

## **GST 101 2015/2016 Session**

### **Reading**

Reading and writing are two sides of a coin; they have a symbiotic relationship and are both integral to literacy. Reading is the process of identifying and understanding the meaning of the characters and words in written or printed material. The goal of reading is “to construct text meaning based on visually encoded information” (Koda, 2007, p.1). No other skill taught in school and learned by school children is more important than reading. It is the gateway to all other knowledge. If children do not learn to read efficiently, the path is blocked to every subject they encounter in their school years.

Reading is one of the most complex tasks we undertake. Reading is both a **perceptual and cognitive process**. It is **perceptual** because the eyes look, via the retina, at the text to identify ‘scratches’ or letters of the alphabet that are used to compose a text. Reading is **cognitive** because the images which the eyes see are transferred to the brain which in turn interprets the meaning. In order to read, we must translate visual symbols into words, and words into meaning. For many students, reading skills are developed successfully and with relative ease. However, at least ten million children in the United States are affected by reading problems. For as many as four in ten children, learning to read is a difficult task; and one in five has significant reading difficulties.

**Reading involves two critical elements.** These are the **visual and the non-visual elements**.

The visual elements are the texts, graphics, tables, images, etc. The non-visual elements are the reader’s experience, motivation, attitude, and mindset.

Reading can be broadly divided into the following four components:

1. Word decoding, or accurate and rapid reading of words; and,
2. Comprehension, or understanding the intended message of a written passage.
3. Reaction to what is read (Critical Evaluative Reading)

4. Assimilation, that is the fusion of the new ideas with previous knowledge

Reading affects people in various ways. To some, it provides the avenue for leisure. To some others it empowers the mind and nourishes the soul. Some see reading as a way of broadening their horizon and acquiring knowledge. It is also a way of reaching out to people. Reading is a way of influencing.

**Reading Challenges:**

While reading is a worthwhile endeavour, a critical requirement in teaching-learning activities, it has been observed that not all students have been able to imbibe good reading culture or even have the proficiency to read well. Some of the challenges faced by poor readers are:

**Sub-vocalisation:** Means to mouth words soundlessly. Sub-vocalisation is a reading challenge which involves a reader/learner mouthing words or other speech sounds without saying them out loud. It is usually because of poor reading ability or lack of confidence.

**Eye regression:** this occurs when the reader tracks back with the eyes away from the spot of reading. This means the eyes are not in sync with the point of reading. This thus leads to slow or mumbled reading.

**Tracing with fingers or objects:** A poor reading habit which should be discouraged is tracing reading materials with the fingers. Reading is meant to be fluent and paced. However, when one reads while tracing with fingers, it slows the pace of the reader. It is a sign of neurodevelopmental immaturity. Readers are expected to employ and sustain the use of eye contact when reading.

**Repetition:** this occurs when a reader unnecessarily repeats consistently words which are being read.

**Phonemic Non-awareness:** The signs of such difficulty are a laboured approach to decoding or "sounding" unknown or unfamiliar words and repeated misidentification of known words. Reading is hesitant and characterized by frequent starts and stops and multiple mispronunciations. Children who lack phoneme awareness have difficulties linking speech sounds to letters, leading to limitations in the development of decoding and word recognition skills, resulting in extremely slow reading.

Forgetting what is read

Losing focus

Visual processing problems

Attention difficulties (ADD – Attention Deficit Disorder)

Vocalising

Head movement

### **Models of Explaining Reading**

Stanovich (1980) suggested that readers make up for their insufficient understanding of the messages by using either or both of "bottom-up" and "top-down" approaches.

**The Transmission Model or Bottom-up approach** occurs where readers focus on letters, sounds, syllables, words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs in the process of constructing the meaning of a text. This means that the focus is on TEXT. In other words, readers with this approach begin by focusing on smaller parts of the texts which are then interpreted by the brain in order to make meaning. It is like building a block of knowledge from the foundation upward.

**The Transaction Model or Top-down approach** is the opposite of bottom-up approaches. The focus is placed on the child. It is believed that reading is acquired the same way a child acquires language. If this is so, then a child has the natural ability to read. In addition the

child comes with personal experiences shaped by the environment and background. These experiences can aid the acquisition of reading and knowledge development. Thus, rather than placing focus on individual words, here readers emphasize the whole text passage and look for key information by activating prior knowledge and compensating for meanings of unknown vocabulary.

**The Social Constructivist Model:** Here, the teacher is the focus. This model believes that the child indeed has some innate abilities and comes with certain experiences. It also insists that the teacher should respect the child's experiences. Regardless however, the teacher has a role to play since he/she is to bring together these two (innate abilities + experiences) to assist the child in acquiring reading. This model also emphasises the role of context in reading i.e. we read differently when we read for pleasure and for examination purposes.

### **Reading Comprehension<sup>1</sup>**

Language is learnt cumulatively through constant and consistent use. Each language encounter, whether oral or written, builds more knowledge about the world, the function of symbols, and communication strategies. Consequently, constant language use helps in the performance of the next one - whether oral, written, or mental.

Comprehension involves the ability of understanding the intended messages of a text. Reading comprehension is based on using the appropriate meaning-making processes from the printed messages and involves the passage, the reader, and the context. Reading comprehension involves a reader constructing the meaning of the oral or written messages. A reader may construct meaning through using background knowledge, analyzing words, inferring the text, and/or identifying key vocabulary or information.

---

<sup>1</sup>*Whole Language: Theory in Use*, Neuman, Judith M. Heineman: Portsmouth, NH (1985). [Whole Language: Theory in Use](http://www.funderstanding.com/curriculum/whole-language/#sthash.GVTzB3Ht.dpuf). Downloaded on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2014 from <http://www.funderstanding.com/curriculum/whole-language/#sthash.GVTzB3Ht.dpuf>

The comprehension of a text requires understanding three levels: literal, inferential and critical/evaluative. The literal level is quite straight forward as it is based on the facts presented directly in a text. 'Boko Haram killed 300 people in Maiduguri' (How many people did Boko Haram kill in Maiduguri?).

The inferential comprehension of a text however does not rely on the fact in a text. Rather a reader draws conclusions from the understanding on a text.

*'I decided to pay a visit to the church. I hadn't been there in a long time. Not since the war started. I did the sign of the cross as I entered. My shoe sole echoed as I walked in'.*

From the above, we can infer that the person is a Catholic. We can also assume that the church was empty or deserted.

The Evaluative comprehensive is the most advanced and complex level. Here, the reader has to evaluate what has been read in line with his/her own personal experiences and background knowledge. For instances, after reading a text, a reader may ask the following:

Are the characters true to life?

Are the incidents described possible?

What would I have done if I was in such a situation?

**Intensive and Extensive Reading** (practice to include poetry, prose and drama passages involving narration of real-life stories)

Brown (1989) outlined the types of reading as follows:

- A. Oral
- B. Silent
  - I. Intensive
    - a. linguistic
    - b. content
  - II. Extensive
    - a. skimming

- b. scanning
- c. global

Intensive reading is used to teach or practice specific reading strategies or skills. It is otherwise called Narrow reading. Intensive reading may be also described as the practice of particular reading skills and the close linguistic study of text. In it, the text is treated as an *end* in itself. Intensive reading "calls attention to grammatical forms, discourse markers, and other surface structure details for the purpose of understanding literal meaning, implications, rhetorical relationships, and the like." It is useful in developing rapid reading practice.

**Characteristics:**

- usually classroom based
- reader is *intensely* involved in looking *inside* the text
- students focus on linguistic or semantic details of a reading
- students focus on surface structure details such as grammar and discourse markers
- students identify key vocabulary
- students may draw pictures to aid them (such as in problem solving)
- texts are read carefully and thoroughly, again and again
- aim is to build more language knowledge rather than simply practice the skill of reading
- seen more commonly than extensive reading in classrooms

Extensive reading, on the other hand, involves reading of large quantities of material, directly and fluently. Emphasis is placed on reading confidence and reading fluency. Reading is treated as a *means* to an end. It may include reading simply for pleasure or reading technical, scientific or professional material. This latter type of text, more academic, may involve two specific types of reading, **scanning** for key details or **skimming** for the essential meaning. A relatively quick and efficient reading, either on its own or after scanning or skimming, will give a **global** or general meaning.

**Differences between the Intensive and Extensive Types of Reading**

- 1) The first difference is that Extensive Reading covers a large area of reading materials, while Intensive Reading covers a narrower area.
- 2) In Extensive Reading the students' activity is more complex than in Intensive Reading. The students, in Extensive Reading class, usually are asked to write a summary or do a short presentation on what they have read. By doing either of these, the students will have knowledge of the right preparation, self- independence and autonomy (Bell, 1998). In Intensive Reading however, instead of writing summary and having presentation, the students are asked to answer some questions related to the topic which is given by the teacher. Usually, all of the answers are available on the text, so that the students only rewrite it.
- 3) Extensive Reading will discourage the over- use of dictionary (Bell, 1998); on the contrary dictionary is a must in Intensive Reading. It is true that dictionary have an important place in reading activity, but as stated by Bell (1998) that the students will focus only on the language if they always consult the dictionary every time they find

an unfamiliar word. They will not pay attention to the message conveyed. Bell also said that this habit will cause inefficient reading and destroy the pleasure that reading is intended to provide.

- 4) Because it is concerned with doing complex activities, Extensive Reading can broaden students' knowledge more than Intensive Reading.
- 5) Intensive reading is very dependent on the teacher's guidance only. This kind of activities will not encourage students to explore their abilities.

### **Previewing**

This is concerned with determining the essence and importance of a text before reading. Previewing includes skimming and skipping, and looking for main concepts, ideas and keywords. To identify the reason or purpose for reading a book, one may preview through skimming through the table of contents, foreword, introduction and index. Previewing also includes reading biographical information about the author, reviewer comments and endorsements by recognized authorities.

**Skimming and Scanning:** These have to do with reading speed. **Scanning** is the fastest speed of reading and it is primarily used to locate a word or expression in a text. Scanning is done with an objective in mind – to find a word and learn more about it. This may be in a dictionary, telephone directory, menu list, etc. In the case of a textbook, the reader may use the index page, usually at the back pages of a book to locate the word or expression being sought. The index directs the reader to the necessary page from where the reader may then identify the word within the page by searching left and right with the eyes. Scanning is a very valuable skill for readers.

**Skimming** on the other hand is another fast speed reading skill. While not as fast as scanning, the aim of skimming is to quickly identify and extract information. It may also be for clarification purpose. Skimming assists the reader in making quick evaluative judgements. For instance, if a student has just enough funds to purchase a book but he/she has two books to choose from. The student may quickly skim through the books by gleaning necessary and

important information like the year(s) of publication, the names of the authors, the table of content, etc. all these will guide the student in making a decision on which of the books represents value for money and which meets their expectations. Judgement has thus been made quickly based on sound principles and not speculations or emotions.

### **Guessing From Context**

This is also referred to as the Inferential Strategy of reading. It is based on the fact that texts do not always reveal or say everything they should have said. The onus thus rests on the reader to fill in the gaps. In inferring, the reader has to identify and interpret the message of the writer, the unsaid or implied messages through reliance on their own individual background experience and knowledge. Through inferences, a reader can predict what will happen in a text. Inferences are also used to comprehend the meaning of an unfamiliar word or idiomatic expression based on the context of usage.

### **Paraphrasing**

Paraphrasing is one of the end-results of reading activities. Here, a student or reader rewords or expresses the idea(s) or message(s) in what has been read in his or her own expressions. It is employed in such a way that the reader expresses what has been read in a different form for clarification purposes. Paraphrasing reveals the level of knowledge or familiarity that a reader has of the text/material.

### **Reading for Study**

This is otherwise called Study Reading. It refers to the speed that a student uses when studying a specific topic or concept. This is mainly determined by the purpose of reading or the goal which the student has set out to achieve. In reading for study, a student may need to reread portions of the text to aid **comprehension, retention and recall**. Attention must however be paid to the fact that rereading in reading for study should not be targeted at



recitation. The student may also embrace highlighting important sections of the text. This will draw attention and assist the student in identifying 'marked' areas. In addition is the use of a notebook or journal where the student may pour out their mind and note key details of the study. Some other students, to facilitate and internalise their study practises, use tape recorders to document/record, review and recall what they have studied. After the student has listened and connected the audio recordings with the written text, it is important to independently write an outline or summary of the study for future revision purposes.

### **Improving Reading Skills**

The average reading speed is 250 words per minute. To boost reading ability, a reader has to be wary of the reading challenges already discussed. In addition, to be a good reader, one must read a lot of various texts/materials. Some other techniques that can assist in improving reading skills are: reading aloud, being exposed to new words/expressions, listening to good speakers i.e. having models.

### **Reading Goals**

The primary goal of any reading activity is comprehension. A reader must satisfactorily decode the meanings within a text and then process what has been read for:

- 1) Literal comprehension – basic/elementary understanding of a text.
- 2) Interpretative comprehension – combines literal comprehension with background knowledge or experience which is essential in drawing inferences and identifying hidden information.
- 3) Critical comprehension – is higher than interpretative comprehension because the reader is expected to make judgements on what has been read. For instance, is the text adequately reflective of its theme/essence? Is the text effective?, etc. and,

- 4) Creative comprehension – is higher than critical comprehension because it connects reading with writing. While critical comprehension involves the reader making judgements, in creative comprehension, the reader actually writes or develops a text in response to what has been read. This may be via summary writing, journal entry, or a textbook.

### **Choosing a Text**

The important factors that motivate the selection of texts mostly rely on interest and reason(s) for text. For instance