



# Enhancing Reading Skills of Students Learning English as a Second Language

(R. Navin Kumar, Ph.D. Scholar, Arignar Anna Govt. Arts College, Villupuram)

**Abstract** - The most common problem that the students of both Schools and Colleges facing since the beginning of learning English as Foreign Language is comprehending any text in English. Of the four skills- Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW) that one ought to be mastered oneself for learning any language, the Reading Skill is the most important one which demands more attention, patience and consistent practice. Since for comprehending anything correctly, one has to be a good reader. Skimming and Scanning play a major role in this regard. A good reader is the one who possesses the ability of reading any given content at the right pace and simultaneously able to cognize the matter. The author of the paper has analyzed the impact of year long Lockdown on the students' reading skill. This paper also incorporates importance of reading, various types along with merits and demerits of each type and also offered some of the suggestions for improvising this faculty in students.

## Meaning of Reading:

Reading is one of the four skills of language learning. The first two skills are Listening and Speaking. After acquiring these skills, a person starts learning to read and write a language in order to have mastery over it.

Reading, like Listening, is a decoding process – a process to recognize graphic symbols and their corresponding vocal sounds. It is a very complicated process which involves many physical, intellectual and often emotional factors. Any of the above said factors would have its impact on reading.

Reading, though a passive act, is the most important skill of language learning. Learning to read a language helps to decipher the whole world. For example, by reading good English, we can develop a feeling

and insight into the working of the languages. It holds the key to the development of real communicative competence in English.

According to Tarigan (2008:7), Reading is a process of getting the message of the writer through words or written languages. Anderson (in Cahyani 2007: 99) clearly states that Reading is a process of understanding the meaning implied in a text and looking at the ideas contained in the written word. According to Sutari “Reading is a process of getting the meaning of something written or printed by interpreting its characters or symbols. Reading is a second language that is defined as a process of grasping full linguistics meaning in the new language through the symbol used to represent it.” In the words of Grellet, Reading is an active skill. It constantly involves guessing, predicting, checking, and asking oneself questions (Khoiriyah:2010:1).

According to Nunan (2003:68), Reading is a fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their own background knowledge to build meaning. Mikulecky (2011:5) states that reading is a complex, conscious and unconscious mental process in which the reader uses a variety of strategies to reconstruct the meaning that the author is assumed to have intended, based on data from the text and from the reader’s prior knowledge.

### **The Importance of Reading Comprehension**

Reading is a threshold for learning. It is part and parcel of our daily lives. This act is performed both for pleasure and information. It helps us to discover the world. Knowing the importance of reading comprehension, our present School as well as College curriculum has started giving more importance to reading comprehension at almost all levels. Teachers have started focusing not only on language development, but also on reading strategy practice. Reading comprehension is nothing but the readers’ skill of understanding a written passage of text. This skill is very essential to be atop in academic, professional and personal life. According to Barack Obama, Reading is the gateway skill that makes all other learning possible. As with real reading, the ability to comprehend subtlety and complexity comes only with time and a lot of experience. If you don’t adequately acquire those skills, moving out into the real world of real people can actually become quite scary. (Jeffrey Kluger). Such a skill has been put at its brink due to the inexorable lockdown by the Govt. Since the classes went on virtual, there was a little opportunity for the students to read out from their text and the teachers to correct them. The lock down might have enriched students’ skill of listening but it has brought in an adverse effect on their reading skill. Substantially speaking, reading is about understanding written texts. But understanding cannot be wrought by taking a simple look over the text; rather it is a complex activity which involves two related processes i.e word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols

correspond to the spoken language; whereas comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text.

## **The Benefits of Reading:**

Reading has a number of benefits. The followings are the important benefits of reading

### **Reading helps to discover the world**

Reading like Listening is a gateway for learning everything around us. It helps to learn novel things and educate ourselves in any domain. There are a number of books available in the market on almost all the subjects. More over the easy accessibility to Internet helps to read a lot. All we need to do is to have inexorable interest for learning and find time for it.

### **Reading develops our imagination and creativity**

When we watch television or a movie, there is no necessity for any imagination, since everything we get visually on the screen. Whereas so far as a book is concerned, everything is in written form and as such our minds have to pasteurize everything while reading. This act will automatically develop our creativity and imagination.

### **Reading improves Vocabulary and Communication**

It is quite obvious that more one reads, more one gets to know pack of new words. This will help for both oral and written communication. As we are familiar with more number of words, it will not be a problem for expressing our thoughts freely either orally or in blue and black. The larger our vocabulary, the more effectively we can learn. Hence it is advisable to have regular reading habit.

### **Reading improves concentration and reduces stress**

It is a proven fact that our stress can significantly be reduced by reading anything of our choice. When we intend to read, we should bear in mind that the chosen place should be conducive for reading. Then only we shall be able to focus with full concentration on the task assigned. We should consider the act of 'Reading' as a pleasure and not a pain. Once we take it as a pain, we may feel boredom. Hence we should read completely involved which will surely help to relax and feel calm.

## Types of Reading:

### Loud Reading

Loud Reading is also called as 'Oral Reading'. Many students of lower classes prefer Loud Reading. Young children are greatly motivated by Loud Reading and can therefore be well utilized for practicing the structures. This kind of reading helps to improve one's pronunciation. "When students are provided frequent opportunities to orally read text, they make significant gains in fluency" (Alber - Morgan, 2006, p. 273).

#### Merits:

1. Any error in pronunciation can well be noticed and corrected then and there.
2. The auditory organs are well trained.
3. Loud Reading develops confidence and helps to drive away shyness and enhances the skill of oration.

#### Demerits:

1. Loud Reading will make one tired shortly.
2. It is not possible at all the places – especially in the libraries.
3. A group cannot go for Loud Reading simultaneously. Hence one has to wait for the other to complete reading and moreover while reading, others may or may not pay attention.

### Silent Reading

Silent Reading is a kind of reading which is more effective and therefore preferred by many. As one goes for higher education, it is advisable to go for Silent Reading. Hence in Silent Reading, we do not lose our energy. As long as the subject is interesting, we shall go on reading without getting tired. This act, of course, gives a sense of fulfillment and achievement.

**Merits:**

1. Unless Loud Reading, there is no energy loss in Silent Reading.
2. This might help for developing interest in reading.
3. This might pave way for intensive study.

**Demerits:**

1. Pronunciation checking is not possible.
2. The students, in the pretext of reading, simply while away time.
3. There is possibility for skipping the content which the students feel either uninteresting or difficult to understand.

**Intensive Reading**

Though there exist many types of learning like Loud Learning, Silent Learning, the one which plays a crucial role in the process of learning is Intensive Learning. It implies the skill of students to read not only for mere understanding meaning but also for mastering over the structures and vocabulary. Hence, Intensive Reading helps students to focus on accuracy. In the Intensive Reading, the learners focus on the language more than the text. The readers read in the text, focusing on the new vocabulary, grammatical forms and the purpose of the author and the problems of the text. "The readers carefully and closely read a short text with the intention of gaining an understanding of as much as detail as possible" (Scrivener, 1994, p.188).

**Merits:**

1. It enhances one's vocabulary power.
2. Apart from understanding the text, the reader is able to acquire a sound knowledge in grammar.
3. It improves critical thinking and analytical skills in the reader.

**Demerits:**

1. This is time consuming and the reader may lose interest and quit reading at any point of time.
2. There is slender scope for pleasure as this type of reading lays much stress on language's aspect.
3. Due to selective topics and lack of dynamism, it is hard to meet the students' learning needs of all round development in the skills like Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing etc.

## Extensive Reading

Extensive Reading is a type of reading which involves learners reading texts for enjoyment and to develop general reading skills. It is also called 'Rapid Reading' or 'Independent Silent Reading'. Here the learners shall ignore certain paragraphs or lines which they feel not so important and might jump on to the important and interested ones.

According to Thompson and Wyatt, the main purpose of Extensive Reading is to induce a taste for reading and it seeks by encouraging the habit of visualizing what is read to make reading a form visual instruction.

### Merits:

1. It helps to get necessary and relevant information within a short span of time.
2. It improves the reading speed and fluency of the reader.
3. It is helpful for self-study and assignment preparation.

### Demerits:

1. As reading takes place rapidly, some necessary points might be ignored.
2. The reader may commit grammatical error as it means a quick and rapid reading.

### Active and Passive Reading:

Every reader, most importantly students, should be an active reader. Active reader is the one who is able to guess what shall follow while going through a story and able to connect events in the text to prior knowledge or experience. To be successful in reading, one ought to possess the skill of active reading for it improves their reading comprehension, speed of reading, and enjoyment. On the other hand, a passive reader is the one who does not take in anything just read. The foremost difference between an active reader and a passive reader is the former reads ideas; while the latter reads words. A passive reader will just be intended to finish reading. But an active reader will aim to gain knowledge out of the text he/she reads. There is no role for critical thinking so far as passive reading is concerned.

## **Suggestions for Improving the Skill of Reading**

### **1. Be strong in vocabulary:**

Vocabulary plays a key role in mastering any language. The more the number of words one knows, the more effective one can be in learning and expressing one's thoughts. For improving vocabulary, students, from the beginning, should nurture the habit of reading English newspapers and watch English movies or regional movies with English sub titles. Whenever we come across any new word, we should immediately get to know its meaning. This will help us to be acquainted with more number of English words. This might seem to be somewhat ordeal and boredom in the beginning, but in course of time, continuous practice will improve understanding and make reading pleasurable.

### **2. Guessing the meaning from the context:**

Many a times, the context itself would help the readers to guess the meaning of unknown words. It provides readers with numerous clues to guess the meaning of unknown words. The main contextual clues are definitions, synonyms, antonyms, and examples and cause-effect relations.

### **3. Having a sound knowledge in grammar:**

It is quite obvious that stronger in grammar, easier it will be to comprehend anything by reading. Most of the students both schools and colleges turn a blind eye towards this. It results them finding very difficult to make a sentence error free. Unless one knows the sentence structure and the role each and every word in English plays, it will be difficult for the students to comprehend anything. Hence knowledge of grammar is vital for the readers to understand ideas. Therefore, it is very essential for the students to study grammar and have a sound grammatical knowledge.

### **4. Improve comprehension by being a voracious reader:**

Most people wish to be a voracious reader. Many unknown becomes known by being an extensive reader. The habit of reading helps to enhance our knowledge and be more successful in variety of fields. We should have the habit of regular reading, allotting convenient time for it and pre plan what should be read during the stipulated time. Forming Reading Groups and Books Clubs with the members of voracious readers shall support reading goals and offer plenty of opportunities for improving one's reading skill.



## Conclusion

This paper has clearly defined what is meant by Reading, the need for enhancing one's skill of Reading Comprehension, how to master over this skill and various benefits of acquiring the skill of Reading, different types of Reading with merits and demerits of each type and the author has also offered a few points for enhancing it.

## References:

- Küçükoglu, H. (2013). Improving Reading Skills Through Effective Reading Strategies. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 709–714. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.113>
- Bojovic, M. (2010). *Reading Skills and Reading Comprehension in English for Specific Purposes*.
- Rao, V. C., & Durga, M. (2018). *Developing Students' Writing Skills in English-A Process Approach*. 2.
- Amin, M. (2019). *Developing Reading Skills through Effective Reading Approaches*. 4, 35–40. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2557919>
- OKTAFIANA, A. (2014). *IMPROVING STUDENTS'READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH MIND MAPPING TECHNIQUE (An Action Research at the VIII-E Grade Students of SMP Negeri 7 Cilacap in the Academic Year of 2013/2014)*. UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH PURWOKERTO.
- Fahas, R. (2021). *IMPROVING THE STUDENTS'READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH REQUEST (RECIPROCAL QUESTION) STRATEGY FOR INDONESIAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL*. *SALEE: Study of Applied Linguistics and English Education*, 2(1), 37–50.
- MUSTIKASARI, J. (2015). *IMPROVING STUDENTS'READING COMPREHENSION BY USING LRD (LISTEN-READ-DISCUSS) STRATEGY AT SEVENTH GRADE OF MTsN PILANGKENCENG IN ACADEMIC YEAR OF 2015/2016*. Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo.
- Alber-Morgan, S. R. (2006). Ten ways to enhance the effectiveness of repeated readings. *Journal of Early and Intensive Behavior Intervention*, 3(3), 273.
- Scrivener, F. H. (2022). *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*. BoD–Books on Demand.
- <https://www.wordsworthelt.com/blog/teaching-reading-skills-to-english-as-a-second-language-learners/>
- <http://ddekun.edu.in/Files/2cfa4584-5afe-43ce-aa4b-ad936cc9d3be/Custom/4.%20Understand%20Language%20Skills%20READING%20AND%20WRITING.pdf>
- <https://www.edutopia.org/article/6-techniques-building-reading-skills-susan-barber>
- <https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/reading-comprehension-skills-english-language-learners>
- <https://www.jmu.edu/valleyscholars/files/studyreadingskills.pdf>
- [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261213403\\_Reading\\_Skills\\_and\\_Reading\\_Comprehension\\_in\\_English\\_for\\_Specific\\_Purposes/link/0f317533960f7f422f000000/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261213403_Reading_Skills_and_Reading_Comprehension_in_English_for_Specific_Purposes/link/0f317533960f7f422f000000/download)



[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257718591\\_Improving\\_Reading\\_Skills\\_Through\\_Effective\\_Reading\\_Strategies/link/551bd6d30cf2fe6cbf75f12b/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257718591_Improving_Reading_Skills_Through_Effective_Reading_Strategies/link/551bd6d30cf2fe6cbf75f12b/download)

<https://www.cal.org/caela/research/RAELL.pdf>

<https://www.atlantis-press.com/article/12520.pdf>

<https://pdfroom.com/books/developing-reading-skills-a-practical-guide-to-reading-comprehension-exercises/3kZdoJQ15M8/download>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331024294\\_Developing\\_Reading\\_Skills\\_through\\_Effective\\_Reading\\_Approaches/link/5c61d1d192851c48a9cd3d9e/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331024294_Developing_Reading_Skills_through_Effective_Reading_Approaches/link/5c61d1d192851c48a9cd3d9e/download)

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1053627.pdf>

<http://manglar.uninorte.edu.co/bitstream/handle/10584/718/45686016.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

