Sodikova Shokhistakhon

ENHANCING READING COMPREHENSION SKILL FOR EFL PRE-INTERMEDIATE LEARNERS

Abstract: Reading comprehension is considered the most challenging and sophisticated skill for many EFL learners. For many years, pre-intermediate learners, who are at the levels between basic and advanced levels of proficiency, have faced significant challenges in developing comprehensive skills. This research work investigates the challenges that EFL learners face while reading authentic or adapted versions of reading materials. It provides solutions to improve their comprehension skills by providing viable strategies. Conducted research mainly focuses on analyzing the several factors and obstacles that decrease comprehension levels. Moreover, it supports the notion that high reading comprehension improves receptive skills and develops productive skills including speaking and writing abilities. This paper aims to enhance the basic elements of reading comprehension skills through effective strategies.

Keywords: EFL, reading comprehension, pre-intermediate learners, advanced level, authentic materials, adapted materials, detrimental factors, receptive skills, productive skills.

Introduction.

Many people think that reading is the fundamental skill that helps students to learn other skills, enhance their language proficiency, and get familiar with the subjects of their majors (Kim and Anderson, 2011). Learners' speaking, writing, and listening skills are all significantly impacted by the development of their reading comprehension skills. According to the recent research, "Where there is little reading, there will be little language learning." Unless a prospective learner, who is willing to learn English at a native speaker level, moves to an English-speaking environment, he has to read himself to master the language for communicative purposes. (Bright and McGregor, 1970, p. 52). A description of the learning process and a discussion of its characteristics are essential components of any thorough explanation of reading comprehension. Therefore, the main goal of this paper is to provide learners with valuable strategies and ways of learning to achieve the highest level of reading comprehension.

1. Definition of reading comprehension.

There are various ideas and interpretations of the definition of reading comprehension stated by linguists. Most scientists claim that "reading comprehension is the ability to get meaning from what is read" (Pressley, 2010). According to other linguists, mastering reading comprehension allows EFL learners to assimilate knowledge by understanding what they read. Furthermore, it assists in reading proficiently, learning effectively, and conceptualizing. These skills are mainly based on earlier stages of reading development, including oral reading and reading fluency. Without developing these earlier reading skills, students must continually focus on decoding letters and words rather than progressing to meaning and understanding (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Katherine Maria (1990) defines reading comprehension as knowledge including word recognition ability, word knowledge, and knowledge of linguistic convention, i.e., what the reader brings to the text. However, I assert that reading comprehension is a vital skill for a learner's academic achievement in the scope of study.

2. The difficulties pre-intermediate students face in comprehension.

Pre-intermediate students are expected to have a relatively little vocabulary because they have been exposed to most of the fundamental English grammatical structures. This is thought to be the largest comprehension challenge. In addition, some academics have identified a variety of other elements, such as prior knowledge, the reading text's complexity, motivational factors, anxiety, and contextual circumstances (Dennis 2008). Additionally, the researcher says that deciphering printed symbols and understanding their meaning are two difficult aspects of reading comprehension.

2.1 Insufficient vocabulary.

A lack of vocabulary is one of the most important things that makes reading sophisticated. Limited vocabulary range makes inexperienced readers more frustrated and anxious while reading adapted or authentic reading materials. To overcome this problem, they need to have scheduled active reading habits that allow them to read aloud and activate passive vocabulary. Furthermore, the most effective strategies for learning new words must be implemented in their self-study. When learners decide to study the unknown new word in context and its meanings, they need to absorb all the features and usage of the selected word and use them in their speaking and writing.

2.2 Background knowledge.

Thorough observation of background knowledge leads to the notion that students benefit from their previous knowledge when they put past experiences, beliefs, and ideas into practice. According to Nyugen (2007), who has done careful research on how prior information affects the ease of comprehension of a text, learners have a challenge in understanding many unknown vocabularies in unknown reading material for the first time if they do not have prior background knowledge. So that reason they might have to read the texts more than once to understand them. To overcome these problems, learners have to become familiar with a variety of resources, including fiction books, magazines, newspapers, and scientific journals. This, in turn, will help to widen their horizons and activate their passive vocabulary.

2.3 Text complexity while reading.

 Reading materials that are appropriate for the level of learners have always had a positive impact on the process of knowledge assimilation. Conversely, complicated academic readings make learners feel overwhelmed by decreasing comprehension level. When upper-intermediate reading materials are taught to pre-intermediate learners, they encounter challenges. Furthermore, they will become less motivated and interested in this subject due to the reading's high level of complexity. Mentors should consider the learner's interests and level when teaching them the fundamentals of reading comprehension and conduct the lesson according to these criteria.

2.4 Motivation factors.

As noted by Presseley and Hilden (2002), "Motivation plays a vital role in learners academic achievement.". Therefore, only teachers can motivate their students by assigning appropriate, engaging texts and topics that assist in establishing concrete goals for reading assignments. Compared to worried students, motivated students are more likely to comprehend the meaning of the word in context. However, for students to properly integrate their skills and apply specific techniques to reading tasks, it is essential to be more motivated, enthusiastic, and interested in reading materials.

2.5 Anxiety.

According to Vazalwar's (2011) research, anxiety has a negative impact on the development of reading comprehension. His research suggests that while some anxiety at a healthy level may benefit students, conversely, increased anxiety may make it difficult to understand even the most straightforward texts. In my view, a learner's anxiety level will rise due to a lack of background information, confidence, self-worth, and other factors. As a result, starting reading exercises earlier helps young students become proficient readers and reduces their anxiety. Learners should identify their weaknesses to overcome these problems.

2.6. Environment conditions.

Reading in an organized and safe environment will maximize comprehension efficiency for EFL learners. (Dennis, 2008). When readers attempt to comprehend a text in a secure, safe, and controlled place, they may be able to avoid many comprehension issues. If the reverse occurs, they will find it difficult to focus on their reading materials. Pre-intermediates need to be aware of the setting in which they are reading, as various noises, such as televisions or radios, can interfere with their ability to concentrate and comprehend the material.

Techniques for improving comprehension while reading.

There are many different approaches, methods, and strategies for solving reading comprehension issues. Enhancing reading comprehension and practical application skills is largely dependent on the usage of reading techniques during language acquisition.

3.1. Read as much as you can.

Reading comprehension is a difficult skill that requires constant practice and development. It is a set of cognitive exercises that encompasses many different aspects, such as integration, mindful response, and word meaning comprehension (Meniado et al., 2016). By using various strategies and reading a range of sources for two or three hours a day, students can develop their reading comprehension.

3.2 Reciprocal teaching.

Learners encounter unfamiliar and new words in their reading material. It takes some time to look up a word's definition by going through the whole dictionary. By applying the reciprocal teaching approach, mentors can help their students anticipate, summarize, explain, and clarify textual passages. In other words, students who receive mental tools from their teachers to help them comprehend a text will be able to improve their comprehension skills more effectively on their own (Pressley, 2006). Furthermore, anticipating what will happen next speeds up reading, which is essential for text comprehension.

3.3 Discussion.

Most linguistics claim that peer discussion is the best strategy to absorb knowledge. Learners use their brains to ask and respond to potential questions from their friends while they work to commit the information they read to memory. Additionally, class discussions encourage students to formulate fresh ideas and viewpoints. (Goldenberg, 1991). He also mentioned that knowledge gained through question-and-answer sessions is the best mental tool for developing one`s horizons.

3.4 Learning with peers.

Language learners are divided into two categories: those who can pick up the language independently and those who find it easier to study in groups or with partners by discussing. It is also the most effective strategy to improve reading comprehension with peers. While working in groups, learners will give suggestions for developing reading comprehension skills by analyzing their partner`s weaknesses and strengths.

According to the research paper's conclusions, beginning pre-intermediate readers will gain from a variety of reading techniques as they come to understand their own needs and the best suitable approach for their learning. The application of the mentioned strategies facilitates the effortless mastery of reading comprehension abilities by EFL learners. The best advice may be to include more authentic materials, as this would help students grasp the text's meaning better and broaden their horizons on a wide range of subjects. Speaking and writing skills are greatly impacted by extensive reading as well as the pleasure of reading through appropriate authentic sources (Dubin and Olshtain, 1977, 97p). On the other hand, increased vocabulary knowledge has a significant role in increasing learners' self-confidence and reducing their anxiety related to reading assignments. Consequently, having a good range of vocabulary helps to boost learners` reading comprehension and lessen the anxiety on the reading materials. Therefore, vocabulary is considered one of the most vital and fundamental components of language learning (Levelt, 1993).

Conclusions.

Reading comprehension enhancement is not a complicated and unattainable process. Avoiding and overcoming these obstacles can be accomplished in several ways. This process will be simple and successful if EFL students understand where and when to read in terms of a safe and organized environment, what kind of suitable material to read, as well as the reason for reading material in suitable and appropriate ways. Additionally, when selecting reading material, students should examine their reading level, area of interest, and mental capacity to avoid becoming confused by inappropriate content, which can lead to disappointment and demotivation from learning. It will be easy to overcome reading comprehension challenges if they are aware of the negative aspects and beneficial strategies and how to apply them appropriately. When one has a positive outlook on reading, it becomes one of the most fascinating aspects of their study.

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