The Importance of Teaching Reading Comprehension Among Learner of English as a foreign language(EFL)

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Abstract

This paper discusses the development of teaching reading comprehension for learners of English as a foreign or second language. Reading comprehension requires more than recognizing individual words; it involves connecting ideas across words, sentences, and larger textual units, as well as understanding the writer's message. Reading is a fundamental skill in English language learning, as it enables students not only to decode written language but also to extract meaning and information from texts.

The paper presents different views on reading comprehension, the major tasks involved in teaching reading, and the activities used in classroom instruction. Additionally, several effective strategies that can improve learners' reading abilities are reviewed, along with the main approaches used in teaching reading.

Key words: reading comprehension, reading skills, second language learning, teaching reading.

تتناول هذه الورقة أهمية تدريس القراء والفهم لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أو لغة ثانية. يتطلب فهم القراءة أكثر من مجرد التعرف على الكلمات الفردية؛ فهو يتضمن ربط الأفكار عبر الكلمات والجمل والوحدات النصية الأكبر حجمًا، بالإضافة إلى فهم رسالة الكاتب. تعد القراءة مهارة أساسية في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، لأنها تمكن الطلاب ليس فقط من فك رموز اللغة المكتوبة ولكن أيضًا استخلاص المعنى والمعلومات من النصوص.

تعرض الورقة وجهات نظر مختلفة حول فهم القراءة، والمهام الرئيسية التي ينطوي عليها تعليم القراءة، والأنشطة المستخدمة في التدريس في الفصول الدراسية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يتم مراجعة العديد من الاستراتيجيات الفعالة التي يمكنها تحسين قدرات القراءة لدى المتعلمين، إلى جانب الأساليب الرئيسية المستخدمة في تعليم القراءة.

Introduction

Reading is not just a skill but a gateway to lifelong learning. For ESP learners, reading competence directly affects their ability to perform in professional or academic environments. By applying modern teaching methods and strategies, educators can help students overcome

difficulties in understanding specialized texts and improve their overall academic performance.

In reviewing developments in second language research, Grabe (1991) emphasized that the increasing significance of reading in academic contexts has contributed greatly to the improvement of reading skills among second-language learners. The aim of most language programs has shifted from "learning to read" toward "reading to learn" (Bernhardt, 1989).

In recent years, many researchers have agreed that reading is an active and dynamic process through which learners develop various skills. Reading instruction is a vital component of any language curriculum, requiring teachers to understand the nature of reading and appropriate methods for teaching it effectively.

Among the four language skills, reading is often regarded as the most essential because it provides learners with access to knowledge and supports the development of other skills. However, many learners still face difficulties in understanding texts even after reading them (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). This highlights the need for well-structured instruction in reading.

Definition of Reading

Reading is considered a receptive language skill and a psycholinguistic process that begins with the recognition of written symbols and ends with the construction of meaning by the reader. Reading therefore represents an interaction between language and thought, where the writer encodes ideas into text and the reader decodes the text into meaning.

A reader's proficiency varies depending on prior knowledge, vocabulary, and background experiences. Reading may be defined simply as the ability to extract and interpret meaning from written text.

Heilman, Blair, and Ruby (1998) describe reading as an active process in which the reader constructs meaning from written material based on his or her knowledge and experiences. Similarly, Carrell (2006) argues that effective reading in a second language is essential for learners in academic contexts or in English for Specific or Academic Purposes.

Types of Reading

1. Extensive Reading

Extensive reading is widely applied in EFL and ESL classrooms as an effective method for enhancing learners' general reading abilities. It usually involves reading longer texts to obtain a general understanding rather than focusing on linguistic details (Carrell & Carson, 1997).

Walter (2003) defines extensive reading as reading materials chosen freely by learners and that do not create unnecessary difficulty. Motivation and teacher support play important roles in the success of extensive reading programs. Extensive reading helps develop reading fluency and should be incorporated into EFL/ESL programs using authentic texts.

2. Intensive Reading

Intensive reading involves reading short texts carefully to extract detailed meaning. It aims to develop skills such as identifying main ideas, understanding specific information, recognizing text connectors, and improving vocabulary and grammar.

According to Brown (2000), intensive reading directs students' attention to grammatical structures, discourse markers, and other textual features to understand literal and implied meanings.

Patel and Jain (2008) state that intensive reading supports language development under teacher guidance and strengthens learners' understanding of vocabulary, idioms, and structural differences in the language.

Models of Reading

According to Hudson (2007), models of reading development can be divided into three major types:

1. Bottom-up Model

This model views reading as a process that begins with decoding letters and words, then building up to larger units of meaning. Readers first recognize sounds, then words, then sentences, and finally the whole text.

2. Top-down Model

The top-down model sees reading as a meaning-driven process in which readers rely on prior knowledge, expectations, and context to interpret texts. Readers use background knowledge to predict meaning and confirm it while reading.

3. Interactive Model

The interactive model combines both bottom-up and top-down processes. It suggests that proficient readers use both decoding skills and background knowledge simultaneously to construct meaning. This model is widely accepted as the most comprehensive.

Activities used in Teaching Reading

Reading comprehension is the activity where the students actually understand what they read about. Snow (2002) states that reading comprehension is   the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning.

Effective reading instruction uses different types of learning to accommodate a variety learning styles, interests, and proficiency levels.

Pre-Reading Activities : These prepare learners for the text and activate prior knowledge. Examples include brainstorming key vocabulary,   predicting content from titles, heading, or picture, and discussing related personal experiences.

Such activities stimulate curiosity concept learners experiences with text, and provide a mental framework for understanding.

During-Reading Activities

These Activities focus on helping learns engage with the text while reading. Guided reading, where learners read under teacher supervision is common. Learners may highlight ideas, underline unfamiliar words, an notable the text, or answer comprehension questions. Group or paired reading encourages discussion, collaboration, and clarification of misunderstandings. One of best example is at memorizing Quran for young student at mosque the used to read loudly, which is the best activities to <u>memorizing the Holy Quran.</u> Thinking loud where learners verbalize their thought process, help develop metacognitive skills and enhance understanding.

Post-Reading Activities

These Activities reinforce comprehension and prompt critical thinking. Learners may summarize or paraphrase the text, create mind maps, write reflections, or participate in debates and discussions about the text content. Projects, presentations, or material also deepen understanding and help learners apply what they have learned in practical ways.

The Latest Strategies for Teaching Reading Comprehension to EFL Learners

Teaching reading comprehension in EFL contexts has evolved significantly, moving from traditional grammar-translation methods to more interactive and student-centered approaches. Modern strategies aim not only to improve language proficiency but also to develop critical thinking, and the ability to engage with texts in meaningful ways.

1. Interactive Reading Strategies

These strategies involve learners actively in the reading process, making them participants rather than passive receivers of information.

- Reciprocal Teaching: Students take turns being the "teacher" and guide discussions by predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing the text.

- Collaborative Reading: Group activities where learners read together, discuss meanings, and answer questions collaboratively.

- Think-Aloud: Teachers or students verbalize their thought processes while reading, demonstrating how to make inferences or monitor comprehension.

Benefit: Increases engagement, promotes peer learning, and helps learners internalize reading strategies.

2. Digital and Multimedia-Assisted Reading

Technology integration has become a major trend in teaching reading comprehension.

- E-Books and Interactive Apps: Platforms that provide instant definitions, multimedia annotations, and comprehension quizzes.

- Video-Text Integration: Combining videos with reading passages to enhance understanding, particularly for context-heavy or cultural texts.

- Online Discussion Forums: Learners respond to reading prompts online, allowing reflective and asynchronous discussions.

Benefit: Supports diverse learning styles and makes reading more engaging and contextually rich.

3. Schema Activation and Pre-Reading Strategies

These strategies prepare learners' minds before reading to facilitate comprehension.

- K-W-L Charts (Know, Want to know, Learned): Activates prior knowledge, sets purposes for reading, and consolidates learning.

- Graphic Organizers: Concept maps, mind maps, or flowcharts that help learners visualize relationships in the text.

- Predictive Activities: Encouraging learners to predict content from titles, headings, or images before reading.

Benefit: Helps learners connect new information with what they already know and improves retention.

4. Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies

These strategies focus on how learners think and regulate their reading process.

- Question-Answer Relationships (QAR): Guides learners to categorize questions (e.g., right there, think and search, author and you, on your own) to improve comprehension.

- Self-Monitoring and Self-Assessment: Learners reflect on understanding, re-read when necessary, and track their progress.

- Reciprocal Questioning: Learners create their own comprehension questions, enhancing engagement and critical thinking.

Benefit: Develops learner autonomy and critical reading skills.

5. Task-Based and Content-Based Reading

Integrating reading with meaningful tasks or content improves motivation and contextual understanding.

- Project-Based Reading: Learners read materials to complete a project, e.g., research, presentations, or reports.

- Authentic Materials: Using newspapers, blogs, advertisements, or real-life texts to make reading relevant and practical.

Benefit: Encourages authentic language use and connects reading to real-world purposes.

6. Extensive and Sustained Silent Reading

Promotes fluency and automaticity in reading.

- Sustained Silent Reading (SSR): Learners read self-selected texts independently for a set period.

- Reading Logs and Journals: Learners track what they read, summarize, and reflect on texts.

Benefit: Builds reading stamina, vocabulary, and confidence over time.

7. Integration of Vocabulary and Comprehension Strategies

Since vocabulary knowledge is critical for EFL learners, combining it with comprehension strategies enhances reading outcomes.

- Pre-Teaching Key Vocabulary: Introduces crucial words before reading to reduce comprehension barriers.

- Contextual Guessing: Teaching learners to infer meaning from context.

- Word Maps and Semantic Mapping: Visual strategies to expand understanding of new words.

Benefit: Reduces comprehension difficulties and supports deeper engagement with texts.

Conclusion

The current study aimed at exploring tenets of reading comprehension : investigation the activities used for teaching reading, and in inspecting some technics for teaching reading. Reading remains one of the most powerful influences on EFL learning. It builds vocabulary, strengthens grammar, expands cultural awareness, and develops critical thinking. Methods not only enhance comprehension but also cultivate critical thinking, motivation, and lifelong reading habits in learners.

Ultimately, reading empowers learners to become independent, confident users of English, capable of accessing global knowledge, and participating fully in academic and professional environments.

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