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READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES IN THE ESL CONTEXT: THE CAUSE AND EFFECT PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT:

Reading holds the most significant place in the field of education since it functions as a means of communication in a literate society. It is a multifaceted process that develops only with practice, the ultimate goal of which is to derive meaning. Among the LSRW skills, reading is considered as a basic life skill, which is also the cornerstone for a child's success in school, and, indeed, throughout life. Individuals undoubtedly lose their opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success, if they lack the ability to read well. Moreover, reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols in order to construct or derive meaning (i.e.,) reading comprehension. For most of the students, reading comprehension is more than a problem. There are numerous of factors that contribute to reading difficulties for many students and the primary grounds of their reading problems are mostly unknown. In this backdrop, the present paper focuses on some of the typical reading comprehension difficulties encountered by the learners of English and also suggests remedies for the same.



KEYWORDS: Reading, Comprehension, Difficulties, Remedies, English Language Skills.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is the most imperative skill taught as the 'tool' skill, as the progress in other subjects depends considerably on the development of Reading ability in students. Research suggests that one of the best ways to help students increase their language proficiency is to encourage them to read extensively. However, reading

and the comprehension of text is a complex interactive process, and there is more to reading and comprehension than just decoding or word calling (De Corte et al, (2001); McNaughton et al. (2004); Rivalland,(2000).

Like all language, it is a complex interaction between the text and the reader which is shaped by the reader's prior knowledge, experiences, attitude, and language community which is culturally and socially situated.

The reading process requires continuous practice, development, and refinement. In addition, reading requires creativity and critical analysis. Reading is such a complex process, it cannot be controlled or restricted to one or two interpretations and there are no concrete laws in reading, but rather allows readers an escape to produce their own products introspectively. Therefore, this promotes deep exploration of texts during

interpretation. Readers use a variety of reading strategies to assist with decoding (to translate symbols into sounds or visual representations of speech) and comprehension.

READING COMPREHENSION: WHAT AND WHY

Reading Comprehension is the process of making meaning from text. The goal, therefore, is to gain an overall understanding of what is described in the text rather than to obtain meaning from isolated words or sentences. Reading comprehension involves the function of the reader's language competence, the subject matter of the language message, and the syntactic and morphological complexity of the language. The biggest problem is that when students read a text they are so worried about understanding every single word that they do not get the general idea from the passage. That is one of the reasons that led us to want to help our students improve their reading comprehension skills.

READING COMPREHENSION: PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Reading comprehension creates a mental representation of what is read –comprehension processes (Kintsch and Van Dijk, 1978) and these representations are stored in memory. Reading comprehension is a complex skill which relies on variety of linguistic and non-linguistic skills and not teachable in the same way as other reading-related skills. Reading comprehension also involves less well-defined skills: “thinking” “interpreting” “predicting” “reasoning”. A beginner would find these skills hard to acquire. On the otherhand, listening and reading comprehension overlaps many a times. Once words are decoded or heard, comprehenders use similar processes to understand. Oral language skills are found to be introductory to reading comprehension and as well as higher level syntax and vocabulary skills particularly are also important for an individual to acquire the skill of reading comprehension. Therefore, the teachers of English find it intricate to teach and bring into play many strategies so as to assist them.

DIFFICULTIES WITH READING

There may be a multiplicity of factors that contribute to reading difficulties for many students and the underlying causes of their reading problems may be largely unknown (Lewis and Doorlag 1999). The reading process breaks down due to many reasons. They are:

Decoding Difficulties and its signs:

- trouble sounding out words and recognizing words out of context
- confusion between letters and the sounds they represent
- slow oral reading rate (reading word-by-word)
- reading without expression
- ignoring punctuation while reading

Comprehension Difficulties and its signs:

- confusion about the meaning of words and sentences
- inability to connect ideas in a passage
- omission of, or glossing over detail
- difficulty distinguishing significant information from minor details
- lack of concentration during reading

Retention Difficulties and its signs:

Retention requires both decoding and comprehending what is written. This task relies on high level cognitive skills, including memory and the ability to group and retrieve related trouble remembering or summarizing what is read. The signs of Retention difficulties are :

- difficulty in connecting what is read to prior knowledge and
- difficulty in applying content of a text to personal experiences

Good Readers against Poor Comprehenders

Good readers select information by paying attention to text and focusing attention on information and organize the same. They also arrange units of information into a coherent mental structure and logical relationships between ideas; integrate and connect information to the cognitive structures thereby linking information to external information. Whereas poor comprehenders are not aware of their lack of understanding; when aware, they do not know what strategies are available and when aware of strategies, the comprehenders do not know how to use them correctly.

Common Causes of Reading Comprehension difficulties

There are many factors that influence Reading Comprehension. The foremost factors are:

- Lack of reading engagement
- Lack or poor use of strategies
- Difficulties with word recognition and decoding
- Difficulties with fluency
- Poor short-term and/or working memory
- Lack of Language, Vocabulary, or Visualization Skills

Difficulties with oral language

- Speech and language impairments
- Limited language proficiency
- Dialect differences

Difficulties with written language

- Written language register
- Specific genres

Difficulties related to prior knowledge

- Lack of relevant prior knowledge
- Failure to apply relevant prior knowledge
- Application of irrelevant prior Knowledge

Other factors

- Eye movement problems
- low confidence about ones comprehension skills which might lead to low self-esteem
- Other self-regulatory or metacognitive issues

Reading Remediation at the Early Stages

There is no generally established method that helps all struggling readers equally, but the following have all been found to help.

- Recognizing regular and irregular spellings.
- An array of activities (e.g., **word study, reading, re-reading, and writing**)
- Direct and persistent teaching of the tricky words.
- Provide simpler respellings for the tricky words
- Use of rhymes and stories that children already know.
- Carefully planned assessments that allow for continual monitoring of the child's response and lead to modifications of the intervention when indicated
- Considerable attention to the materials used (e.g., **predictable, patterned, easy-to more-difficult texts**), with a focus on interesting and enjoyable texts at appropriate reading levels.
- Pick out the tricky words from a story to be read and making sure that pupils know them before starting.

SUGGESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Comprehension is complex and multifaceted, and it is thus no surprise that the population of children identified as having Reading Comprehension difficulties form a heterogeneous group. Poor comprehenders do, however, have weaknesses in other aspects of language skill with deficits at both lower (e.g., knowledge on vocabulary) and higher levels (e.g., inference generation, understanding figurative language) being reported (Nation et al., 2004). Comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading. Everyone agrees that reading comprehension is not a simple matter of recognizing individual words, or even of understanding each individual word as our eyes pass over it. The solution to reading comprehension problems is more reading. Although there is still a lot that remains unknown about the Reading Comprehension Impairment, interventions developed to date give a positive picture of what can be done to help the children to overcome their problems. Adequate attention, patience and facilitating the child's growth in comprehension skills as well as confidence and motivation can go a long way in their way to academic achievement.

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