

Upgradation of Reading Skill

M.A.Mohamed Sahul Hameed,^{1*} R.Srinivasan,¹Dr. Rosamma Jacob²

1. Assistant Professor (Senior), English, School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu- 632 014, India
2. Senior Professor (Retd.), School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Vellore, Tamil Nadu- 632 014, India

* E-mail of the corresponding author: mamohamedsahulhameed@vit.ac.in

Abstract

Reading is one of the greatest phenomena in a nation's development in various perspectives. Every nation can get free from illiteracy when citizens of the nation become good readers. Every nation is in need of great leaders. Great leaders can lead the nation. A great leader reads a lot. Reading not only makes a full man, but produces a great leader. That many of our students lack reading skill is a bitter fact and a matter of great concern. The writing skill of our students has deteriorated a lot, because students lack reading skills. Though reading is a passive language-learning skill, the active language-learning skill 'writing' can be developed by means of avid reading. Constant readers become good writers. This research paper begins with an introduction to reading skill and its importance, moves with an analysis on the lack of reading skills of students and ends with some strategies and suggestions that could be advocated for the upgradation of reading skills.

Keywords: efficient reading skills, passive reading, comprehending ability, contextual meanings, fluency in reading, filled reading.

1. Introduction

"Reading maketh a full man" – Francis Bacon

"Leave me alone in a sunny desert

I shalt live.

Leave me in an island where there is no hope of survival

I shalt live.

Leave me in a planet where there is no air

I shalt live, but

Leave me alone in a room without books.

I will die within hours.

Gates of Hell get closed, when a good book opens".

-Poet Vairamuthu

Book is the key that opens one's mind.

A good book democratizes one's mind.

Reading refines one's mind. Reading reforms one's mind.

Man came to know more of 'Culture' and 'Civilization' through reading.

Reasons for Lack of Reading Skills

(a) *Lack of Motivation by Parents*

"Education begins at home." – Mahatma Gandhiji

Reading of newspapers at home means a lot for students. Parents must motivate their children to read newspapers and good magazines at home. A good home is not that which consists of big-sized master bedrooms fully air-conditioned and well furnished, but has a good library with a collection of good books and newspapers, besides the basic facilities. As first teachers, parents must develop the reading skills of their wards. This will help them a lot in their academic and professional journey.

(b) *Lack of Motivation by Teachers*

Teachers should not limit the boundaries of reading skills of students only with the prescribed textbooks. Reading of the prescribed textbooks may help students secure well in the examinations, but not fully serve the purpose of reading. Students can be motivated a lot to read thought-provoking articles that appear in standard journals, magazines and newspapers and to discuss them in class. Extensive reading serves various purposes. It not only enhances the reading skills, but also helps students enrich vocabulary, learn a number of expressions, master the art of writing and ultimately develop the linguistic thirst and taste of students. A great leader reads a lot. Every student of today is the leader of tomorrow.

(c) *Reading without any Purpose*

The purpose of reading must be clear. Passive reading is ‘waste of time on pages’. Even a blank page means a lot for an active reader. An active reader reads with his mind, not with mere eyes and has a total control over reading. Active and purposeful reading is the ‘lively interaction between Mind and Book’. When one reads books with heart and soul, he/she feels some sort of intellectual and energetic vibration. The taste of pudding is in eating.

Read not to confuse and contradict,
Nor to believe and take what you read for granted,
Nor to find talk and discourse; but
To weigh and consider.

(d) *Inability to Comprehend*

“The connection between reading speed and comprehension; a film is made up of still images flashed in rapid succession to stimulate movement. Slow down the film, and the movement and meaning slows and the film’s impact is diminished. Viewers won’t learn as much about the film as if it were shown at normal speed. With reading the same thing may happen. When a person reads word by word, like frame by frame, they are not reading on the level of ideas. You need to read on some level that’s more conversational and allows things to coalesce into ideas themselves”

- *Doug Evans, Institute of Reading Development*

There are various factors for one’s poor comprehending ability. With a poor vocabulary, trying to comprehend well is like expecting a good harvest without cultivating the lands. Wrong comprehension might even lead to misinterpretation or misunderstanding. Mere use of dictionaries will not help readers. Patience is a sine qua non for readers to comprehend many texts. Contextual meanings will be there. Indirect and symbolic messages require not only ‘concentrated attention’ but also a ‘maturity of mind’. Thus, readers should not be hasty while passing remarks. Students, while comprehending passages or reading books, need to access higher order thinking skills to process the message and go beyond the surface layer of the text and infer possible meanings. Connoisseurs of William Shakespeare admit the fact that one gets various interpretations every time the plays of Shakespeare are read out. Students must have adequate vocabulary, grammar and syntactical skills to organize and interpret the written messages effectively. Effective and careful readers differentiate fact from judgment and objectively identify differing opinions. They evaluate, review, reflect and reinforce the matter to slowly develop reading comprehension abilities.

The comprehension exercises seek to increase two kinds of reading ability; the global questions of comprehension are meant to make learners perceive the over-all organization of matter-facts, ideas, arguments or experience in the passage, while the local questions of comprehension direct attention to detail, including suggestions, implications and particular expressions.

Passages meant for reading could be from modern English writings of a scientific, technical, literary and general interest. They can be graded according to an assessment of the comprehension levels in terms of vocabulary, syntax and thought content.

Passages can be used for two main purposes; to increase the complex skills of reading and writing, and to offer remedial help on the elements of language.

Apart from comprehension and composition exercises, there must be ample exercises on vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, pronunciation and spelling.

(e) *Lack of Importance to Reading*

In most of the English classes, the focus is more on completion of the prescribed textbooks rather than on developing the four language-learning skills. As far reading, students do not read or are not made to read beyond the textbook in English. Lack of a linguistic atmosphere in class limits the scope for development of the language-learning skills. When the approach towards development of any language-learning skill is not linguistic, scientific and psychological, the result will be pernicious. All exams test the writing skills of students. Even assignments given in class are only exercises on ‘written communication’. Thus, the amount of importance given to reading is not sufficient enough for the students to upgrade their reading skills.

(f) *Deterioration of Eye-sight*

“If a child is struggling in school, it is important that a parent consider his or her vision”

- Dr Joel Zaba, Virginia Beach optometrist and researcher

Nearly 80 % of what a student learns is obtained visually. Research indicates that 70 % of the two million school age children who have difficulty in reading have some form of visual impairment such as ocular motor, perceptual or binocular dysfunction.

More than 10 million children (one in four) in the United States suffer an undetected vision problem that can interfere with learning. Despite this disturbing figure, a survey released by the Vision Council of America (VCA) found that only 6 % of parents recognize the fact that vision problems obstruct the progress in the academic line.

A nationwide survey on student health conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2004 found that 80 % of Chinese college students suffered from poor eyesight. The ratio of male students with bad eyesight is 77.8% and that of female students is 82%. In addition to the high ratio of poor eyesight among college students, the ratio of senior students with bad eye-sight reaches 77.3%, 59.4% of junior students and 32.5% of 7 to 12 year-old students have poor eye-sight.

(Source – China News Service)

The following ten signs of poor vision have been identified by various reports and surveys.

- [1] Squinting, closing or covering one eye.
- [2] Holding a book close to the face.
- [3] Losing his / her place while reading.
- [4] Excessive clumsiness.
- [5] Headache, nausea or dizziness.
- [6] Tilting the head to one side.
- [7] Frequent daydreaming.
- [8] Using a finger as a place mark while reading.
- [9] Performing below potential.
- [10] Rubbing eyes repeatedly.

Strategies for Enhancing Reading Skills

(a) Creating in students an interest in reading

The general attitude of students towards study of languages and that of other knowledge-oriented subjects is different in the sense that even the sense of seriousness given to the study of subjects, in general, is not as much as that given to that of languages. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the teachers to create an interest in the study of languages and develop in them a taste for languages. Students must be made aware of the achievements of great leaders by means of reading. In short, students must be motivated a lot to develop the reading habit.

“Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers”.

- Harry S. Truman

(b) Choice of books for Reading

One cannot expect a person of technology to enjoy reading pieces of literature, nor can a person of literature be expected to enjoy reading books on science and technology. It does not mean that a person of technology is not interested in literature, but everyone has some choice. Choice of books is like choice of friends. Two persons with totally contradictory characteristics may not agree with each other in many aspects. In short, the choice of books lies in the taste of the reader. No worthwhile result can be achieved by means of force. Anything that is done by means of force may have pernicious effects.

(c) Reading to be made Purposeful

The purpose of reading must be made clear to students. Generally a book is read for pleasure or profit, or for both, but reading serves various purposes. Reading helps one obtain information, enrich vocabulary, learn expressions, spend time and so on. Suitable guidance is required for students even in the process of reading. Reading becomes more effective, when it is done with some purpose.

(d) Assignments on Reading

Since that many of our students do not go beyond text-book reading is an undeniable fact, challenging oral assignments based on reading can be given to our students. Assignments should not be the ‘mere reproduction’ of what had been read out, but it can be an intellectual and critical analysis of what had been read. An intellectual and critical analysis requires one’s full-fledged concentration and interest. Fluency in reading must be explained to students. Fluency does not mean ‘maximum speed’ in reading. International Reading Association defines ‘fluency in reading’ as ‘filled reading’. The sub-conscious process of learning a language is active when the learner’s mind is consciously occupied with challenging tasks, which call for the use of language and the combined enthusiasm of both the teachers and the taught. Students, besides developing their reading skills, must develop their critical and analytical abilities too.

(e) Group Activities

Students can be split into groups and involved in the active process of reading. Teachers can encourage students to discuss various subjects, enrich vocabulary, learn expressions, and have intellectual arguments, debate contradictions and so on. Such language-based activities will create an interest in students in reading. Reading should be followed by various activities.

(f) Continuous Assessment

An assessment of difficult level of students, during the process of developing the reading skills, in terms of

vocabulary, syntax and thought-content is vital for achieving the objective.

(g) Guidance

Guidance on active, passive reading, slow and fast reading, note-making, hints-developing, comprehending, positive and negative analysis of views, developing thoughts will stimulate the interest of students and bring a fruitful result. Proper guidance or a word of encouragement during a failure, non-developing stage or progressive stage is worth more than an hour of praise after success.

(h) Role of Library:

A good academic has a library even at home. The library has a key role in enhancing the reading skills of students. The assistance of librarians to students in locating books requires a strong sense of devotion. A library not properly utilized is synonymous to a haunted house with all its worn out household items being not properly used. A library with a collection of good books is the 'storehouse of knowledge'. The librarians should be sensitive to the thirst of readers for knowledge.

(i) Use of pre-reading strategies:

An avid reader must accumulate vast amounts of information that must be digested and understood before beginning reading. Use of pre-reading strategies is essential for better understanding of what is read. This also helps readers avoid making hasty judgments. Logical analysis is very essential in the process.

Conclusion:

Reading not only makes a full man but also makes a good writer. As a ship is guided by the lighthouse, one is guided by good books. Books make one think. Books are better than teachers. They never scold, criticize or laugh at one. They are available to all round the clock. Any excuse for not reading shall be an excuse for lack of success and prosperity in one's professional career. It shall be considered 'dereliction' of duty on the part of the teachers, if students are not constantly motivated to enhance their reading skills, because the non-reading students are the greatest problem in the field of education.

References:

- Bhaskar W W S, Prabhu N S, English Through Reading
- Grayling A.C, Financial Times, (in a review of A History of Reading by Alberto Manguel)
- Payal Chanania, Upgrade Reading Skills: Stay Ahead of Competition
- Autobiography of Malcolm X, 1964
- Surveys on Reading Skills
- Survey on Students' Eyesight

This academic article was published by The International Institute for Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open Access Publishing service based in the U.S. and Europe. The aim of the institute is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the publisher can be found in the IISTE's homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

The IISTE is currently hosting more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals and collaborating with academic institutions around the world. **Prospective authors of IISTE journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:**

<http://www.iiste.org/Journals/>

The IISTE editorial team promises to review and publish all the qualified submissions in a fast manner. All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Printed version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

