

# Strategies To Improve Students' Reading Comprehension

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**Abstract:** It is inevitable that, reading skill is an interactive process in which students construct a meaningful representation of a text by the utilization of suitable reading strategies for themselves. Effective reading strategies are estimated to be significant skills which received the special attention to learners' reading comprehension proficiency. By reading the new aspects of the foreign languages can be obtained. Furthermore, reading is one of the challenging aspect for the students of English language. In this article, the definition to the term reading and reading comprehension, explain the types of reading, declare models of reading process, state theories of reading comprehension, review the effective strategies for reading comprehension, and finally mention findings of learners' reading strategies and their reading comprehension proficiency.

**Keywords:** Reading comprehension, kinds, models, theories, strategies

According to some researchers reading comprehension is the process of eliciting and making meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. McNamara and Magliano (2009)<sup>1</sup> emphasized that this process is a task of both reader and text factors that happen within a larger social context. Duke (2003)<sup>2</sup> stated that comprehension is a process in which readers make meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the views of readers related to the text. Reading comprehension needs the successful expansion and arrangement of a lot of lower-and higher-level processes and skills. Accordingly, there are many sources for possible comprehension break and these sources are different based on the skill levels and age of readers. There are some kinds of reading which should

<sup>1</sup> . McNamara, D.S., &Magliano, J. P. (2009). Towards a comprehensive model of comprehension. In B. Rose (Ed.), The psychology of learning and motivation (pp.297-384). New York, NY: Academic Press.

<sup>2</sup> Duke, N. (2003). Comprehension instruction for informational text. Presentation at the annual meeting of the Michigan Reading Association, Grand Rapids, MI.

be known in order to enhance students' reading comprehension. At first, there are two different types of reading. They are extensive reading and intensive reading.

There are different definitions for extensive reading. In the papers of Hedge (2003)<sup>3</sup> it is described as skimming and scanning activities while Hafiz and Tudor (1989)<sup>4</sup> expressed that exposing learners to large quantities of meaningful and fascinating materials and activities will have a significant impact on the learners' knowledge of second language. A lot of researchers have shown great interest in extensive reading in the last years. Extensive reading has several defining characteristics which make it different to most reading that happens in ELT classrooms. First, the texts that are used are generally relatively easy for the learners to understand, with few unknown words. This is important because it means that longer texts can be used than would be the case in most classroom situations. A further characteristic is that ER should be an enjoyable experience, with learners free to select texts on topics they find interesting. Comprehension checks are typically kept to a minimum, as the process of reading is seen as more important than the understanding of particular details and also because such checks can be anxiety provoking and lessen the pleasure of reading. Extensive reading should be an enjoyable exercise, with learners free to select texts on topics they find interesting. Extensive reading is for comprehension, for that reason there are some criterion for them to be available for ELT classrooms.

The reading material should be easy to understand. The number of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available. Extensive reading has several peculiar defining characteristics which make it stand out to most reading that happens in ELT classrooms. Initially, the texts that are used are generally relatively simple for the learners to catch the meaning, with few unknown words.

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<sup>3</sup> Hedge (2003) Reciprocal Teaching Strategies and Their Impacts on English Reading Comprehension. Theory and Practice in Language Studies

<sup>4</sup> Hafiz and Tudor (1989) Intensive Reading English Teaching Professional, 28,40-48. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This is crucial because it means that longer texts can be used than would be the case in most classroom atmosphere. A further characteristic is that extensive should be an enjoyable experience, with learners are able to free to select texts on topics they find intriguing. Comprehension checks are typically kept to a minimum, as the process of reading is seen as more important than the understanding of particular details and also because such checks can be anxiety provoking and lessen the pleasure of reading. Extensive reading should be an enjoyable exercise, with learners free to select texts on topics they find interesting. Day and Bamford<sup>5</sup>, who have been very influential in the research and promotion of ER in second language contexts, produced a list of ten principles that they felt encapsulated its key tenets:

1. The reading material is easy.
2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available.
3. Learners choose what they want to read.
4. Learners read as much as possible.
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.
6. Reading is its own reward.
7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
8. Reading is individual and silent.
9. Teachers orient and guide their students.
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader.

What is Intensive Reading?

In this type of reading, learners read a page to find the meaning and to be familiar with the strategies of writing. Through this reading, students can get fundamental practice in performing these strategies based on a series of materials. These strategies can be either text-related or learner-related. The first involves

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<sup>5</sup>Day and Bamford (2009 ). Teaching reading comprehension to EFL. The Reading Matrix, 143-154. Retrieved from <http://www.readingmatrix.com/articles/alyousef/article.pdf>

recognition of text organization and the second involves strategies such as linguistic, schematic, and metacognitive strategies. Hedge mentioned the benefits of extensive reading as follows: Students can make their language proficiency, advance in their reading skill, become more independent in their learning, learn cultural knowledge, and expand confidence and incentive to continue their own learning. (Hedge, 2003).<sup>6</sup> The definition for intensive reading is commonly given as the emphasis is on details that support the main points picked out at the skimming level. When comprehension level needs to be quality, reading for remember or accuracy is performed through surveying structure and reading phrases. This reading features close re-reading and note-taking, very often accompanied by summary writing. When preparing for an examination, a close and accurate interpretation of a text is essential and requires intensive reading skills. Intensive reading includes several types of reading tasks. Matching -the graphs, tables, diagrams with explanations related to them. Defining -the scientific texts from the genre viewpoint. Recognizing- the relationship between the concepts, the relationships between the ideas. As intensive reading is mostly for scientific text, they are characterized by conciseness with the concepts related, sometime dependent on each other. Understanding how language is utilized to present thought is essential. Comprehension of academic texts is easier if students are familiar with methods of text development, e.g. cause-and-effect relations, exemplification, definitions, comparisons, and the connectors associated with some of them. Science textbooks are heavily illustrated. These visual forms of communication replace verbal communication and need to be carefully read and comprehended.

There are three models for the second-language reading process: the bottom-up model, the top-down model, and the interactive model. *The Bottom-up Model-*

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<sup>6</sup> Hedge (2003) Reciprocal Teaching Strategies and Their Impacts on English Reading Comprehension. Theory and Practice in Language Studies

Carrell (2012)<sup>7</sup> said that the main focus of this model is the smaller units of a text like letters, words, phrases, and sentences. The reader reads all of the words in a phrase, or a sentence before understanding it. This model starts with decoding the smallest linguistic units, particularly phonemes, graphemes, and words and then makes meaning from the smallest to the largest units. The reader uses his/her background knowledge to the information that they find into the texts. There are some difficulties in this model. One of the drawbacks is that the reader is successful in reading when he/she deciphers the linguistic units and understands the connection between words. The reader is not able to keep in his/her memory the meaning of every word. The other difficulty is that it is not possible to connect one word to the other words. *The Top-down Model*-Goodman (2012)<sup>8</sup> stated reading as a “psycholinguistic guessing game” in which readers apply their previous knowledge to relate with a text and to connect these to new information found in the text in order to understand it. The readers do not read every word of a text but they focus on identifying the next words. They try to guess the meaning of words or phrases. Readers begin forecasting from the title of the reading text that permits them to restrict the scope of their reading. Then they assume the message the writer wants to transfer and change their hypotheses based on what they read in the text. Comprehension starts with higher levels of processing and continues to the application of the lower levels. *The Interactive Model*-according to Rumelhart (1977)<sup>9</sup> this model is based on information from various sources like orthographic, lexical, syntactic, semantic knowledge, and schemata. While readers are reading, decoding processes support each other. If they do not understand texts, they should apply their previous knowledge to help them. Readers who are dependent on top-

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<sup>7</sup> Carrell (2012) A schema-theoretic view of basic processes in reading. Handbook of reading research (pp. 255–292). New York: Longman.

<sup>8</sup> Goodman (2012). Towards a comprehensive model of comprehension. In B. Rose (Ed.), The psychology of learning and motivation (pp.297-384). New York, NY: Academic Press.

<sup>9</sup> Rumelhart (1977) Understanding reading problems: Assessment and instruction (4th ed.). New York: Harper Collins.

down model use textual signs and infer the meaning but they should make up for deficiencies like weaknesses in word identification and lack of effective bottom-up processing. This model results in the most effective processing of texts. Teachers should find reading instructions according to this model to boost readers' skills. The mutual teaching method is a reading instruction that is based on the interactive model. It involves four principal reading strategies.

There are three types of theories of reading comprehension. They are mental representations, content literacy, and cognitive processes. *Mental Representations*-Van Oostendorp and Goldman (1998)<sup>10</sup> expressed that when a reader is reading a text, he can create a mental representation of the text that explains how the reader understands the text. A lot of researches supported the many levels of representation are included in constructing meaning. When a reader is reading a text, three various levels of mental representation are created. They are the surface component, the text-base, and the situation model. When the words and phrases and not the meaning of the words and phrases, are encoded in the mental representation, this is defined as the surface component of mental representation. The text-base indicates the meaning of the text and is composed of those parts and connections that are arose from the text itself without increasing anything that is not clearly identified in the text. A text-base can be made without any memory of the accurate words or phrases from the text. In a pure text-base, the reader applies previous knowledge to create a more perfect and consistent mental representation. The situation model is a structure that combines the text-base and the related features of the reader's knowledge. In order to create a text-base, some previous knowledge is required but this knowledge is a more general one that is necessary for decoding texts in general, while the previous knowledge in the formation of a situation model is more specific regarding the content of the text.

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<sup>10</sup> Van Oostendorp and Goldman (1998). Improving student achievement through organization of student learning. (ED 435094).

Content Literacy-Content literacy is the ability to read, understand, and learn from texts from a particular matter. There are three types of content literacy: general literacy abilities, content-specific literacy abilities, and previous knowledge of content. The general and the content-specific literacy abilities indicate some more general type of knowledge that does not hinge on the detailed content of a particular text. This knowledge is applied to make a text-base in the mental representation. Previous knowledge of content is the knowledge that is related to the content of a particular text and is applied to make a situation model in the mental representation. For example, it is not obvious that mathematics makes a necessity for content-specific literacy abilities and the reading comprehension in mathematics hinges on more general literacy abilities and previous knowledge. It can be stated that the symbolic language in mathematics is the main cause for the need of content-specific literacy skills.

*Cognitive Processes*-the application of syntactic and semantic rules together with the activation of more particular previous knowledge occurs automatically and unconsciously. Various cognitive processes are more or less conscious. Perception is defined as the highly automatic and unconscious processes. For instance, when we see a dog and directly know it as a dog; we are conscious of the outcome of the process but there isn't any active and conscious thought processes for this identification. Problem solving deals with active thinking when we want to remember the name of a person we see and know. Accordingly, when we read a text without having any difficulties in comprehending what we read, the process is related to perception than problem solving because the process of comprehending is unconscious. This is comprehension is located somewhere between perception and problem solving (Kintsch, 1992)<sup>11</sup>.

*Activating and Using Background Knowledge*- in this strategy, readers activate their background knowledge and apply it to aid them comprehend what

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<sup>11</sup> Kintsch, 1992 Reading comprehension tests vary in the skills they assess: Differential dependence on decoding and oral comprehension. Scientific Studies of Reading.

they are reading. This knowledge consists of individuals' experiences with the world together with their concepts for how written text work, involving word recognition, print concepts, word meaning, and how the text is formed (Anderson & Pearson, 1984)<sup>12</sup>. Schema theory is very important in comprehension process. This theory is based on how people form and activate their previous knowledge. This theory explains that as persons learn about the world, they create a series of knowledge structures or schemas. These schemas develop and shift as the persons learn new information through experience and reading. Generating and Asking Questions-In this strategy, readers ask themselves pertinent questions in reading the text. This strategy assists readers to combine information, recognize main ideas, and summarize information. Asking appropriate questions permits successful readers to concentrate on the most important information of a text. Creating relevant questions helps good readers to concentrate on difficulties with comprehension and to take the necessary actions to solve those problems.

*Making Inferences*-Readers assess or draw conclusions from information in a text. In this strategy, writers do not always provide full information about a topic, place, personality, or happening. Instead, they provide information that readers can use to read by making inferences that integrate information of the text with their previous knowledge. Through this process, readers can improve their skills to make meaning. Being able to make inferences is an important factor for readers' successful reading.

*Predicting*-In this strategy, readers are able to gain meaning from a text by making educated guesses. Successful readers apply forecasting to make their existing knowledge to new information from a text to obtain meaning from what they read. Before reading, readers may apply what they know about a writer to forecast what a text will be about. The title of a text can operate memories of texts with the same content, permitting them to guess the content of a new text.

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<sup>12</sup> Anderson & Pearson, 1984 Frameworks for comprehending discourse. American Educational Research Journal, 14, 367-382

Teaching learners to annotate and highlight text while reading is one of the most effective methods. It is important for students to highlight and underline necessary or highly informative facts as they read. Have students write notes on the pages they are reading to help them stay focused and improve comprehension. Students can also write down questions as they read to receive more explanation on a new concept or to define a new word. It helps not only to practice reading, but also work with vocabulary. Students can increase their understanding by seeing how the material connects with their life Personalize the content. Students should make personal connections with the text by writing it down on the page. Teachers can also help students comprehend the text by helping them see an association with current events. Practice problem solving skills is another way of enhancing reading skill. Blend real-world problem solving skills into your curriculum. Then students are asked to write out solutions to the problem and discuss their ideas as a class or in small groups. Incorporate more senses is quality way of teaching reading. Adding in activities that reinforce learning and comprehension by using more senses as they read is preferred by ELT teachers. Remind students to read with a pen or pencil to annotate the text. Have your students take turns reading out loud. Use projectors to guide the lesson and write down questions for those who are visual learners is a tough need of the modern classrooms. Making understand common themes on the topic improves students' creativity. Students are required to look for examples of a certain theme throughout the chapter to increase engagement. Have students share their findings with the class to help students learn a specific theme more in-depth.

Set reading goals before starting any unknown text leads students to be punctual while reading. Each student set their own reading goals. This can help them take action in building reading skills and students will be more mindful of how they are improving. If the text is too complicated or long it is useful to divide them into portions. Long, complex reading can be more digestible by breaking it

up into pieces. Shorter segments will help students retain the information as the class discusses the materials. It can also help students build confidence in understanding a complex subject. Every student has their own style of reading, they are to be given a chance to guide their reading. Students process reading material and curriculum in very different ways. As teacher implement reading activities to help your class learn complex materials, you will learn what works best for each student individually. By implementing more reading activities into classroom coursework, students will find improvement in vocabulary, writing skills, problem solving, concentration, and cognitive development to help build a solid foundation for future learning.

This article emphasized the idea that comprehension processes are influenced by a lot of strategies. All of these strategies work together to construct the meaning process easily and effectively. Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that reading materials and activities should be very attractive to students in order to understand a text easily and they should be related to the students' proficiency levels. Teachers have a big responsibility to motivate their students in reading these materials, should be very sensitive to their learners' comprehension difficulties, and should help their learners to modify their views towards reading and have positive attitudes towards their reading activities so that they can better understand the different texts.

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