

Teaching and Testing of Reading Skill

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Abstract

Reading skill has to be developed in the students to fulfill the demand of the higher education. Conscious efforts should be taken till the learner is confident of self-learning in reading. They have to be trained both all the sub skills of reading and the three phases of reading, viz., pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. Students have to understand the characteristics of reading. They have to be trained primarily in mechanics of reading and then proceed to develop the cognitive skills of reading. Any skill can be acquired mainly by practice. A teacher has to design the activities to develop reading skills in his students. Task-Based Language Teaching is getting momentum as it involves the students to complete the activities.

Keywords: Reading Sub skills, Reading skill, good reader,

Introduction

The skill of reading has to be inculcated in the learner, especially to benefit them in their higher studies. Conscious efforts should be taken till the learner is confident of self-learning in reading. (Cordula Artelt, 2003) Reading involves many sub skills like, grasping the meaning of a sentence, comprehending the main facts and details in the text, should justify when to read rapidly and when to read slowly, deducing the meaning of new words and so on. (Jack C. Richards 1983)

Reading has 3 stages namely, pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. Students' ability to understand the text depends on the pre-reading session that the teacher holds before allowing them to understand the text by themselves. Then, what in pre-reading? Pre-reading is the ability to guess the essence of the text by understanding from the title of the text. So, the title should have some characteristics that will enable the student to guess the text precisely. (William Grabe and Fredricka L. Stoller, 2013.) While-reading is what the readers understand while reading the text. Post-reading is what the readers critically understand the text by trying to answer the questions that are at the end of the text. If the reader is quite successful in pre-reading, further reading will be easier.

Characteristics of Reading

In early stages the teachers concentrate on giving mechanical skill or reading. One they are satisfied that their students are forts in mechanical skill then they start developing the cognitive skills of reading. (KRAMSCH, C. 2006) Teachers should take all measures in making the students to know characteristics of reading.

1. Reading has an aim.

We read any text with some aim. We may aim to gather some information or sometimes we may read for pleasure. Our aim to read a daily is to know news.

2. Choosy Reading

Reading material are plenty. We don't intend to read everything. Choice reading an item depends on the interest of the reader. Even while reading a newspaper we don't read everything that are in the newspaper. We apply our skimming and scanning skills of reading on most occasions.

3. Slow-reading Vs Rapid-reading

The pace of the reading cannot on the same line. Slow-reading is applied where the language of the text is simple. And Rapid-reading can be applied where the language of the text is a bit difficult. Slow and Rapid style of reading depends on the subject matter of the text also.

4. Entire text is a unit.

The content of the text cannot be understood by understanding a few sentences. Even a few sentences cannot be understood without understanding what is there in the text. So, the entire text is a unit.

5. Reading - "a psycholinguistic guessing game"

Reading involves the consolidation of what is read and guessing of what may proceed. No reader starts reading after learning the meaning of all possible words used in the text. In most of the cases the readers predict what may follow based on the assumption that they formed at the macro-level.

6. Reading is chunking.

While reading our eyes do not move smoothly on the written matter rather they jump from one meaningful segment of words to another segment of words. If we read word by word comprehension of reading is not possible.

Activities to Develop Reading Skill

Reading skill has to be developed in the students to fulfill the demand of the higher education. The two activities of reading that is 1) Mechanical activity which means the visual perception and 2) Mental activity which involves chiefly dependent upon experiences of the reader should ceremoniously be taken care of by the teacher. A few suggestions are given to develop a good reading habit.

1. The teacher must be a good reader

Children normally follow what their teachers say. They would summarily dismiss any suggestions that we give as their parents if they have to their perception created by their teachers. That way, teachers have to be wary about what they teach. They should not give scope for the children to learn by mistake. The teachers should possess good communication skill salted with better pronunciation.

2. Guidance

A ready guidance should be available to the students whenever they need it. If the doubts are accumulated, it will lead the students to hatred of the subject.

3. Library facilities

The institutions should possess books of varied categories to cater to the need of the learners. Today, library is a place to give even 'assertive punishment' which means sending

the students to the library and read some books as a punishment. So, the library should not be in dearth of books on any field that the students need to refer.

4. Pupils' interest

Any activity that is designed should necessarily reflect the interest of the pupils. When reading is supported by schemata, the understanding will be better. (Sweller, J., van Merriënboer, J. J. G., & Paas, F. G. W. C. 1998). Schemata are the prior experiences of the reader on the topic that he is reading. So, to live up to this expectation a survey can be conducted to ascertain and infer the interest of the pupils.

5. Discussion on the book read

Discussion on the book read will give a good insight to the readers. As there will be analyses of the points from the text, the understanding of the text will be stronger and retention will be longer. Moreover, if the students are told that there will a discussion on the book they read, there will not be any passive readers in the class.

Testing of Reading

Testing of language skills in English is not in accordance with the objectives of teaching it. And this leads to the non-acquisition of language skills in English. English can be learned and used properly if criterion-referenced test is followed. The following aspects should be involved in READING tasks. (MOUAS, SAMIA, 2008)

1. Scanning for specific information should be tested.
2. Skill of Skimming to grasp the gist of the text.
3. Style of pronunciation at least to the decodable level should be tested.
4. Understanding of new words contextually.
5. Identify the point of argument presented in the text.

Conclusion

The desired effect of making the learner to understand English effectively depends mostly on the genuineness of the test conducted. The objectives of testing should directly correlate with the objectives of teaching. Necessity is mother of invention. The necessity of acquiring language skills in English can be achieved only by bringing changes in testing. Reading is mainly understood on 3 aspects namely, semantically, syntactically and in discourse. The first two are very important in understanding the text through reading. A better reader understands the text semantically. It doesn't mean that syntactic aspect of the language is not helpful in understanding the text. To put it precisely, understanding the text syntactically should be done only when we fail to understand the text semantically. Here is an example from the Hindu dated 29th November 2009. It reads:

“Mr. Obama told prime Minister Manmohan Singh that he was seized of the case related to Headley and Rana”.

If we understand the above sentence semantically it means he is briefed of the case related to Headley and Rana. On the other hand, if we understand it syntactically it means no information came to him related to Headley and Rana.

Thus, it should be criterion referenced test that would ensure and give scope for developing reading skill.

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