

LANGUAGE IN INDIA
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow
Volume 10 : 7 July 2010
ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.
Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.
Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.
B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.
A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.
Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.
K. Karunakaran, Ph.D.
Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.
S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

Using a Reading Material for Interactive Reading

M. Hemamalini, M.A. (Ling), M.A. (Eng), Ph.D.
K. Devadoss, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Abstract

Reading is essentially an active as well as a communicative process. It is an important language skill required for academic and professional purposes. Quick, efficient and imaginative reading techniques are essential to achieve academic success. One's professional performance also definitely depends on the quantity and quality of reading. In the learning process, reading comprehension follows the listening comprehension. It is the listening ability, which enhances one's reading comprehension.

This paper calls for doing away with the conventional method of teaching in developing comprehension skills by introducing the Interactive Method and argues for the utilization of groups of students. In this context, the students are first exposed to listening, and then reading. They are required to discuss before taking up writing skills. Hence, interactive skills and group tasking, necessary for inculcating communication skills in the long run, have been successfully attempted.

Key words: reading techniques, professional performance, interactive skills, group tasking

Importance of Reading for Academic Achievement

Reading plays a major role in the learning process. Reading technical materials involves a complex process of obtaining discipline-specific information and retaining the same for future use and reference. Reading could be quite a challenging activity because of the complexity involved – comprehension is not always simple. Reading needs better

concentration and motivation and especially reading of technical materials needs critical analysis and evaluative understanding.

Reading is an important skill by which profound ideas and observations of the writer gently flow into the minds of the readers. Moreover, it is a communicative process to meet the academic and professional needs. Thus, students pursuing professional courses such as engineering need excellent reading skills because of their need to get exposed to different kinds of materials.

Needed: Effective Linking of Four Processes

Efficient reading could be achieved with the effective linking of the four processes: decoding, comprehending, text analysis and response. The process of reading could easily be influenced by social, cultural, educational, professional and intellectual frames of reference (Rizvi, 2005:219). In order to overcome any possible negative influence of these frames of reference, the basic purpose of reading should clearly be identified.

In academic contexts, a student has to read and interpret textbooks, research papers and articles in technical journals, teaching notes, notices, internet resources, technical reports, directories, encyclopedias, laboratory instruction sheets, safety manuals and regulations and reference materials. Unless the student reads with a purpose and comprehends the text clearly he or she may not be efficient in his or her academic activities as well as in his or her chosen profession. Hence, it is imperative to identify dynamic and productive grasping techniques to improve reading.

The Goal of This Paper

The present study aims to improve students' reading comprehension focusing on analysis activities.

Comprehension in reading refers to the identification of the central theme, supporting details and the aspect/s around which the ideas are developed. Comprehension of a technical text needs critical and analytical thinking which leads to the effective linking of the factors involved in the reading process.

The Study

Researchers conducted an experiment in a class of undergraduate engineering students. The material given to them comprised of both the reading and writing aspects of the language.

The legacy of teaching comprehension exercise through the Conventional Method of Teaching (CMT), by merely reading the given passage and answering the questions appended to it, was dispensed with. This enabled us to ensure that the skills of reading and writing were imparted in an enjoyable manner.

Developing Comprehension

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 7 July 2010

M. Hemamalini, M.A. (Ling), M.A. (Eng), Ph.D. and K. Devadoss, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Using a Reading Material for Interactive Reading

The word *comprehension* means ‘the power of the mind to understand’. It has two parts, namely, reading and interpretation. While reading the given passage, one realizes the content, the attitude of the author to the subject, and peculiar diction through four types of reading such as skimming, scanning, receptivity (subsidiary details) and critical.

The ultimate purpose of a comprehension exercise is to test one’s proficiency in the use of language through two skills - reading and writing.

The analytical activity of using group work in teaching comprehension allows the two parts of reading and interpretation to be developed simultaneously.

Methodology

A passage was selected for use in the class by the faculty. Loud reading of the given passage was done by a couple of students in the class. Twenty students who volunteered to take up the task were then divided into groups of five each. Each group was assigned a special task. The first five were to prepare five True or False statements on the passage. Another five were assigned five Short Answer Questions. The third and fourth groups were asked to frame Completion of Statements and Identification of Difficult Words for giving contextual meaning. Apart from the 20, one student was asked to summarize the whole activity.

The questions prepared by the students were then read out, reserving the answers. The teacher reframed the questions wherever necessary, pointing out correct answers. Finally, the teacher’s own contribution was read out and compared to that of the students for improvement.

In this interactive reading, the whole class was involved. That is, the class was wholly involved both in reading and writing. One among the group of five read, while the other four gathered material from the loud reading. Then, each one set one question, a True or false statement, a Completion of Statement and a Difficult Word in the passage. The group then reassembled to consolidate the questions. The final Questions were then prepared and made ready for presentation.

Effectiveness of the Study

This method introduced a **learner-centered approach** through group-tasking. Learner participation becomes indispensable and the learner understands the passage thoroughly. By analyzing the given text students noticed that framing relevant and appropriate and grammatically correct questions is more difficult than answering as in the conventional method. When these two went together there was greater understanding of the matter on hand.

Another skill-preparation for group work related to activities or performance that are needed as part of participating in the processes of placement for jobs. Development of communication skills, especially presentation skills, is given special attention in this group work. Simultaneously, the important aspect of fluency of language received greater attention as part of the preparation, and this was enjoyable.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 7 July 2010

M. Hemamalini, M.A. (Ling), M.A. (Eng), Ph.D. and K. Devadoss, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Using a Reading Material for Interactive Reading

Note that in order to make the exercise effective, teachers have to monitor every process.

Skills Improved

Proficient reading depends on the ability to recognize words quickly and effortlessly (Adams Marilyn Jager 1990:27). Many approaches that are in practice to improve reading comprehension usually comprise a method where students answer teachers' questions, write responses to questions or both. Here, many times students are tempted to write a specific portion of the passage related to the question without making any change.

The technique used for the present study, on the other hand, motivates the students to actively participate in the activity given. The objective of developing the interactive comprehension skills was easily achieved by the teacher. The experimented analytical activity encouraged the students to interact with text and make them critical readers.

In this focused activity, students become aware of text construction and their interaction with the text improves their cognitive development. In the language classes, passages from various text books could be used for this task. Through this activity, students could improve listening skill, reading skill, writing skill, framing questions, sentence patterns, functional vocabulary and, above all, a thorough understanding of the passage. This interactive reading would also help the students to prepare for the same type of tasks they would encounter in other subjects like filling in tables, labeling diagrams, preparing to make presentation, and help them learn to use the texts without plagiarizing them.

On the whole, the approach used for the study brings the following changes among the students during the reading activity.

1. Distinguish an active reader from a passive reader who normally reads the passage without understanding its meaning.
2. Bring out a better grasping of the text.
3. Improve all the skills of the language.
4. Help frame questions to bring out a better idea about the passage.
5. Motivate students to think aloud.
6. Direct students to make predictions on the theme of the passage.
7. Uncover the text structure.
8. Bring forth a clarity in framing questions, sentence patterns and in the use of functional grammar related to writing skills during the generation of questions.
9. Improve the functional vocabulary.
10. Create a visual representation of the theme of the passage.

Conclusion

The strategy used in the present study not only improves the level of understanding of writing but also involves a gradual release of responsibility. That is, instead of teachers asking questions and students answering them, this approach gives more responsibility to the students where both questioning and answering are done by the students. This technique

plays a pivotal role in developing and honing the skills of reading comprehension and at the same time it is easy for the teachers to identify the students who have difficulty in the correct usage of grammar. On the whole, the elaborate investigation of the subject and a through interaction between the students are made possible and this results in clarity about the subject of the text as well as skills of the language.

References

Adams, Marilyn Jager, *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*, MIT Press, 1990

Rizvi Ashraf M, *Effective Technical Communication*, Tata McGraw Hill Publishing Company Limited, New Delhi, 2005.

Annexure I

Passage given to the students for reading

When the first white men arrived in Samoa, they found blind men, who could see well enough to describe things in detail just by holding their hands over objects. In France, just after the First World War, Jules Romain tested hundreds of blind people, and found a few who could tell the difference between light and dark. He narrowed their photosensitivity down to areas on the nose or in the fingertips. In Italy, the neurologist Cesare Lombroso discovered a blind girl who could 'see' with the tip of her nose and the lobe of her left ear. When a bright light was shone unexpectedly on her, she winced. In 1956 a blind schoolboy in Scotland was taught to differentiate between colored lights and learned to pick out bright objects several feet away. In 1960 a medical board examined a girl in Virginia and found that, even with thick bandage over her eyes, she was able to distinguish different colors and read short sections of large print. The phenomenon is obviously not new, but it has reached new peaks of sensitivity in a young woman from a mountain village in the rural.

Rose Kuleshova can see with her fingers. She is not blind, but because she grew up in a family of blind people, she learned to read Braille to help them and then went on to teach herself to do other things with her hands. In 1962 her Physician took her to Moscow, where she was examined by the Soviet Academy of Science, and emerged a celebrity, certified as genuine. The neurologist Shaefer made an intensive study with her and found that, securely blindfolded with only her arms stuck through a screen, she could differentiate among three primary colors. To test the possibility that the cards reflected heat differently, he heated some and cooled others without affecting her response to them. He also found that she could read newsprint and sheet music under glass, so texture was giving her no clues. Tested by the psychologist N ovomeisky. She was able to identify the colour and shape of patches of light projected on to her palm or on to a screen. She underwent rigidly controlled tests with a blindfold and a screen and a piece of card around her neck so wide that she could not see

around it. Rosa read the small print in a newspaper with her elbow. And in the most convincing demonstration of all, she repeated these things with someone standing behind her pressing hard on her eyeballs. Nobody can cheat under this pressure; it is even difficult to see clearly for minutes after it is released.

M. Hemamalini, M.A. (Ling), M.A. (Eng), Ph.D.
Department of English
Sri Shakthi Institute of Engineering and Technology
Sri Shakthi Nagar, L&T By-pass
(Via) Civil Aerodrome, Venkittapuram Post
Coimbatore- 641 006
Tamilnadu, India
hema_malinimoh@yahoo.co.in

K. Devadoss, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.
Department of English
Kumaraguru College of Technology
Chinnavedampatty Post
Saravanampatty
Coimbatore- 641 006
Tamilnadu, India
dosskutty@yahoo.co.in