

READING COMPREHENSION IN ENGLISH: BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Reading comprehension has been described as a hierarchy of discrete skills or as a process associated with general thinking and solving problem. Not everyone knows exactly ways to avoid being bewildered and confused in comprehending. This paper, based on secondary research, will discuss three aspects of reading comprehension: its importance, the barriers a reader may struggle in reading, and some proposed strategies for better comprehensive reading. The findings of the research indicate that there are many problems that contribute to not deeply understanding while reading, and reading issues are more than trouble understanding or remembering what ones have read. The paper draws the conclusion that despite reading encounters, reading comprehension can get better with building vocabulary success and appropriate reading methods.

Keywords: barriers, English, reading comprehension, solutions

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a part of our lives, and it gives us more knowledge as well as it is an effective way to entertain. Therefore, reading comprehension is an extremely important skill for individuals. Hellyer, Robinson, and Sherwood (2001), as well as Kalayci (2012) stated that reading is a self-discovery process. In this process, the reader contacts directly the materials, by investing in both cognitive and metacognitive efforts to decompose new knowledge in order to make or infer meaning. From this point of view, it is clear to say reading comprehension is the final product of the process. People think that reading comprehension is passive, but it is actually an active process. As Block (1992) indicates, reading is such a hidden process that it is often unnoticed in the language classroom. Therefore, learning reading comprehension is completely depended on the reader. It is right that the reader needs to add knowledge themselves to enhance reading comprehension. However, it is not easy to learn a foreign language because of some requirements in reading comprehension. There are certain difficulties for people to understand the text. Thus, this paper, with the purpose to help the learner advance in their reading comprehension level will discuss the importance of reading, barriers to reading comprehension and ways to enhance the reading skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In “The role of reading in language learning” research, Julia (n.d, p.2) mentioned the role of reading in foreign language. She stated that reading played an important role in learning the second language. In addition, from her own experience as well as from observing two other learners, she has found ways to provide effective advice on improving reading skills.

Based on Julia's experience, she had planned to improve her reading skills since she was a primary student. She started reading short stories, and comics that gave her interests in reading. Later on, in high school, she continued finding books or other reading materials which enhance both grammar structures and reading comprehension skills. She also shared that one of her most inspirational English books was "A Tale of Two Cities" written by Charles Dickens.

Similar to the 2 learners Julia observed, they also had a process to improve their reading comprehension. Since they were young, they learned to read bilingual books, even reading the native language books to understand the content of an article. They continue to search for many English books related to their interests such as motorcycles and romantic stories. As a result, they built vocabulary success and extended grammar structures when they were high school students. The key is that they were self-discipline and had a reasonable time schedule. These helped them succeed in conquering the second language. Moreover, Renandya (2007, p.144-145) pointed 5 effective ways of learning in his article. First of all, students need to be familiar, "flooded" in the materials, until they are "hooked" on reading. Second, they choose the readings themselves in the favorite field. Third, the readings are varied on the subject and genre. Fourth, the readings are not too difficult for learner to understand. Fifth, there are post-reading activities that readers do, for example, designing a bookmark, designing a poster, reading out interesting sections, copying interesting words and useful expressions. These 5 ways will help the reading skills in advance, which can make reading texts more interesting.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The importance of reading in learning English

Learning English can easily be understood as learning a new language. When learning a new language, people have to focus on learning four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Especially, reading comprehension is certainly important for English learners. Reading is described as a means of communication and the main goal of it is to understand the meaning of printed materials and written materials. If people cannot understand what the materials mean, they will have difficulty in acquiring new knowledge.

To be precise, the meaning of reading is to understand, and reading is always in parallel with comprehending. When the learners said they could only read and could not understand, that means they cannot get the meaning of reading. According to Williams (1984) the role of reading when learning a foreign language is that learners can practice the language through listening and speaking. The language which learners acquire through reading skills can be reused for writing skills, or learners can learn how to make sense of texts in order to get the right information for them. Rivers and Temperley (1978) provide further details on why readers should engage in reading activities such as gathering information for a specific purpose, communicating with friends through correspondence or reading about what is happening or has happened in the world (recorded in newspapers, magazines, and reports).

Through reading, readers have developed all skills about intellectuality and knowledge. Specifically, one can broaden and flourish more ideas and arguments. Thanks to such intellectual impact, readers gain ability to learn speaking and writing skills in a much more effective way. In addition to enlarging knowledge, people can gain more background information on the society and the world. It also helps the reader to complete the target language in writing such as sentence structure and the usage of words. For details, reading helps improve the vocabulary fastest and naturally. In reading the text reader should use a highlight to learn more new words and collocation. Learning new grammar through sentences, paragraphs is a good idea to enhance grammar. When having a broad understanding, the learners can hear and talk about their area of interest. They also gain experience in writing skills because of being familiar with many styles, different writing styles. In addition, the reading material also provides the topic for the reader to discuss, encourage engagement in communication. Therefore, the learners will feel excited when learning a new language.

The encounters in reading comprehension

Lack of vocabulary

Vocabulary acts as a vital role in learning English particularly and language learning in general. Vocabulary is essential for learning 4 English skills: reading, speaking, writing and listening. It can be denied that with deficiency vocabulary, people cannot communicate and express their feeling fully both in form of spoken and written naturally. They might even misunderstand the conversation due to the limited vocabulary in listening and reading. It is clear that the more people master vocabulary the more they can speak, write, read and listen as desired. According to Wilkins in Thornbury (2002), people cannot convey their ideas without grammar, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed. It means that even someone has excellent grammar, it will be useless if they do not have a rich vocabulary. Most of the learners have difficulty in English reading comprehension because of poor vocabulary. Based on the results of the survey, the majority of people started learning English from elementary school to college while their vocabulary is still inadequate. That is to say their vocabulary is not enough to communicate with native speakers. People tend to avoid communication.

The connection between vocabulary and reading comprehension is close knit. It is clear that vocabulary is a fundamental function in reading comprehension as it represents for the background knowledge in the reading. Vocabulary is also considered as a key to express the meaning of words in reading, from which people can understand what implied in texts. Joshi and Aaron (2000) state that vocabulary knowledge is a strong evaluation of reading ability when analysis reading speed with decoding and understanding. Obviously, individual differences in reading ability cause individual differences in vocabulary success. Therefore, a good reader needs time to accumulate and memorize the new words they have met, they have to use methods to remember and achieve the number of new words.

Ineffective reading method

Not only does the lack of vocabulary matters, but also the need to improve reading comprehensibility poses another challenge for readers. The reading comprehension text is often quite broad and strange, requiring the reader to understand the main content of the reading. Many people are not aware of the reading purpose, as a result it is difficult to understand a long reading and large knowledge of contents. Stated in *esl.fis.edu*, the way one reads a book or a text depends very much on the reason for reading it.

For example, the way when reading a novel is different from the way reading a textbook or a comprehension reading. When reading novels, one tends to read to not only grasp the main content of story but also to contemplate its sophisticated content. In addition, reading books or textbooks just provide the information and values to readers depending on reading purposes. Such purpose also requires one to recognize the reading structure. Adler noted that knowing the structure of the reading helps learners to generate ideas and remember what they read. Therefore, the readers can understand deeply the content of the reading comprehension. Whether readers own achievement level or not, comprehending reading still represents a hard work that requires people to be more laborious and have proper reading methods to achieve the results matching their expectations.

Proposed strategies to reading barriers

Vocabulary success through motivation

As one in many suggested ways to improve vocabulary in reading, there is the Rs of vocabulary method according to Judy (2008) stated in her book *Teaching brain to read: Strategies for improving fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension*. As implied in this book, vocabulary success is built due to three components working in sequence and in parallel that results in three strategies: resonate, reinforce, and rehearse. These strategies both aim to keeping language learners motivated and enriching vocabulary and skills in expressive language. Though, in this part, the first strategy will be discussed.

The core meaning of the first strategy, “resonation” strategy, is to motivate learners and maintain their attention by engaging them in activities so that they can attend closer to the sensory input of information. Therefore, it comes to resonate through motivation. To inspire readers’ effort in building individual vocabulary, the strategy needed should resonate their interests and learning style preferences. Considering this, learners will recognize and internalize the value of vocabulary improvement. For interest, a reader who is into business development, education or politics will feel motivated since they have ability to describe and learn about living word when they absorb specialty words of those fields. If they are analytical learners, they might increase vocabulary through what they read, think, debate and problem solve. Moreover, they need to create individual connections. This means that one should be aware of words in daily life. For instance, a basketball itself is fun to bounce. Yet, when learners are given instructions with resonate strategy, they can successfully build manipulation of the basketball. Others action comes up with that basketball such as dribbling, passing or throwing into basket. The basketball is now more than a bouncing ball.

Removable keys reading techniques

It sometimes happens to readers that regardless of reading ability, they encounter difficulties in comprehending passages with no recollection or background knowledge even misunderstanding. Those long and intricate textbook chapters and research articles can even cause confusion for readers with high achievement level. Another widely known reading technique is removable keys, also known as skimming and scanning in reading comprehension. Students can also use skimming and scanning in while-reading exercises.

Fundamentally, skimming is used with the purpose of covering the general contents of the text. The skimming can simply be done by reading only the first sentence or the first and the last sentence of each paragraph, especially noticing the proper nouns, dates and strange words. These

words can be useful for comprehension later. After having skimmed the text, readers can read again the whole paragraph in more details, more slowly, carefully and specific information. Readers now can guess the main idea of a piece. Similar to skimming, scanning is a selective reading method. This scanning method is suitable for searching a particular fact or information. Despite the fact that readers may not carefully read the paragraph, but they have obtained needed information to accurately capture what the author implies and wants to convey.

CONCLUSION

From all the findings mentioned, it can be seen that reading has a significant role in acquiring new knowledge. Through reading, readers can obtain skills about intellectuality and knowledge. In other words, reading is a means of communication as both background knowledge along with the vocabulary, ideas acquired when reading can be reused for writing or speaking skills effectively. On the other hand, there are some certain obstacles preventing people from reading comprehension. They are inadequate vocabulary and improper reading method. These two problems lead to the fact that readers cannot deeply understand the content of text. Accordingly, better strategies for reading are proposed as enhancing reading vocabulary and removable keys reading technique. It is surely fundamental to be aware of the importance of reading, find out and choose appropriate approaches to become a comprehensive reader as well.

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