
Diverse Effective Strategies in Teaching Reading to ESL / EFL Learners

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Abstract

The core objective of writing this research paper is to discuss and discover the various supportive strategies and techniques for teaching reading to English language learners. Today, English has become a lingua franca in terms of global communication. Hence, teaching English language methods and strategies should also be abridged and refined. In English language teaching and learning, reading is considered as one of the essential and vital skill in language acquisition. Reading allows individuals to become better writers while improving their vocabulary and communication skills. Reading stimulates patterns of brain development, thereby improving speech and literacy. Likewise, reading is also a thought-provoking task in understanding communiqué. Considering its importance and vitality in language learning, it is not an easy skill that could be learned without much practice and exertion. So, the researchers consider that mastering the reading skill might help students to improve other skills like speaking and writing, as it enhances comprehension in communicative abilities such as speech production and writing. Learners often struggle with reading comprehension and find it challenging to master reading a given text in English language class. A teacher can provide learners simple and easy strategies/techniques to overcome the difficulty of reading skill. A teacher can introduce his/her student's varied supportive and simple stratagems to progress reading e.g. 1. Assigning students a short and simple text to read silently or aloud. 2. Asking comprehension questions about the text, as questioning aids in understanding

3. Encouraging them to make use of their background *knowledge* as it plays a vital role in reading comprehension. 4. Breaking down the *elements* of a reading passage can help learners get a more complete picture. 5. Finally, we can determine simple, clear and easy strategies for reading skill that could help the students in improving their reading skill. These strategies would also be substantiate for teachers in the teaching of reading efficiently and capably.

Keywords: reading comprehension, acquisition, *knowledge*, strategies, *communiqué*

1. Introduction

Currently, English language has achieved the status of international language. English is being used in every walk of life. The importance of this language cannot be undermined, as it has become a common language for education as well. The significance of English is also recognized worldwide, as it is the language of international communication in politics, science, media and art as well as entertainment and socializing. Different methods and resources are being used to acquire proficiency in this global language. Numerous methods and strategies are used to learn the four language skills: Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing. English is considered as a challenging language for EFL learners. Learners face lots of difficulties and problems to overcome the challenges of learning this language and acquiring the proficiency in communication. English language learners are always in the quest of having easy and authentic language learning techniques/strategies in terms of learning reading, writing, listening and speaking to meet the local as well as the global demands and needs. Consequently, reading is a receptive skill like listening and it needs several drills to acquire competence to comprehend the various written texts.

English language reading skills for EFL/ESL (learners) have been a point of investigation for decades. Reading is a familiar part of our everyday lives for most of us. Scholars and researchers in the field have been trying to understand the complexities of the process. It is performed both for pleasure and information. Reading skills are crucial for the individuals since they foster comprehension in reading. If the students do not have knowledge of reading skill, they cannot be expected to become successful readers. Thus, they cannot achieve the level of

comprehension required to pass exams in their own departments although they reach to study at university level.

Research in second language reading suggests that learners use a variety of strategies to assist them with the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information (Rigney, 1978). Comprehension or reading tactics exhibit how readers to conceive of a task, how they make sense of what they read, and what they do when they do not understand. It is most emphasized in traditional EFL/ESL courses and even today is the focal center of English as a foreign language (EFL) instructions in some countries (Susser&Robb, 1990). Reading skill is an instrument to facilitate the communicative fluency in each of other language skills.

Reiss (1983) contends that “the more our students read, the more they become familiar with the figurative and imaginative dimensions and also creativeness native speakers of the language”. Other researchers have also emphasized upon the importance of reading. Rivers (1981) believes that reading is the most important activity in any language class (p. 259).

There exists numerous studies on reading skills and comprehension. Alderson (2000) notes that the readers' knowledge affects what they understand. There are other factors which affect reading comprehension. According to Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004), reading comprehension is a problem for many students. When they read in English, they tend to attribute the comprehension difficulties to the English language. They may also feel that the problem is their own lack of ability. In fact, the problem is about their approach to a text. If the students understand how the information is presented in English texts and are aware of the cognitive processes, they will be better at comprehension.

The word reading is often used to describe both: what beginners do when they are learning to read, and what good readers do when they are involved in fluent reading. However, the two kinds of readers do different things and therefore, have very different needs as they struggle to become better readers. Reading at these two extremes of skill, and at the various levels of proficiency between them, is a series of activities which presuppose different levels of knowledge and purposes. It should be apparent; then, that what may be true about reading at some particular level of proficiency may not be true at all of reading at much higher or much lower levels. Reading is primarily a cognitive process, and the key to fluent reading is not a kind of visual gymnastics, but knowledge (Eskey, 1983; Kalayci & Humiston, 2015; Rathert, 2012).

English language teaching as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) has four basic skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing which have been identified as the four policies in language learning. Reading is considered especially valuable under the foreign language context because it is one main source for students to achieve language content (Ediger, 2001), therefore it is important that the students become advanced in it. Alfassi stated that students should “understand the meaning of text, critically to assess the message, remember the content, and apply the new-found knowledge flexibly”.

Reading for comprehension is a high worth and challenging task for EFL students. It continues to be a motivating challenge for teachers also, to make their students able to comprehend the reading texts starting at different levels. Reading comprehension requires organized strategies to be followed to achieve improved results under any suitable circumstances.

2. Reading Skill

2.1. Definition of Reading

Reading is the process of interpreting written symbols and letters to understand their meaning. It is one of the four main language skills alongside listening, speaking and writing. Reading is usually the third language skill that you learn in your native language - it comes after listening and speaking. When we read, we look at written symbols (letters, punctuation, spaces) and use our brains to convert them into words and sentences that have meaning to us. We can read silently (in our heads) or read aloud - speaking every word that we read.

To be able to read, we need to be capable to:

- a. identify the words we see (word recognition);
- b. understand what they mean (comprehension);
- c. connect words and their meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate (fluency)

2.2. Meaning of Reading Skill

Reading is a receptive skill that allows a person to interact and gain meaning from written language. There are several components one must master, which lead to independently comprehending the text's intended message. In broader aspect, reading is generally defined as a process that helps us to

- a. decode, decipher and identify the words in print;

b. articulate, speak and pronounce the words in print;

c. understand, interpret and sense the meaning of the words in print.

Word-reading (also known as word-recognition or word-identification) is the ability to read real words accurately and automatically by sight or through the process of decoding.

2.3. Reading Skill Process

Reading involves three major processes: word recognition, comprehension, and fluency. Each of these plays a vital role in fully mastering the skill of reading.

2.4. Objectives of Reading

The objectives of reading are to gain information, improve writing skills, learn about relevant news, and scan for quick facts. Reading is a lifelong skill that improves memory, builds a robust vocabulary and foundation of knowledge, and adds a richness to the meaning of life, for all those who can access true and deep comprehension.

2.5. Importance/Benefits of Reading Skill

Reading skills enable one to acquire and understand necessary information and use it for decision-making in personal and professional life. The ability to read well correlates with having good writing skills, and it can also make one better at self-expression and communication. Regular reading bolsters cognitive processes, enhancing critical thinking and analytical skills. Thinking through complex plots or understanding character motivations fosters problem-solving skills by encouraging readers to make connections and draw conclusions.

Whether one is engaged in a novel, pouring over a newspaper or a just looking at a sign, reading skills allow him to interpret and become engaged in the world around. According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, "Reading is the single most important skill necessary for a happy, productive and successful life." Developing those skills takes active engagement from an early age. Reading improves vocabulary and enhances knowledge about the world. It can open minds to different ideas which may challenge our own, and cause us to view things in a different light. A study by Delgado, Vargas, Ackerman and Salmeron, published in 2018, demonstrated that reading also improves written comprehension skills.

Reading allows for one to become a better writer while improving their vocabulary. It expands their viewpoints, gives them a thorough understanding of the

world, and improves communication skills. The scientific benefits of reading have been proven with evidence showing that reading stimulates patterns of brain development, thereby improving speech and literacy. Reading for understanding enables a better understanding of the characters in the story or facts in a discussion. In the case of the former, a reader can relate and understand a character more when they are fully immersed in the story. In the case of the latter, the more facts that one can comprehend, the more they will retain.

The purpose of reading differs, whether one wants to learn, be entertained, or communicate with others. There are also many scientific benefits of reading and clear advantages of reading. One might expand their vocabulary while reading, resulting in a wider lexicon, or they improve their own writing by mimicking effective writing techniques. Either way, the better one's reading comprehension, the more beneficial it is.

The benefits of reading are ample:

1. enhancing one's memory;
2. improves analytical thinking;
3. expands vocabulary;
4. enhances writing skills;
5. better career opportunities;
6. reduces stress;
7. stronger cognitive function;
8. increases social engagement;
9. better sleep cycles;
10. intellectual development;
11. high empathy;
12. better mental health;
13. development of independent research skills;
14. enhances communication skills;
15. expands concentration and focus.

2.7. Ways of Effective Reading

There are multiple ways to ensure that one reads effectively:

1. Read aloud - This allows for the verbal articulation of each syllable and ensures

focus.

2. Provide books at the right reading level - Reading outside the appropriate level or ability is frustrating or boring as the text can be either too simple or too difficult to understand.

3. Talk about the text - Discussing a novel or text not only encourages others to read but also makes reading social and fun.

2.8. Role of Vocabulary in Reading Skill

The role of Vocabulary in Reading Skill is very vital and well established. A vocabulary is a set of words, typically the set in a language or the set known to an individual. The word vocabulary originated from the Latin word *vocabulum*, meaning "a word, name". It forms an essential component of language and communication, helping convey thoughts, ideas, emotions, and information. Research has proven that *vocabulary* knowledge directly impacts reading comprehension. *Vocabulary* is an integral part of understanding a text and is vital for reading ease and fluency. Learners need to understand most of the words in a text for effective reading.

3. Reading Strategies / Techniques

3.1. Steps of Reading

1. Prepare for Reading.
2. Explain the Story Structure.
3. Read the Pictures First.
4. Ask and Answer Questions.
5. Visualize as You Read.
6. Develop Social-Emotional Language.
7. Double Check Comprehension.

3.2. Reading Skills

Decoding, fluency, and vocabulary skills are important for reading comprehension. Being able to connect ideas within and between sentences helps learners understand the whole text. Reading skills are built on five separate basic components:

1. Phonemic Awareness

2. Phonics

3. Fluency

4. Vocabulary

5. Comprehension.

These components work together to create strong, rich, and reliable reading abilities.

3.3. Reading Techniques

Reading techniques can enhance student's academic performance and overall learning experience. By actively engaging with the text through methods like annotation, highlighting, and summarization, they will be able to improve their comprehension and retain essential information.

1. Skimming: Skimming is a rapid reading technique used to gain an overall impression of the text without delving into every detail. Skimming, sometimes referred to as gist reading, means going through the text or content to grasp the main idea. For example, when we read a newspaper or magazine we read quickly to get the main points, and skip over the detail.

2. Scanning: Scanning is a process of reading in which the reader quickly scuttles across sentences to get to a particular piece of information. Scanning is reading rapidly in order to find specific facts. this technique is used when one looks up a dictionary to find out the meaning of a particular word.

3. Churning: Churning is slower than scanning. It involves grasping of concepts. It means interpretation and inference. It is about getting the summary of all the important points on a topic. In this reading style, one must have a slow reading of the text once or twice so as to understand its primary and secondary ideas in detail.

4. Assimilation: It refers to taking in or understanding the text so that one can answer any question based on the text. It is the end process after skimming, scanning and churning during the reading of a given text.

3.4. Strategies to Improve Reading Comprehension

1. Development of reading comprehension skills from an early age, using picture books.

2. encourage reading aloud

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3. Provide Books appropriate to the reader's level
 4. Reread texts to Build Fluency
 5. communicate with the child's teacher
 6. Supplement Their Class reading

3.5. SQ3R Reading Comprehension Method

SQ3R is a reading comprehension method named for its five steps: survey, question, read, recite, and review. This method follows the steps to learn how to glean as much information as possible according to the text requirements of any class.

3.6. Role of 4 C's in Reading Comprehension

The 21st century learning skills are often called the 4 C's: critical thinking, creative thinking, communicating, and collaborating. These skills help students learn, and so they are vital to success in school and beyond.

3.7. Active Reading Strategies

Active reading simply means reading something with a determination to understand and evaluate it for its relevance to your needs. Simply reading and re-reading the material isn't an effective way to understand and learn. Actively and critically engaging with the content can save time.

These Active Reading strategies should be focused before one starts to read:

1. Know the purpose
2. Integrate prior knowledge
3. Preview the text with a specific focus
4. Plan to break the reading into manageable portions
5. Decide whether and how to read from a screen
6. Self-monitor
7. Annotate
8. Questioning the text while reading
9. Taking notes throughout the process
10. Summarize content grasped through reading

3.8. PQRST method/strategy

PQRST is the acronym of Preview (establish the general theme of the text), Question (formulate main questions about the text), Read (read carefully, thinking at

the questions), State (summarize the main information), and Test (test your knowledge) (Moffat, 1992). The tried-and-tested PQRSST study method (Preview, Question, Read, State, Test) can make a difference in student's learning experience by helping them absorb, understand, and retrieve information more effectively.

3.9. KWL Strategy (What I Want to Know)

KWL is a research strategy. The approximate acronym stands for "What I Know," "What I Want to Know," and "What I Learned." Many students and teachers also use it as a reading comprehension aid.

3.10. Quiet / Silent Reading

Silent reading is reading done silently, or without speaking the words being read. Before the reintroduction of separated text (spaces between words) in the Late Middle Ages, the ability to read silently was considered rather remarkable, though some scholars object to this idea.

3.11. Choral / Echo Reading

Choral Reading or Echo Reading involves the teacher reading aloud a text line by line or sentence by sentence modeling appropriate fluency. After reading each line, the students echo back the reading of the line with the same rate and prosody. This activity can be done with individual students, small groups, or larger groups of students.

4. Summary of the main strategies to be practiced for teaching Reading To ESL/EFL Learners

- 1. Re-reading, predicting, and questioning:** students can be encouraged to play guessing games to engage their mind with the text.
- 2. Utilizing Background Knowledge:** The more students know about a topic, the easier it will be for them to make meaning. When students make inferences based on their prior knowledge, it enhances comprehension.
- 3. Setting goals:** Making clear reading goals motivates students to reach them, providing them with milestones to achieve, which makes them feel a sense of accomplishment.
- 4. Identifying the main idea:** trying to recognize the central idea of the texts helps in better comprehension.
- 5. Reading fluency:** This refers not only to the speed at which one can read (words

per minute) but also to the accuracy.

6. Summarization: Writing a summary of what *has been read* can demonstrate what *is* understood from the text.

7. Comprehension monitoring: It is a metacognitive strategy which involves the ability of readers to assess their level of understanding.

8. Questioning the text: Students should be encouraged to ask questions regarding the text as it keeps them engaged and develops in them, a deeper understanding of the text.

9. Taking notes: writing the key points while reading is another highly effective method for strengthening of reading skills.

10. Visualization: It is also a very useful strategy as studies have shown that students who visualize while reading have better recall than those who do not (Pressley, 1977).

11. Breaking down of the text: Long, complex reading can be more digestible by breaking it up into pieces. Shorter segments will help students retain the information.

12. Applying multiple strategies: Combining different strategies such as connecting to background knowledge, summarizing, visualizing, sequencing, inferencing, predicting, comparing and all others improves comprehensive reading skills.

13. Dedicating time for daily reading: The most important strategy is dedicating *time* to read *every day* which can help with comprehension because the more one does it, the more familiar he becomes

5. Conclusion

As we know that reading is the most important skill in communication, being good in reading also makes individual skillful to communicate effectively. Based on the entire earlier discussion it is established that teaching reading demands effective strategies and techniques to develop reading skill. It is important for a teacher to make his/her students aware of the numerous reading strategies such as Connecting to background knowledge; Summarizing; Visualizing; Sequencing; Inferencing; Predicting; Comparing and Contrasting; Self-monitoring; Differentiating; Re-reading. ESL/ EFL Learners need a full length practice of mastering reading skill in terms of comprehension of the text. Here teacher's role becomes very crucial that how much he has made his students aware of varied supportive and simple strategies

to enhance reading. The current paper suggests diverse useful strategies for teaching reading to English learners. The teachers may make the effective use of these strategies in teaching reading to their students. The teachers need to use and apply these reading strategies in language classroom in a controlled and varied manner as required. These strategies/techniques will be highly advantageous in developing the English language reading competence of ESL / EFL learners at various levels.

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