



Improving reading skills through effective reading Strategies

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Abstract. *Researchers have found that teaching reading strategies is a key element in developing student comprehension. However, many teachers lack a solid foundation for teaching these reading comprehension strategies. Therefore, teachers need to be prepared on how to design effective comprehension strategies and how to teach these strategies to their students. Therefore this study aims to study the effective reading strategies in order to improve reading skills in language classes.*

Key words: *cornerstone, challenging, analytically, technological, strategy, fundamental.*

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Introduction

Reading is a lifelong skill to be used both at school and throughout life. According to Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone for a child's success in school and, indeed, throughout life. Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfilment and job success inevitably will be lost (1985). Despite its importance, reading is one of the most challenging areas in the education system. The ever-increasing demand for high levels of literacy in our technological society makes this problem even more pressing. If students want to get the most out of the materials they are assigned, they have to learn to read critically or analytically. The idea here is that when we read something, the purpose is to try to understand what the intention is. When dealing with reading, we encounter two layers of reality: one that we can see and one that we cannot see. Therefore, the purpose of reading is to make the invisible layer, the underlying meaning, visible and clear. Teele asserts that the goal of all readers should be to understand what they read (2004, p. 92). Research shows good readers are actively involved with the text, and they are aware of the processes they use to understand what they read. Teachers can help improve student comprehension through instruction of reading strategies. Predicting, making connections, visualizing, inferring, questioning, and summarizing are strategies shown by research to improve reading comprehension (Block & Israel, 2005). It is important to teach the strategies by naming the strategy and how it should be used, modelling through the think-aloud process, group practice, partner practice, and independent use of the strategy (Duke & Pearson, 2005).

In order to be a good reader, learners should set a goal for their reading; therefore good readers have a purpose for reading. One strategy for improving comprehension is predicting, which helps the reader set a purpose for their reading. Research has shown that good readers use their experiences

and knowledge to make predictions and formulate ideas as they read (Block & Israel, 2005). This strategy also allows for more student interaction, which increases student interest and improves their understanding of the text. It is important to compare the outcome in the actual text with the prediction process as it will lead the learner to improve his understanding.

Some of the approaches for teaching predicting are teacher modeling, predicting throughout the text; with partners, with a graphic organizer, or using post-it notes throughout the text. Using the title, table of contents, pictures, and key words is one prediction strategy. Another key prediction strategy is to have students predict at specific points through the text, evaluate the prediction, and revise predictions if necessary (Teele, 2004). Another strategy that the good readers employ when comprehending a text is visualization (Adler, 2001). Visualization requires the reader to construct an image of what is read. This image is stored in the reader's memory as representation of the reader's interpretation of the text (National Reading Panel, 2000). Teachers can motivate students to visualize settings, characters, and actions in a story and ask them to make drawings or write about the image that come to their minds after visualizing the text. Making connections is another strategy that can be used in the reading process. By making connections, the learners can activate their prior knowledge and connect the ideas in the text to their own experiences. Reading becomes meaningful when the reader connects the ideas in the text to their experiences and beliefs, and the things happening in the outer world.

Students can make text-to-text connections through drawing, making a chart, writing, and graphic organizers. These text-to-text connections could be based upon how characters in the story relate to each other, or how story elements relate between stories. Students can make text-to-world connections through drawing, making a chart, writing, or graphic organizers. Text-to-world connections could be done by comparing characters in a story to characters today or comparing the content of the text to the world today. The process of summarization requires the reader to determine what is important when reading and to condense the information in the reader's own words (Adler, 2001). During the summarizing process, the students will be able to distinguish the main ideas from the supporting ideas. Distinguishing the related knowledge from the unrelated ones is another point in the summarizing process. Summarizing is a strategy which helps the students to organize the ideas even in the long reading passages which are usually perceived as a threat for the students.

Readers can use the questioning before, during, and after reading. The questioning process requires readers to ask questions of themselves to construct meaning, enhance understanding, find answers, solve problems, find information, and discover new information (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). In this strategy, the students return to the text throughout the reading process to find the answers to the questions asked by the teacher before, during and after the reading. Inferring refers to reading between the lines. Students need to use their own knowledge along with information from the text to draw their own conclusions. Through inferring students will be able to draw conclusions, make predictions, identify underlying themes, use information to create meaning from text, and use pictures to create meaning. Students can be given techniques to use illustrations, graphs, pictures, dates, related vocabulary and titles from the text to make inferences. Reading proficiency is the most fundamental skill for academic learning and success in school. According to a study done in the United States, the ability to read proficiently is significantly related to how much a person can achieve in his or her personal and professional life (Block & Israel, 2005). It is for this reason that I have decided to do this action research. According to Brown and Dowling (2001), action research is a term which is applied to projects in which practitioners seek to effect transformations in their own practices... Generally an action research is carried out in a school setting. Corey (1953) believed that the value of action research is in the change that occurs in everyday practice rather than the generalization to a broader audience. Action research is a reflective process and it deals with the

practical concerns that are close to the instructors and allow them to make a change. The main aim of an action research is to find solutions to real problems faced in schools and searching ways to improve student success. The process of action research assists educators in assessing needs, documenting the steps of inquiry, analyzing data, and making informed decisions that can lead to desired outcomes. Research results show that students improve comprehension when they analyze which strategy they are using and how it helps bring meaning to the text.

The results of the reading awareness scale and my personal experience showed that there was a lack of knowledge in the area of reading strategies in my students at the beginning of the study. The students had a lack of knowledge and practice in reading strategies however after a comprehensive study, there was an improvement in their success.

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