

Strengthening the Reading Skills of ESL Students with Integrating Teaching and Learning Methods

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to strengthen the reading skills of the ESL students. This research report will offer lots of support for the development of students' reading skill through useful and effective strategies. The importance of reading skill in language learning is also presented. Then, the effective approaches on reading are expressed too, to get the students' interest. Moreover, in this research paper, a survey on selected students from third year is carried out within eight weeks. Need analysis questionnaires about their needs, strength or weak points in reading are collected. This paper is hoped to be to able help students' reading skill effectively through teaching and learning methods.*

Keywords: effective approaches, effective strategies, reading skill, strengthening

1. INTRODUCTION

This research paper intends to strengthen the reading skills of the ESL students. In our country, English is second language for all students. The survey area is limited for third year students attending at Technological University Mandalay. As they are adult learners (they are in their twenties), they have got language exposure for ten years and over. But they have fear for their reading materials and they are unsure what strategies should be for speeding up their reading pace. They are highly focusing on written, then they may neglect the reading skill. Reading material in a foreign language is not always easy. However, the learners should not give up this skill easily, too. Since the language learners start their learning by reading and listening, reading is one of the most basic foundations of acquiring a language. To wipe away the difficulties in reading, this research paper has been carried out. For acquiring a new language, reading skill should not be an excuse of their difficulties. A reading knowledge is an essential skill contributing to professional and academic studies [3].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The simple definition for reading is that it is the construction of meaning from a printed or written message [2]. Although, the purposes of reading can be determined by the nature of the material and the interests of the learner, it gives us pleasure, information, and general understanding. As all of the learners know, there are four skills in learning English (as a second language). All the four skills are really interrelated each. Among them, reading is the foremost vital skill for learners. Without reading, they may struggle for learning something in their daily lives. There are many adults who have difficulties in understanding the

instructions on a medicine bottle, filling out applications, warning signs, and the like. Learners are unsure of what they have read. If they feel that they do not have sufficient language to say what they want to express, they hesitate to respond something. Regardless of academic purposes, reading can remove our loneliness, and it can separate us from the structure of lives or the sequential habits of our day-to-day living style. Moreover, reading may be a resource of creation something or motivation for curiosity [1].

3. STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING READING SKILLS

Reading is an activity that can add someone's knowledge about important news and also some new vocabulary items. Reading comprehension refers to how much the readers understand of what they read. Although the readers read English book every week, it cannot support to improve the readers' reading skill if he does not understand the meaning of the words on the pages. Therefore, learning a language likes building a house. Scaffolding is also a method of learning. The idea is that, to learn a skill well, the learners need to learn smaller parts that will help them build their knowledge and skills.

3.1. Why do we read?

Reading takes many forms. The purpose of reading is to catch the idea or information in paragraph text. According to Anderson in Cahyani (2007:99-100), the learners' read the text for detail to discover the facts. They will be able to trace the main ideas of the text. If they understand the text clearly, they will be able to evaluate the content of the text and compare or contrast between the facts or characters. A Dewi (2013), mentions the benefit of reading. Reading enables the reader active mental process, vocabulary building,

concentration and focus, building self-confidence, improving discipline as well as increasing creativity.

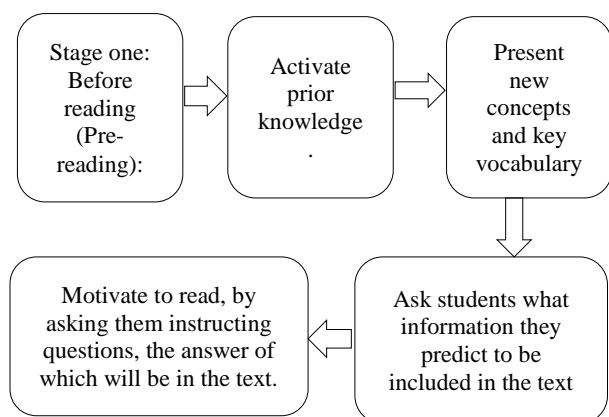


Figure 1. Stages of teaching reading

3.2. Scanning

To teach foreign or second language reading well, the learner need to know as much as possible about how the reading process works and how to integrate that knowledge effectively into their reading pedagogy. Scanning is a way of reading strategy for searching a particular information in a text. In other word, it Scanning, is the lanners must have a basic idea about the text. Scanning is mostly used in searching the one's favorite show listed in the cable guide, friend's phone number in a telephone book or the sport scores in newspaper. If the learners are doing the research paper, they could scan the index of books, website, and reference material. They can easily scan the pages where the information can be found. The more they practice, the more effective scanning will become [7].

3.3. Skimming

Skimming is a way of reading strategy to look only for the general or main ideas. If the learners have less time to read, skimming is the effective way for them. Therefore, if the leaners know how to skim a text efficiently, skimming will also save a great amount of their valuable time. For example, if they want to read on interesting article on the newspaper and they do not have enough him to read more than one article, they will skim through most of the article to decide exactly which article they want to read. Skimming is an appropriate activity when the learners do not have much time to read something carefully or when they are trying to decide if careful reading is merited [7].

3.4. Intensive Reading

Intensive reading is like reading deeply. With intensive reading, the learners have to read the same passage many times, for their deep understanding. When the learners first start out in a language, they are a lot of unknown words apart from a few cognates. In this situation, intensive reading is more appropriate for them to build up their comprehension to a level where extensive reading becomes possible.

The primary focus of intensive reading is to understand the literal meaning of the text being read. Moreover, the goals of intensive reading include comprehension the gist and subject matter of the text, improving grammar and vocabulary and understanding the thought of the author behind the text. In intensive reading, the learners focus on the language used, not on the text [5].

3.5. Extensive Reading

Extensive means covering a substantial area and so, extensive reading refers to massive amount of reading. In extensive reading, it exposes the learners large amount of new vocabulary and structures as well as reconsolidating the original text. Therefore, extensive reading is like reading widely [6]. In this approach, learners read long texts and refer to various supporting study material. They read the text just for enjoyment and a better understanding of the concept. With extensive reading, the readers look for easy, interesting and amusing books so as to improve their reading fluency and speed as well. The nature of extensive reading is to encourage the students' reading habits with pleasure and makes them a voracious reader. Without considering the readers' understand in each written word in the text, extensive reading emphasises on getting the basic concept of the passage to readers. The benefits of extensive reading include individualized, free choice of reading material. As a result, it enables the students to follow their own interests in reading [4].

3.6. Reading Rubric to Help Strengthening Reading Skills

It is important for the teachers to examine or assess the students' proficiency level in reading. The teachers need to evaluate their reading-competency. The characteristics for reading proficiency include: making effective use of cueing systems, bringing in background information, moving from a word by word system to a fluent reading for the meaning system [9].

3.6.1. Reading for Meaning

The question, 'Why do we read? For meaning?' is a consideration for reading skill. Reading is not just a decoding words activity. As a better reader, he/ she reads the text in a meaningful way instead of word by word reading. It is very important for the students to understand the purpose for reading and tap into the prior knowledge needed. In reading passages, they have to make connections, predictions and draw inferences.

3.6.2 Reading Behaviors

Depend on learners' reading pace, level or proficiency, they will be able to understand the important information in reading passages. And then, they can make self- correction or re-reading if they need to enhance understanding. If they have got sufficient reading proficiency, they will use some reflective thought instead of stopping periodically to ensure

understanding. When they reach a good command in reading, their reading behavior slightly changes. From their reading materials, they start discovering something new from them and they begin to accept that reading gives them enjoyment and pleasure. In this way, they get a positive attitude towards reading.

4. SELF-IMPROVING STEPS FOR READING

There are many genres for reading like reading textbooks, essay, paper for academic purpose, reading messages, letters, reports, financial documents for job-related purpose, and reading newspaper, magazines, emails, greeting cards for personal purpose. Reading is a mental task that someone looks into a written text and starts to absorb the information from the written linguistic message.

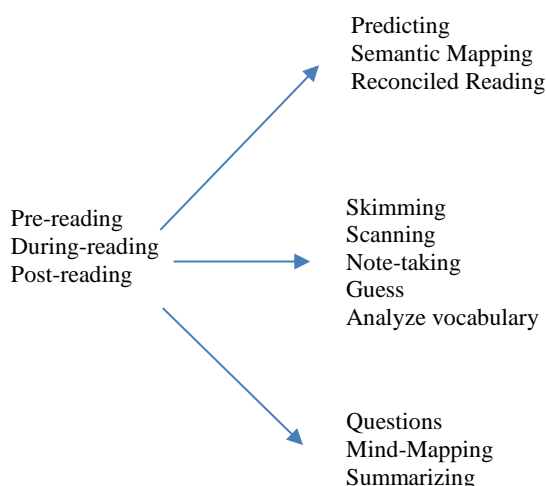


Figure 2. Reading process

4.1. Always Make Special Time to Read

As reading is a free and amusement activity, one can read a fun book on a bus, in bed or at the office. However, the purpose of reading may be varied one after another. If the students are reading to improve their comprehension, they need to focus and study. They need to set a special time for focus reading with quiet, and comfortable place without risk of being interrupted. Reading for pleasure gives the learners transferable skills for content reading [8].

4.2. Read the Right Books

It is important for learners to know what they are interested in and their reading level. The reading materials should be enjoyed to learners. Sometimes, the learners want to challenge themselves just enough to learn new things. Therefore, the best way to develop reading is to read and they are more likely to read when they have a choice in the reading. In this case, the

learners should have a consideration of their reading level.

4.3. Ask Yourself Questions While Reading and After Reading

When they start a reading, they must notice the highlighted words, title, the name mentioned in paragraph and conversation of the characters. Then, after they had read, they need to summarize or review the text or the most important facts that happened in the text. In this way, they may have some chances to ask questions themselves depending on what kind of text they were reading. Students often have no idea how to ask questions, what type of questions to ask or the frequency of questions. Asking questions is also a good way to evaluate their understanding what they are reading [5].

4.4. Improve Fluency First

It is hard to build an understanding of what they are reading in the situation of word- by-word reading instead of in full sentences. Therefore, it is important to improve their fluency first. Fluency is how smoothly they can read. Improving fluency can be as simple as choosing slightly easier to read, or it might take some time and practice. If they take some time to enhance how fluently they read, then, it will help them in the future. They will improve their reading and even their speaking. It will also make reading feel more fun and natural [7].

4.5. Read It Again

It is true that, reading a text just once is not enough to understand it. Re-reading is great for some difficult things in the text. There may be many new words in the text, they will see them again every time they read again. Every time they read something, they understand more of it. When they want to get the most out of their reading, they should try reading at least three times. The first time they focus on understanding the words, in the second time, focus on the meaning and the third time, they can start asking deeper questions [8].

5. NEEDS ANALYSIS QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THIRD YEAR STUDENTS

The purpose of collecting this questionnaire is to obtain your opinion on English language learning and to find out their strength and weakness in reading skill. Please fill it in as completely as possible. Your contribution is truly appropriated.

Name. : -----
 Age. : -----
 Academic year. : -----
 Specialised subject. : -----
 University. : -----

Please mark (✓) in the appropriate boxes.

1. Are you interested in learning English?
Yes. No.
2. How many years have you been studying English?
.....years
3. Do you think the provided texts are helpful to improve your reading skill?
Yes. No.
4. In your learning, which language skill is the most difficult for you?
Reading. Listening
Writing. Speaking
5. What are the problems you face in reading?
(a)Vocabulary
(b)Grammar
(c)Structure
6. In your opinion, how important is the role of vocabulary to develop the reading skill?
(a)Critically important
(b)Very important
(c)Somewhat important
7. Have you ever read other printed materials besides your textbooks?
Yes. No.
8. If there are many new words in your reading text, then do you use your background knowledge to guess the new words?
Yes. No.
9. How often do you read the books in your extra time / leisure?
(a)Always
(b)Often
(c)Sometimes
(d)Never
10. Are you happy and satisfied with the courses provided for you?
Yes. No.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Percentage of data result for reading skill

Question	Yes	No	-	-
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(1)	(95%)	(5%)		
Question (2)	13 years and above (100%)	-	-	
Question (3)	100%	-	-	
Question (4)	Writing (33%)	Speaking (13%)	Listening (19%)	Reading (35%)
Question (5)	Vocab (56%)	Grammar (11%)	Structure (33%)	
Question (6)	Critically important (26%)	Very important (72%)	Somewhat important (2%)	
Question (7)	Yes (52%)	NO (48%)		
Question (8)	Yes (100%)	NO (0%)		
Question (9)	Always (0%)	Sometimes (56%)	Often (22%)	Never (22%)
Question (10)	Yes (78%)	No (22%)		

In order to investigate actual needs in reading, the survey questionnaires are carried out on the (80) students who are attending at Technological University Mandalay. Although the students get exposure from various resources, they ignore the reading skill. According to their responses, 35 % of the students have difficulty in reading the other three skills. Some think the reading skill is not very important for them. The data show that they enjoy with their reading texts. It is assumed that vocabulary is their challenge in their reading. This is because they are weak in extended reading out of their class. Most of their time is spent in gaming or other activities. Even if they are bored in printed materials, they should try digital materials. They should set a habit of reading beyond their courses. If they have a concrete practice, they will start liking reading. The more practice they get, the better readers they will be. The teachers should motivate and attract the students to read various kind of books because they accept the importance of reading skill. On the other hand, they forget to practice their reading skills and they should expand their language acquisition through reading. If they are familiar with reading habit, they

will be able to understand the merit of reading. To motivate their reading, IELTS or TOFEL tests should be tried. To love reading and to become better readers, the teachers need to introduce the effective reading strategies to the language learners.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Teaching the reading skill involves unique problems and challenges at all conceivable levels of instruction. The purpose of conducting this research paper is to highlight the importance of reading skill for ESL learners. They may think the reading skill is easy for them. However, they should understand how important it is. If they have strength in reading skill, they can easily overcome the second language learning. It is clear that, reading is a skill that everyone needs whether the learner is in his elementary, secondary, university or adult level. Being able to read skillfully and flexibly is an important use of language. As we all know, language is a tool of communication, then the purposes of reading should be the same in class as they are in real life- to obtain a specific fact, or pieces of information, to obtain the general idea of the author, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of a reading as in reading a textbook or to evaluate information in order to determine where it fits into one's own system of belief.

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