

STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING EFFECTIVE READING SKILLS IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Reading as a reflection of meaning acquired as intended by the reader has been an essential language skill for imbibing information through the decoding of written symbols. This paper focuses on strategies that enhance reading skills in second language learning. It highlights different reading skills, reasons for reading as well as pitfalls to effective reading. It further identifies the relationship between reading and other language skills. Finally, it discusses remediation measures that will forestall ineptitude, incompetence and poor reading habits in second language learners.

Keywords: Reading, Skills, Second Learning, Language

INTRODUCTION

Reading according to Onyekwere and Nkoro(2007) is an active process that involves a spontaneous interaction with the printed text as the reader makes evaluations and takes decisions based on the message communicated. It may also be considered as a conscious effort made by a reader to decipher the content of a written material. It is prominent among the communicative skills because, according to Uwadiogwu (2010), when reading, the reader indulges in the following activities, listening and speaking. This is given more credence by Brener as cited in Nzerem (2004). To him

“reading makes a man, writing a ready man and conference a perfect man” as this is further confirmed by this aphorism, readers are leaders and if you fail to read so as to be informed you will be deformed. Reading according to Uwadiogwu 2010 is a matter of reasoning which involves meaningful interpretation of verbal symbols as it requires all types of thinking, evaluating, judging, imagining and problem solving. It is an interaction with written thought with the aim of acquiring both intrinsic and extrinsic knowledge internalizing it and using it when necessary.

It is obvious that different readers read for different purposes. Your purpose in reading will determine how, when, where and what to read. It is an avenue for knowledge acquisition, expression and utilization. A reader's mind is like a store house or repository of information. It accelerates the functionality of the mind because the more one reads, the faster his mind works. It exposes the reader to cross cultural affiliation, helps to modify behavioural patterns and boosts proficiency in the use of English Language.

Reasons for reading

The two major reasons for engaging in reading according to Onyekwere and Nkoro(2007) are for pleasure seeking and studying for examination. As a recreational exercise, the reader derives pleasure from such reading material as books, magazines, newspapers etc. These materials may be captured in electronic or print media. However, such a voracious reader should set a limit on what he reads as some materials are injurious to one's social, spiritual, physical, educational, politically and emotionally wellbeing. Pornographic materials, works written in substandard English, morally debased and esoteric materials should be seen as sugar coated poison which is inimical and, counterproductive to one's survival. Another reason for reading is sensitization. At times societal values, norms and ethos are

enshrined in printed materials. This is explored to create awareness of acceptable behavioural pattern.

Didactic Function: Since experience is the best teacher, exposure to morally inspired and character moulding materials helps a sensitive reader to toe line of sanity.

Criteria for choosing reading materials

The choice of materials to be read may be motivated by the following:

- The interest of the reader: What catches and sustains the interest of a reader is a major consideration in choice of reading material.
- Language use: The variety of English language, reflected in the reading material as well as the grammatical arrangement is also a determinant factor.
- Availability and Affordability: Reading materials which are readily available and less expensive make for easy choice by readers.
- Content relevance and aesthetic value: Materials that contain issues that are relevant, well designed and artistically embellished remain the choice of many voracious readers.
- Quality of the material: The size, structure as well as time limit of any

reading material are given necessary consideration.

A reader who reads with the intention of either agreeing or disagreeing to what has been read is a critical reader. Such a reader according to Adindu (2014) must be at these three levels of reading as highlighted below:

- i. Reading for the literal meaning
- ii. Reading inferentially
- iii. Reading to evaluate

All these are aimed at generating ideas. Oluikpe 2006 lends credence to the above assertion as he equates literal meaning with the ability of the reader to make proper understanding of the words and sentences used by the writer. The ability of a reader to identify implied ideas as contained in a reading material places the reader at an inferential level and a readers' ability to project new ideas based on what the writer has delineated is an effort at the conjectural level.

- **Creative Reading:** Reading here is seen as an active process not passive because a reader with a creative sensibility and mind set asks some questions, raises some objections and makes meaningful input based on what is read.
- **Extensive Reading:** Here a reader's mind is not clipped rather he extends

his reading tentacles beyond the prescribed texts since he has penchant and insatiable passion to know more than is expected of him. This type of reading according to Onyekwere and Nkoro 2007 enhances speed, boosts confidence and sharpens the mental power and sensitivity of the reader.

- **Intensive Reading:** This is performance oriented. Here the reader reads because he has an assessment exercise to undergo. He is more or less restricted to the given texts. This makes for a careful and thorough perusal of the prescribed texts.
- **Rapid/Fast Reading:** This helps to increase the reading speed. It involves eye movement and flexibility which helps in determining the number of words the eye can conveniently capture at a time. Attention is given to the punctuation rules for better performance. One should aim at improving one's reading speed constantly. Reading at two hundred words per minute (200 w.p.m.) is acceptable.

The formula is this;

$$\frac{\text{Number of words in the text}}{\text{Number of seconds taken to read the text}} \times \frac{\text{Number of seconds in a minute}}{1}$$

Strategies Involved in Reading Skills

The strategies for effective and result oriented reading include:

- i. **Skimming:** Here the reader's interest hinges on getting the general idea that pervades the material. This type of reading is obtainable in newspapers, magazines, journals etc.
- ii. **Scanning/ Search Reading:** The purpose here is to quickly locate a particular piece of information relevant to the reader.
- iii. **Surveying:** This is more of a selective strategy. Here the reader makes an attempt at focusing his interest on the information contained in the text through the title and content arrangement.

Teaching of reading skills or strategies for fostering reading skills

These include using integrated approach, direct approach literary approach and eclectic approach.

Integrated Approach: This implies the teaching of reading with the teaching of other skills as earlier pointed out. Reading and listening skills which have symbiotic

relationship should be taught simultaneously. This is authenticated by Neville as quoted by Ogude and Ikupa 2018 who are of the view that good listeners make good readers.

Direct Approach: This entails direct activities targeted at enhancing reading. The teacher provides various goal-oriented reading activities during the language class. Students are allowed to engage in reading exercise such as reading for others including the teacher to listen and make comments. The teacher at the end entertains as many questions as possible and equally makes an encouraging remarks on their performance

Literary Approach: The teacher can explore the genre of literature-prose, poetry and drama in enhancing reading among students. He provides suitable reading materials in the form of stories, plays, and poems. The students take turn in reading them especially drama texts which they may accompany its reading with appropriate gestures and other body movements.

Eclectic Approach: This encompasses the approaches highlighted as best result is recorded when they are not used in isolation. What is accomplished in direct

approach or literary approach should be reinforced in the integrated approach and vice versa. This helps to avoid monotony since variety is the spice of life.

Some Pitfalls in Reading or Poor Reading Habits

- **Vocalization-** This is a practice where a reader speaks some words as contained in the text silently to himself. This is evident in the movement of the lips while reading.
- **Head Movement-**This has to do with the movement of the head unconsciously from side to side while reading. This poor habit is not only distracting but also time consuming. A good reader only moves the eye muscles.
- **Pointing to Words-**This involves pointing to words with either finger or any other object while reading. This is counterproductive. It creates drabness.
- **Regression-**This has to do with the act of looking back at expressions which have already been read. This situation arises when a reader lacks concentration or is emotionally traumatized or lacks mastery of vocabulary and other grammatical nuances.

- **Reading Aloud-**This reading method is noisy. It should only be practiced where audience is involved.
- **Use of Dictionary-**It is advisable for one to consult a dictionary at the end of a reading exercise. After reading, the reader writes down all the strange words in the text and consults the dictionary for their meaning. This will enable him to reread the text for better understanding.

CONCLUSION

From experience, it is quite glaring that a good number of students lack the needed patience, zeal and determination to read critically and artistically. It requires dedication and concentration to gain information from reading texts. One must avoid disruptive tendencies and emotional interferences such as feelings of over excitement, anger, worry etc. These limit the comprehension of what is read. Language teachers should strive at developing a positive attitude to reading in the students.

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