Reading Comprehension Challenges and How to overcome those Challenges

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Abstract

Reading is an essential skill that plays vital role I learning a language. Similar to other skills that are Listening, Writing and speaking the understanding of reading is influenced by myriad factors. Here an attempt is made to identify the problems that are countered by students while attempting reading comprehension so that proper technique can be identified to cope with this issue of solving a reading comprehension. Questions that have been answered in this paper are (1) Problems faced by students while doing reading comprehension? (2) Why these difficulties are faced? (3)What techniques can be used in class so that students do not face any issue while taking reading comprehension? Explanatory multi method is used to study the difficulties wherein a test was given to students and later on their result was analyzed and identified where students faced more difficulty whether it was in vocabulary, poor reading habits or less interesting reading comprehension .Moreover, it also focused on how reading comprehension techniques can be taught to students.

Keywords: Vocabulary, Reading Ability, Reading comprehension

Introduction

For all the learners Reading comprehension is considered to be one of essential Skills. Different types of passages are given that cover diverse range of topics from sports to science, business to law. All the topics are of general interest. They deal with issues which are interesting and appropriate for test takers. Sometimes non verbal material like diagrams, graphs or illustration are also present in reading comprehension. Understanding in advance what students need to do in every type of task gives student huge advantage. This way during the test student will only read the instructions to confirm what they already know. Moreover, sometimes even lecturers are unaware about the problems that students encounter and to overcome the fear of reading comprehension it is important that lecturers also try to understand the problem so that they can provide ideas or tricks to overcome those issues.

What is Reading Comprehension

According to Snow and Sweet (2003), “reading comprehension is a multi-dimensional and complex process that requires high cognitive ability of extraction and construction, in that the reader extracts the meanings from the text, while at the same time combining them with existing knowledge in order to construct new meanings.”

Pearson and Johnson have supported the idea saying, “Reading comprehension seems to involve language, motivation, perception, concept, development, the whole of experience itself. It seems to be subject to the same constraints as thinking, reasoning and problem solving. The only distinction, one might want to make, is in the source of input for the cognitive proc-essing. Whatever influences general thinking or problem solving ability also influences reading comprehension. However, there are a few factors that comprehension but do not influence thinking or problem solving.”
In reading comprehension, Lee (2017) stated that there are 6 skills considered essentials, they are:

1. Decoding: Decoding means when students apply their knowledge of letter sound relationships that includes knowledge of letter patterns, to pronounce words correctly. Moreover, Decoding is related to an early language skill called phonemic awareness which is part of a broader skill called phonological awareness.

2. Fluency: Fluency while reading is an essential skill because if students can read fluently and along with fluency they understand what is written and what the meaning of passage is than it becomes easy for students to answer the questions and that too within the time.

3. Vocabulary: One main problem student face is understanding the vocabulary words that are given in reading comprehension. And incase student are not able to understand any vocabulary word than they might not able to answer the question in effective way which in return would hamper their overall marks.

4. Sentence Construction and Cohesion: It is important for students to understand ideas within and between sentences that is what cohesion means. Understanding how two ideas are linked up would make students to easily understand the questions which automatically helps them to answer it easily.

5. Reasoning and Background Knowledge: Most of the time readers try to link what they are reading presently with something they might have read somewhere may be some other article. And it is done to relate present comprehension with the previously read article and to get the background knowledge from there. Readers must also have habit to read between lines.

6. Working Memory and Attention: These two skills are vital while reading a comprehension. No doubt these two skills are different but both are closely related. As when student read the comprehension attentively than only they can remember what was written in previous paragraph. Which will help them to respond to the asked questions? Information is held by working memory and it is used to gain meaning and knowledge is built from what they read.

According to Francie 2017, “Vocabulary is critical to reading success for three reasons: Firstly, incase reader understand the meaning of the words given in passage it improves understanding of comprehension also. Secondly, Vocabulary words not only improve reading but it also contributes to all areas of communication that is listening, writing and speaking. Last but not least, when vocabulary is improved it also helps to improve overall academic and social confidence and that too helps them to compete effectively and efficiently.

Method

The subjects of this study were MBA 120 Second year students of Lovely Professional University. Wherein, analysis of Continuous Assessment was made and Assessment consisted of Reading Comprehension consisting of Multi choice Questions. Total students that were assessed were 120 And following were the findings and discussion

Table 1:- Number of students that gave wrong answers in various sections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Number of students that gave wrong answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding Main Idea</td>
<td>30/120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>100/120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using words in</td>
<td>80/120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the table it is succinct that 30 students out of 120 gave wrong answer to the question that was related to finding main idea. And it was the section where students have least issues. Whereas, in case of Vocabulary lion’s share of student that is 100 out of 120 gave incorrect answer.

Table 2. The most difficult session (in order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Using words in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cloze Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Finding main Idea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the analysis it is clear that most difficult section is Vocabulary followed by Cloze reading, Using words in context, Finding main Idea and other Issues

What are the causes of the difficulties?

“Why do you think Vocabulary and Using words in Context sections are difficult?”

Most of students feel that it is difficult to do vocabulary section because of Limited knowledge of words followed by Lack of memorizing ability. And meager number of students felt it happens because of unfamiliarity with the topic. Adjusting which words to use related to the context of the sentence sometimes is not as easy as it seems. Students need to understand the whole meaning if a word.

And memorizing new words is difficult for some students. Some of them rarely meet new words because of lack habit of reading and using new words. The new words memorized are easily forgotten due to lack of usage. The students might have memorized it but they rarely or even never use it in their daily conversation nor writing activities. They keep using the words they are familiar with without realizing that this habit can cause less improvement in their language skill related to limited vocabulary knowledge.

“Why do you think Cloze Reading session is difficult?”

Based on the results, students find that paraphrased sentences cause confusion. No doubt, sentences in the text are understood by students but they get confused with one that is paraphrased.

“Why do you think Finding Main Idea session is difficult?”

Myriad number of students says that they get confused in finding Main Idea session because they are unable to restate the main sentence in the text. Reason being main idea is different from main sentence and it leads to misinterpret the form. It occurs as students have poor ability to understand sentence and to catch the implied meaning of a sentence.

What Methods or Learning Activities are Applicable in the Classroom to Overcome the Difficulties?

The main problem faced by student was related to vocabulary and it is because of lack of reading habits among students. Students should be motivated to read more books and gain more new words. They must have habit of keeping record of new learnt words in a small diary. Every student must be motivated to learn usage of at least five words every day. This activity should be initiated from the classroom by the lecturer. Some activities can
be applied to motivate students to read and help them memorize the vocabulary. One of the most applicable ways considered fun by students and lecturers is by doing some games instead of reading and discussing.

According to Elaine K. McEwan, "To improve students' reading comprehension, teachers should introduce the seven cognitive strategies of effective readers: activating, inferring, monitoring-clarifying, questioning, searching-selecting, summarizing, and visualizing-organizing.

To assume that one can simply have students memorize and routinely execute a set of strategies is to misconceive the nature of strategic processing or executive control. Such rote application of these procedures represents, in essence, a true oxymoron-non-strategic strategic processing. — Alexander and Murphy (1998, p. 33)

What teachers can do to help

1) Structure of various reading comprehension must be taught to students. So that while doing any comprehension students can relate it and they can make a map by getting the main idea from all the paragraphs.
2) Secondly, students should be taught that Assumptions are the mother of all mess-ups. Therefore rather than guessing the answer it is better to read paragraph by paying attention to all the vocabulary and keywords.
3) Students must be motivated to make notes while reading paragraph. As every paragraph in the passage has its own main idea which might be different from other paragraphs. And students can write the main idea just next to the paragraph.
4) In reading comprehension exercise it is important to give just one response to the question. Hence, student must be instructed to give only one answer even if they see more than one option.
5) Students must be motivated to revise the learnt vocabulary every day.
6) Students understanding must be monitored by them regularly. It can be shown to them that how, for example, to ask themselves "What's unclear here?" or "What information am I missing?" and "What else should the author be telling me?".
7) Children must be instructed to how to make predictions and how to summarize.

Conclusion

Overall, it can be concluded that all of the students’ difficulties in reading comprehension test is caused by vocabulary, especially the limited knowledge or mastery of vocabulary. In order to overcome the problems, students propose an interactive learning for reading activities, both in forms of audio visual and games. Although games are not proven to improve their ability in mastering vocabulary, it can help them enjoy the class better resulting a little improvement though it is not significant. Teachers as the provider of facilities should be aware of this needs and become more creative in term of providing and involving students in interactive techniques or methods or teaching activities.

References


P.David person and Dale, D.Johnson op cit.p.8

