehension is important, not just for understanding text, but for broader learning, success in education, and employment. It is even important for our social lives, because of email, text, and social networking sites. Reading comprehension is a complex task, which requires the orchestration of many different cognitive skills and abilities. Of course, reading comprehension is necessarily dependent on at least adequate word reading: readers cannot understand a whole text if they cannot identify (decode) the words in that text. Likewise, good reading comprehension will depend on good language understanding more generally. This requires comprehension of the individual words and the sentences that they form. However, comprehension typically requires the comprehender to integrate the sense of these words and sentences into a meaningful whole. To do so, construction of a suitable mental model is necessary. (1)

Aforementioned ideas about reading and reading comprehension give the idea about how important is to teach reading skills at the secondary level. These aspects give motivation to the teachers and learners to apply the strategies and participate actively in the classroom.

Set Goals for Reading and adjust them as needed

Each and every classroom has diverse students in terms of level, understanding and background information. The teacher needs to adjust the classroom pedagogy according to the level and knowledge of the learners. Jane Oakhill, Kate Cain, and Carsten Elbro opine:

Even though children typically have a high level of communicative competence when they start school they do not have all the language skills in place that they need for text comprehension. It is a common misconception that, in order to develop competence in reading, beginning readers would need only to be taught to decode the written word, and then their language comprehension skills would kick in and they would be able to understand written texts just as well as they understand oral language. This is a misconception because it ignores the fact that written texts are, in important ways, different from spoken interactions (see “Written vs. spoken language” below), and written texts typically require memory abilities and other cognitive skills that are not so crucial in understanding everyday interactions. (5)

From the aforementioned ideas, it is quite clear that to develop the competence level of the students’ teacher needs to fix a model of teaching that suits to the classroom nature and it should be students friendly. A model of teaching that focuses on text comprehension primarily to enhance the other skills of the language. The modern approaches of teaching language especially activity-based teaching have the capability to focus on the neglected skills of the language.

Goals

Monitoring the students in the classroom means to watch as they read and participate in the classroom procedures. The teacher has to focus on how students are listening to him or her how much they are actively participating in the classroom. From time to time the teacher has to check for specific information to get an idea about how the class is cooperating. This provides the track of teaching for an individual and makes one aware of how he/she is doing. It also helps to build the rapport between teacher and students to build the bricks of success or to spot the problems and do something about it if it is the need of the hour.

Monitoring our comprehension means noticing our thinking as we read and one notice about the confusions of students and rectifies the issues. The teacher has to use background knowledge and recognize when something is new, what questions arise between the students as they read, and what inferences they are making.

Draw on Prior Knowledge as Appropriate

Tapping the students' prior knowledge in the classroom is the goal of the teacher who is teaching reading comprehension. The teacher has to know their classroom and according to the nature of the classroom, one should prepare materials which are culturally relevant. The prior knowledge of the students is known as the schema, relevant background knowledge that allows students to make connections when they are reading a text.

Louann Reid, Ellin O. Keene, and Susan Zimmerman in the article titled “Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Reading Comprehension in a Reader's Workshop” identified three types of connections that students can make while reading a text. They are as following:

A- Text to Self: Comprehension primarily means to understand the text and its meaning according to the schema that is available with the individual mind. Text comprehension as a process to self means how an individual student understands the idea behind the text and its context comparing his or her past experiences in life. It depends upon the nature of the text because whether it is culturally relevant to them or not. The teacher role is to make student active and use materials which are culturally relevant to them or at least which evoke students' interests. It is considered as the endophoric reference to the text i.e. to search the meaning of the text from the background information.

B- Text to World: Comprehension of the text the outer world is considered as the exophoric meaning and reference to the text. It means relating to the text from the discourse markers which discusses the information out of the text and context. Teacher role is to discuss with the students how to decode the information which is not available in the text.

C- Text to Text: Text to text comprehension simple means to read the text and infer the meaning from the surface level structures.

Evaluate, Integrate and Synthesize Information for Critical Reading Comprehension

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Reading skills of students needs to be evaluated, integrate and synthesize according to the demand of the secondary level. To evaluate the reading skills of the students' teacher needs to assess the students' level closely. For example, to evaluate the reading skills group work and pair work can be used as a strategy in the classroom. The group cohesion and peer assessment is a great tool in the era of communicative language teaching because it promotes creativity, develops the motivation of the students, and enhances critical thinking.

When the teacher receives the integrated information about the classroom progress and individual level then he or she needs to synthesize the information and make the necessary changes in the teaching methods.

Maintain these Processes Fluently for an Extended Period of Time

The aforementioned ideas of teaching reading skills and comprehension need to be practiced by the teachers fluently to develop a deep level understanding of the particular text and their context.

Sustain Motivation to Persist in Reading and Use Text Information for Reading Goals

This is the fact that reading is an essential skill and has been neglected by the pedagogues across the world in ESL or EFL classrooms. To sustain motivation in reading tasks the teacher has to use materials which consist of information and relevant information. Ask the students some time to read aloud in the classroom and the teacher should increase the text variety. When they understand the importance of reading a text they will make more time for

reading and inferring meaning. The teacher role is to use a variety of material and provide the right level of challenge for the students in the classroom.

Although apart from these aspects teacher role is much greater while teaching reading skills at the secondary level. There are certain steps that have to be taken by the teacher while teaching reading skills in the classroom. They are as following:

Integration of Reading Skill Instructions with Extensive Practice: The integration of reading skills with instruction based pedagogy in the classroom is the need of the hour. Teacher role is to develop lesson plans according to the needs of the students and ask them to practice extensively the relevant materials that are provided in the classroom.

Use Reading Resources that are Interesting, Varied, Attractive, Abundant and Accessible: The materials and teaching aids which are used in the classroom pedagogy should be interesting so that students feel motivated while participating in the classroom. The materials used should be culturally known and not like an alien topic or area is chosen to teach reading. The material should be accessible to individual students in the classroom.

Provide some Degree of Student Choice: The nature of the classroom is changed as compared to the traditional classroom. Now day students play an active role in the classroom and teacher role is to be a guide. To choose the materials for teaching reading skills and giving space to students for choosing the area or topic will provide active participation in the classroom.

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Introduce and Practice Reading Skills by First Drawing on the Passages in Course textbooks: The use of textbook in teaching always give the teacher an additional advantage because students are familiar with the text. Practicing the reading skills tasks through the textbook prescribed is a remarkable idea because it is available with all the students in the classroom. Using textbook is easier as compared to using authentic materials and searching for culturally relevant material for the whole classroom.

Connect Textbook Readings to Students' Background Knowledge: Use of textbook also allows teachers to connect to the students' background knowledge and information for better comprehension.

Structure Lessons around Pre-Reading, During-Reading and Post-Reading Tasks: Teacher role is to prepare a lesson plan for each class and execute the target set by him or her. The lesson plan should be divided into three phases i.e. pre-reading tasks like brainstorming and asking simple questions and so on and then during reading tasks and finally post-reading tasks.

Provide Opportunities for Students to Experience Comprehension

Success: The use of group work and peer work provide students with opportunities in the classroom to learn from others and rectify their errors. It will enhance the students' experience of comprehending a text in a better way because of the group they can understand a text quickly and frequently.

Build Expectations that Reading Occurs in Class in Every Lesson: Teacher has to build an impression on the class that it is a continuous process that will occur in the classroom frequently. Reading more materials provides them with

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more practice of different topics and they gradually learn how to comprehend the text quickly and efficiently.

Plan Instruction around a Curricular Framework that Integrates Goals for the Development of Reading Abilities: The teacher has to plan the instruction through the lesson plans that are effective and integrates the reading skills development goals. The instruction used in the classroom should activate and make use of the existing schema of the students'.

Conclusion

It is quite clear from the preceding discussions about the reading comprehension that the reading skill is an essential component in language teaching but unfortunately it was neglected in the traditional approaches of teaching. The aforementioned ideas formulate a path which can serve the pedagogue a direction how they can teach reading skills in their classroom. Especially for EFL classroom, these steps become vital and can serve as a direction to teach reading skills and comprehension.

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