PRACTICES IN GENERATING

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' LITERACY SET

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ABSTRACT

As stated by Nunan (1999), generally, most people read books in order to get some information or for pleasure. Through reading, people are processing ideas that generated by others. Here, the ideas are transmitted through language. It happens along with listening, and assumed by some experts to become more and more important in foreign language classroom because reading provides inputs for the students. This article reviews the theoretical framework that has been adopted in some studies of elementary shcool students' reading comprehension. It covers some important theories of reading, teaching reading to young learners, reading comprehension and strategies in teaching reading comprehension.

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INTRODUCTION

Early literacy, a term used in recent educational term, ilustrate how young children gradually become aware of the uses of written language in their environment (Ashworth & Wakefield, 2005). This awareness of writing and reading is now considered as an integral part of children's early language development. This opinion goes with Mason and Allen (1986) who believe that developmental literacy learning occurs during the first years of child's life and is necessary to literacy acquisition.

This literacy development is influenced by child's earliest experiences with printed and stories. The interaction, that young children have with such literacy materials such as books, paper, and crayons and with the adults around them,isthe basic for reading and writing development. Children also need to observe their parents, other adults, or other siblings using literacy in everyday situations (Smith, 1988, as cited in Christie, et.al., 2003). So, they begin to learn about the practical uses of written language and to understand why reading and writing are important.

At the time children learn to read in school, Walker (1992) believes that the main reason why so many school children fail to learn to read has more to do with what goes on in schools than with what the children bring to school. Teacher should know how reading should be taught and how the goals of reading instruction should be formulated. An effective teacher wants first of all to know the purpose of his/her teaching, what he/she seeks to achieve, and then he/she sets about to organize the instructional procedures in

terms of what his pupils need so that these goals can be fully attained. Related to the instructional procedures, Tinker and McCullough (1975) say that the primary goal in reading instruction is to teach the reader to understand and respond to what he reads.

NATURE OF READING

As stated by Hudelson (1994 in Murcia, 2001), reading is a very complex process. In reading he added, "an individual constructs meaning through a transaction with written text that has been created by symbols that represent language". The transaction involves the reader's past experiences, language background, and cultural framework, as well as the reader's purpose for reading. In addition, Grabe (1991 in Murcia, 2001) also states that there are six general components of skills and knowledge that have been indentified in reading: automatic recognition skills, vocabulary and structural knowledge, formal discourse structure knowledge, content/world background knowledge, synthesis and evaluation skills/strategies, and metacognitive knowledge and monitoring skills.

Pumfrey (1977) argues that reading involves application, analysis, evaluation, and imagination. Reading is a process that requires thought. It is one activity through which the child's cognitive development can be furthered. Reading is not merely a matter of transferring printed symbols into oral forms. It is also an activity that involves mental process. It is more than

the ability to understand the explicit and implicit meaning. Therefore, in reading the readers interact their existing knowledge with the text.

TEACHING READING FOR CHILDREN

Traditional wisdom, over the centuries, has believes that the age of six or seven, for most children, is the critical period when learning to read comes most easily (Krogh, 1994). Nevertheless, Krogh argues that there have always been those who believe that age two is not too early to expose children to printed words. It means the earlier we expose children to the reading, the more easily they become accustomed to it and accept it as a natural part of their learning. Kismadi (2004) adds, based on the literature available, that the earlier a child learns a second language the better for the child, at least before puberty.

Furthermore, Nunan (1999) states that, people generally read books mainly in order to get some information or for pleasure. Through reading, people are involved in processing ideas generated by others. Here, the ideas are transmitted through language. It happens along with listening, and assumed by some experts to become more and more important in foreign language classroom because reading provides inputs for the students.

Reading is defined as reacting to a written text as a piece of communication. Through reading, we can assume some communicative intent on the writers part which the reader has some purpose in attempting to understand (Wallace, 1992). In short, the way we perceive reading behaviour

is linked to different reader purpose which, in turn, are linked to situational context and also to social expectation (e.g., in classroom, families, or particular religions settings).

Children's enjoyment and appreciation of books, their interest in a variety of print (e.g., sign, labels, and advertisement), and their attempt at their own writing are the motivational factors of children's 'literacy set' (Holdaway, 1979, cited in Fisher, 1991). Here are Basic General Principles of Reading proposed by Alma Flor Ada and Maria Pilar de Olave:

1. Learning to read and write should be an extension of the process of learning to speak.

2. Children should be motivated; they will grasp more easily what has meaning and interest for them.

3. Reading to children and telling them stories will make them better readers.

4. Reading materials should be written in the clear and simple language children are familiar with.

5. Teaching of reading and writing should be done simultaneously

6. There is a correlation between children's oral language development and their reading ability.

7. Children learn to read more quickly and easily when there is a reason for doing so (in Curtain and Pesola, 1988: 138).

Parallel to what Curtain and Pesola said above, Cameron (2001) also argues that reading does link to speaking as written words are 'decoded' into spoken words. When skilled readers make sense of written text, they may turn text into talk and go straight to understanding.

Children have to understand the association between what they hear and what they read. Children need to learn how to recognize sounds and letters. It will be more useful to let children play with the sounds as they repeat a word they are reading on a card or in their book (Slattery and Willis, 2001). Learning English is not difficult if children can read in their own language, even if it is written in a different script. Teaching situation is the most important factor when deciding how you should teach reading.

Another way to make children a better reader is by telling them stories. Wright (cited in Musthafa, 2004), an expert on children's literature, said the same comment about the children's need for stories. He explores deeply about how dependent the children to the role of story in educational development of their cognitive, emotive, and their psychomotor environment. Story is helpful to reach their response to learn and their consciousness to reserve the substance of what they learn. In the same vein, some studies (e.g., Altwerger, Diehl-Faxon, & Dockstader-Anderson, 1985; Heath, 1982; Holdaway, 1979; Snow & Ninio, 1986; Taylor, 1986; Yaden, Smolkin, & Conlon, 1989) have shown that parent-child story book reading is an ideal context for children to receive all of the previously mentioned factors that promote literacy acquisition (Christie, 2003).

READING COMPREHENSION

Comprehension is the primary objective of reading. According to Webster's Dictionary, comprehension is "the capacity for understanding fully; the act or action of grasping with the intellect." In the same source, reading is define as "to receive or take in the sense of (as letters or symbols) by scanning; to understand the meaning of written or printed matter; to learn from what one has seen or found in writing or printing." Comprehension therefore is the capacity for understanding thoughts and ideas in a written or printed matter.

Sahu and Kar (1994 cited in Ismini, 2000) state that reading comprehension is the process of inferring the ideas and information that the author intends to convey. The comprehension itself depends on the information contained and the background information available with the reader. Concerning the reading comprehension, there are some findings which state that a successful reader is affected by some factors. One of them is what Goodman and Smith (1996, cited in Singhal, 1998) claims that successful readers will consciously or unconsciously use the specific behaviours to enhance their comprehension. For example, readers apply some strategies and use their background knowledge to improve their comprehension of the text. Bartoli and Botel (1988) suggest more about the factors involved in reading:

> Reading comprehension is a process that involves the orchestration of the reader's prior knowledge about the world

and about language. It involves such interrelated strategies as predicting, questioning, summarizing, determining meanings of vocabulary in context, monitoring one's own comprehension, and reflecting. The process also involves such affective factors as motivation, ownership, purpose, and self-esteem. It takes place in and is governed by a specific context, and it is dependent on social interaction. It is the integration of all these processes that accounts for comprehension. They are not isolable, measurable sub factors. They are holistic processes for constructing meaning (in Weaver, 1994, p. 44).

So, effective reading comprehension involves not only understanding cognitive process of the message on a printed page but also as a metacognitive process in which readers are aware of and have control over their comprehension (Taylor et. al., 1988). It means that there are some factors that influence reading comprehension performance.

From the definitions above, it can be concluded that reading is a mental activity of inferring ideas and information both for recreational and functional purposes. There are some factors that influence reading comprehension. They are individual development, experiential knowledge, cognitive and metacognitive ability, attitude, information contained, and background information.

In order to comprehend reading materials successfully, according to Smith and Robinson (1980), most readers need help:

1. To develop strategies for sampling and selecting graphic, syntactic, and semantic cues;

2. To develop prediction strategies to anticipate meaning, syntactic patterns, and graphic features not yet seen;

3. To develop confirmation strategies to check predictions against subsequent cues;

4. To develop correction strategies when miscues occur which interfere with comprehension;

5. To develop flexible strategies for dealing with a wide variety of materials:

   a. Literature

   b. Nonfiction

   c. Instructions and directions

   d. Content area material

   e. Other material

6. To develop critical strategies for judging validity of information in reading;

7. To develop flexibility in use of the reading process for different purposes:

   a. Pleasure

   b. Quick review

   c. Specific information seeking

   d. Other purpose (pp. 205-206)

STRATEGIES IN TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION

In reaching the goal of teaching reading to children especially to make them comprehend the reading, teachers should make their effective strategies

and instruction. Since strategies are processes rather then sets of facts, modelling plays a key role in teacher's instruction. This opinion is supported by the theory claimed by the interactionists who say that adult play an important part in children's language acquisition (www.earlyliteracy.com).

So in this context, to ensure success in learning a foreign language included reading, children should have a great deal of exposure to be engaged in, and support for the language they are learning (Musthafa, 2004). This means that their teacher should give them ample opportunities to hear and see the English language being used in communicative purposes in their social environment. Additionally, they must provide them opportunities to use English. To enhance the learning, the teachers also should give them a necessary support so that they feel that what they are learning is useful and interesting.

From the theories above, teachers should take the reading instruction into a good consideration. As the comprehension is considered as the heart of reading instruction, the major goal of the instruction should be the provision of learning activities that will enable students to think about and react to what they read means to read for meaning. Tierney, Readence, and Dishner (1990) propose nine strategies which are useful for the improvement of reading comprehension:

1. PreP Technique

    The PreReading Plan (PreP) is developed with the goals: (1) to give an opportunity to generate what they know about a topic and to

extend these ideas and evaluate them; and (2) to provide teachers with a procedure for assessing the adequacy of the students' prior knowledge about a specific topic, and for determining the language that students use to express their ideas.

The opportunities for their brainstorming, developing association for, and reflecting and reformulating students' ideas can be used to access what they know about a topic prior to reading. This knowledge about the topic then can be used to help them determine what is relevant and what is irrelevant. This strategy can be implemented by engaging students in group discussion around key concepts and analyzing the nature of student responses.

2. Anticipation Guide

The Anticipation Guide is designed to: (1) activate students' knowledge about a topic before reading, and (2) provide purpose by serving as a guide for subsequent reading. It attempts to enhance students' comprehension by having them react to a series of statements about a topic before they begin to read or to engage in any other form of information acquisition. It utilizes prediction by activating students' prior knowledge, and it capitalizes on controversy as a motivational device to get students involved in the material to be read.

3. Text Preview

The Text Preview determines to: (1) build students' background knowledge about a topic before reading; (2) motivate students to read; and (3) provide an organizational framework for comprehending a text.

When faced with a novel selection for example, students may have a difficult time with unfamiliar vocabulary, syntax, and/or text structure. This could be further complicated by a narrative where characters, setting, or evens are not made explicit and must be inferred. A text preview can give readers this information. It also serves to motivate students' interest because explicit connections are made between topics to be read and students' experiences.

4. Request Procedure

It design to encourage students to: (1) formulate their own questions about the material they are reading and develop questioning behaviour; (2) adopt an active inquiring attitude to reading; (3) acquire reasonable purposes for reading; and (4) improve their independent reading comprehension skills. Manzo, the originator of this procedure, suggest that while teacher questioning and purpose setting are important to reading comprehension, of greater importance is the development of the students' abilities to ask their own questions and set their own purposes for reading. He suggests that these skills facilitate the students' acquisition of an active, inquiring attitude and

their ability to examine alternatives and to originate information. These things he considers essential if students are to transfer problem-solving involvement to different contexts.

5. Question-Answer Relationships

This procedure is developed for enhancing students' ability to answer comprehension questions by giving them a systematic means for analyzing task demands of different question probes. Readers are encouraged to analyze the task demands of questions prior to answering them. Four principles of instruction to help readers analyze the task demands of questions are: (1) give immediate feedback; (2) progress from shorter to longer texts; (3) begin with questions for which the task demands is more straightforward to questions that require the use of multiple sources; and (4) develop independence by beginning with group learning experiences and progressing to individual and independent activities.

6. GIST

This procedure is developed to improve students' abilities to comprehend gist of paragraphs by providing "a prescription for reading from group sentence-by-sentence gist production to individual whole-paragraph gist production." This is an effective instructional

tool for guiding students' summary writing, which, in turn, improves their learning from text.

7. Explicit Teaching of Comprehension

It is intended as a framework for developing reading comprehension skills and strategies that are capable of applying to other reading situations without teacher support. These are some features that constitute Explicit Teaching:

a. Relevance: students are made aware of the purpose of the skill or strategy (the why; when; how; and where about the strategy).

b. Definition: students are informed as to how to apply the skills by making public the skill or strategy, modelling its use, discussing its range of utility, and illustrating what it is not.

c. Guided practice: students are given feedback on their own use of the strategy or skill.

d. Self-regulation: students are given opportunities to try out the strategy for themselves and develop ways to monitor their own use of the strategy or skill.

e. Gradual release of responsibility: the teacher initially models and directs the students' learning, as the lesson progresses, the teacher gradually gives more responsibility to the students.

f. Application: students are given the opportunity to try their skills and strategies in independent learning situations, including nonschool tasks.

8. Think-Alouds

Think-alouds are intended to help readers examine and develop reading behaviour and strategies. It has been used as a means of studying the cognitive processes that readers and writers use as they develop meanings. It also proposes as a means of helping poor readers adopt a meaning orientation to print, monitor their comprehension, and apply self correction strategies. Its four basic steps are: (1) Teacher modeling; (2) students partnerships for practice; (3) independent students practice using checklist; and (4) integrated use with other materials.

9. Induced Imagery

Induced imagery is a procedure for guiding students to generate mental images (about what is read) as a means of enhancing comprehension. Teacher should model explicitly in hopes of helping students visualize as they read. .

Furthermore Christie, Enz, and Vukelich (2003) propose fifteen best practices in reading instruction which are also useful for the improvement of reading comprehension:

1. Read aloud to children on a daily basis

The benefits of this strategy are: promotion of positive attitudes about books and reading, exposure to new vocabulary and knowledge, increased familiarity with book language and story

structure, accessibility to high quality literature, community building, "advertising" books for independent reading, and opportunities for informal teaching.

2. Create a literate classroom environment

In order for children to learn about literacy, they have to see lots of examples of meaningful print and have easy access to reading and writing materials. The types of centers and materials that are recommended:

- a well-designed, well-stocked classroom library

- lots of functional print

- lots of students work on display

3. Provide direct instruction on phonemic awareness, phonics, and word recognition

Decoding is an essential part of the reading process. Text information cannot be accessed unless most of the words are recognized by sight recognition, phonics, context clues, or other means of decoding. Quick, automatic word identification is needed in order for the reading process to work properly and for comprehension to occur. Here are some guidelines for delivering effective decoding instruction:

- Just teach skills that children need to learn

- Provide direct instruction. Don't "beat around the bush" when teaching phonics, letter-recognition, and decoding skills

- Model how the skill is used

- Tie the skill to students' prior knowledge and experience

- Link the skill with the texts that children are reading

4. Provide opportunities for ample independent reading of self-selected books

Current theories of the reading process suggest that the best way to become a good reader is to do lots of reading. Ideally, readers themselves should select much of the material they read. Self-selection insures that books appeal to children's current interest, making reading an engaging and enjoyable activity. Teacher need to schedule a special time for pleasure reading, and this period needs to be long enough so that children can become fully engaged with the books that they are reading.

5. Use guided reading to develop word recognition, fluency and comprehension

Guided reading is an instructional method teachers use to support individual readers' development of effective strategies for reading texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty.

6. Activate and build prior knowledge connected with text

Readers must build meaning by linking text information with what they already know since simply identifying all the words in a text does not insure that comprehension will occur. The obvious instructional implication is that teachers should help children activate

and build text-relevant background knowledge to their attention. A number of strategies are available for activating prior knowledge:

- Questioning: teachers can ask what children already know about a topic

- Brainstorming: Children are asked to call up all the words they can think of that are related to a topic

- Predicting: The teacher provides clues as to what a story is about by focusing on the title, key illustration, or the introduction

- Webbing: A chart is constructed that illustrates how different ideas connected to a topic are related to one another.

7. Teach vocabulary, both directly and indirectly

 Vocabulary knowledge – knowing the meaning of words – has a crucial role in learning to read. It affects both decoding and comprehension. It is impossible to understand the meaning of a text unless the reader knows the meaning of most of the words in the texts.

8. Provide opportunities for children to discuss the books they are reading

 To gain the maximum benefits from high quality literature, students need to have opportunities to discuss stories and share their interpretations. As children share their thoughts about stories in the class, they are often able to construct deeper levels of meaning.

9. Provide a variety of reading response activities

There is a variety of reading response activities that can be taught to the students:

- Response journals: as students read books, they jot down their ideas and reactions in a notebook. They can make comments about key event and favourite characters, or they may discuss their own thoughts and emotions as they read the story.

- Drama: Pretend play is a natural way for children to express their thoughts and feelings about real-life events and stories in books.

- Readers' theatre: Children read aloud from scripts that are based on literature selections.

10. Directly teach comprehension strategies

A number of strategies have been identified that can help readers construct meaning before, during, and after reading:

- Question generating: Readers ask themselves questions that they want to have answered, thus setting their own purposes for reading;

- Monitoring: Readers learn to be aware of their understanding of text;

- Mental imagery: Readers construct mental images that represent meanings expressed in a text;

- Text structure: Readers analyze stories into story grammar elements;

- Summarizing: Readers pull together and condense the information in a text passage.

11. Keep seatwork to a minimum

Traditionally, decoding skills such as phonics and sight recognition of words have been taught using workbooks and skill sheets. Teachers should use seatwork exercises that (1) focus on skills that children have begun to learn but have not fully mastered; (2) have clear directions; (3) involve "real" reading and writing; and (4) are related to other parts of the reading lesson.

12. Use a range of oral reading strategies

This activity occurs when children take turns reading a passage aloud, while the rest of the class reads along silently. Using this strategy, the teacher should only correct mistakes that significantly change meaning, and children should never be allowed to correct each other.

Since, the poor performance by lower ability students, coupled with corrections from the teacher or other students, can make oral reading a stressful and sometimes humiliating experience.

13. Integrate reading and writing activities

Different aspects of written language were linked together in meaningful ways. The stories children read in their basal readers were

not used as stimuli for writing assignments during English period, nor was writing used to help children better comprehend their basal reader selections. So, teacher could use this strategy by involving both reading and writing.

14. Use flexible grouping

Flexible grouping offers an attractive alternative to static ability groups. The teacher should vary the size of groups and the way that students are grouped to task demands and student characteristics. Flexible grouping sometimes is better than ability grouping. Ability grouping has some disadvantages:

- Self esteem: students tend to evaluate their abilities in terms of their group's status

- Modeling: low group students are surrounded by models of poor reading and rarely get to interact with high ability readers.

- Different instruction: children in low group read more words out loud, do more skill drill, are asked lower-level comprehension question, do less silent reading, and have less exposure to high quality literature than students in high groups

- Teacher expectations: teachers have far lower expectations for the progress of low-group students.

15. Use authentic assessments to inform instruction

Assessment should be embedded in instruction. Teachers should assess children's reading skills and knowledge while the children are engaging in classroom learning activities. It provides valuable information about each child's reading development and enables teachers to fine-tune their literacy instruction to meet the needs of the students in their classroom

CONCLUSION

In teaching reading comprehension to elementary students, the teacher should know better how to arrange the instructions. The teacher should know who the students are and what strategy is needed. The teachers should improve themselves related to how to teach EYL, especially in reading skill, and how to make use of teaching aids and realia to help their students learn better.

The school managements should carefully select the English teacher to meet the qualification to be the English teacher for young learners. Schools should also encourage and facilitate the teachers to develop their professionalism as English teachers.

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