
UNIT 10 TEACHING READING : GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Structure

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10.1 OBJECTIVES

Our emphasis in this unit is

- to make you aware of the general principles underlying reading — which involve the integration of cognitive knowledge, language knowledge, reading skills and reading strategies.
- to inform you of the reading process and the stages of reading development so that you are more confident about how to teach reading to all types of learners.
- to plan strategies to teach reading to SL learners.

10.2 READING AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

As we have already discussed in Course 1, language is unique to human beings. Its form, structure, development, the ways in which it helps us to think and communicate our thoughts and feelings, are all manifestations of this uniqueness attributed to language. Every child creates within the first few years itself, a language that can be used to get things done. This language is drawn from the child's contacts with the others in the home and the local environment. Between the ages three and five, even children with serious handicaps acquire the basis of language. Though the pace and manner of early language acquisition may vary from individual to individual, the child is always seen as an active, natural language learner who usually progresses from uttering a word around 9 months to two-word utterances at about 18 months and then moves on to acquire the basic sentence forms as early as 2 years and 6 months of age. Thus well before children enter school, they have a fairly well-developed unconscious knowledge of the formal grammar of their language. This knowledge assists their thinking and enables them to talk to others as well as understand what others say. During this stage children know what language is mainly from what language does. As they mature and with schooling, they will become increasingly aware of the structure of the language and may even go on to talk about the language. It is obvious that in the majority of the children there is a keen natural motivation to learn language, to speak and to explore its functions. This trend will continue as long as the individual continues to acquire, organize and restructure the knowledge of the world.

Since language acquisition seems natural, we tend to think that the other skills like reading and writing will also come naturally to the child. We think that if one can speak a language then automatically one can read and write well in that language. But this is not so. Although reading and writing deal with the same language that is used in speech, there are other dimensions which require perceptions and strategies quite different from those associated with speech. Being aware of these differences will help us in realising what characterises the reading activity and thereby be conscious of those features which enable us to acquire the skill of reading efficiently.

Reading acquisition is different from language acquisition in three ways. First, the reader must get accustomed to the idea that print is language, that it is marks on paper. To do so, the reader must transform the printed code into language. Second, while the motivation for language acquisition is natural, it is not so as far as reading is concerned. It depends on how children have become familiar with print i.e., whether they can decipher the marks on paper correctly, without confusing the different shapes of these signs. But more importantly, motivation to read depends on the functions of the printed word in the child's personal, social and academic interests. Third, the interaction between speaker and hearer always occurs in an actual situation in which the non-verbal actions of the speaker and the immediate surroundings assist in making any necessary clarification of the utterances. But in reading there are no such extralinguistic cues to make meaning clearer to the reader. Moreover, in reading, unlike speech, it is always assumed that any lack of understanding is the problem of the reader and not the writer.

Initial experiences with reading should be based on children's desire to imagine, to know things and to explore the world. The simplest method to acquaint children with reading, its uses and pleasures, is by reading to them and talking to them about books. The next step is to display the print being read so that children can see it and hear it transformed into sound. As the children's overt knowledge of the language grows and their ability to read words quickly increases, then they will want to read by themselves, and choose what interests them. But, to reach this stage, the opportunity must be there. Teachers should provide such opportunities and help children to learn to use printed material for academic, social and personal purposes. Very often teachers tend to concentrate on the academic side of reading in the classroom. This creates the impression that reading is something that is done only in the classroom. Instead children should be made to realise that reading is closely linked to one's life and that a realistic approach to reading will help them to develop a positive outlook in life.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Using information gathered from this unit and other units that you have studied, describe what is involved in language acquisition.

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2. How does reading acquisition differ from language acquisition?

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3. Make a list of the situations outside the classroom where we have to read to carry on our daily life. You may also refer to Course 3, Block 2 before you answer this question.
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10.3 SCHOOLING AND READING DEVELOPMENT

The term “schooling” refers to the arrangement made by society for providing formal instruction within the context of its culture. It stipulates a series of activities for the cognitive, physical and moral development of the individual. Among other things, it requires that the child read, because printed material is one of the major sources of factual information. Schools provide teachers, curriculum goals and instructional materials as inputs to initiate or further a child’s reading capability. Research clearly shows that the amount of time children interact directly with printed material is significantly correlated with reading achievement.

There is another aspect of “schooling” which is of vital importance to the development of the individual. This is the capacity of “knowing how to.....”. It is not enough to be in possession of a lot of facts. One should know how to get the facts in the first place, what to do with them and how to proceed when confronted with certain situations in academic matters. These are abilities which mark the educated person. Therefore, children should be taught how to read, which involves specific strategies and deliberate steps to teach sound-symbol correlation, word meaning and discourse structure. It must also be pointed out that the personal and social purposes of knowing how to read are just as important as the academic purposes. schooling must not be too restrictive in furnishing only information to the children and leaves no time for them to read for pleasure, to imagine, explore, discover, perform and reflect on information found in the reading material. Children’s reading in the classroom should never become purposeless, boring, mechanical or equated with marks only. How reading is taught in the classroom sets the conditions under which children come to value reading in their academic and non-academic life.

Now-a-days there is a great emphasis placed on raising the literacy standards in various countries. Consequently, society’s views of schooling and reading instructions have changed and reading has become the most valued characteristic of literacy. Parents at almost all levels of society expect their children to be taught to read. In fact, demonstration of one’s reading ability is often considered as a sign of one’s intelligence and education. This has even led to the acceptance of a rapid, mechanical reading of the marks on paper without any sign of comprehension. But today the standard for functional literacy must include comprehension. Functional literacy has come to mean the ability to read common texts such as newspapers and manuals and show evidence of their comprehension of these texts. So teachers should realize that the primary goal of teaching reading is to help the learners how to get meaning out of printed material at every stage of reading comprehension.

Reading development refers to changes in the reading performance and how these changes relate to the child’s cognitive growth involving the acquisition, organisation

and restructuring of knowledge. Children's knowledge of the world, relationships and the manner in which they acquire and use knowledge have an effect on their reading performance. Language growth refers to a child's knowledge of his or her native language, language uses and language functions. There is a definite link between language growth and reading. This is clear from the studies of deaf children. Deaf children acquire language at a considerably slower rate than the children who can hear. It is also found that their reading growth too is slower than and qualitatively different from that of the normal children.

Reading instructions must take into consideration the stages of a child's cognitive and language growth. First, if there is a big gap between the reading tasks which elementary school children have to perform and their cognitive or language growth, the reading comprehension is diminished. Second, individual children in the same class may vary in their cognitive and language growth. Owing to these factors, the major challenges of teaching reading are (1) to design and implement a programme that will suit the cognitive and language growth of the average child and ensure that reading comprehension is developed steadily and (2) to find out effective alternative methods that meet the needs of children whose reading capacities vary from that of the average child.

Check Your Progress 2

1. What are the effects of formal schooling on reading?

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2. What are the features of functional literacy?

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3. How are Reading Development, Cognitive Growth and Language Growth interrelated?

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10.4 INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES IN TEACHING READING

There are really two teachers in the elementary classroom. One is the adult professional teacher who designs and coordinates the activities which we recognise as reading in the classroom. The other is the child who is learning to read through experiences

which print provides in the classroom, home and day-to-day social environment. Children have their own learning agenda and exhibit marvellous learning capabilities. Before formal schooling they have learnt to speak, to solve a wide variety of personal and social problems, and have selectively stored a large amount of details of the everyday world. They have come to acquire these skills and knowledge through the opportunity to explore, to discover meaning from actions, language and thinking patterned for them in their environment. This process has been greatly accelerated by the immediate and positive rewards they receive for what they can do with language. With so much of printed matter being displayed everywhere, children also learn a great deal about print on their own. The resources that children possess are much more than what we normally credit them with and we must remember that they bring these resources with them to the classroom. A careful appraisal of what they bring to the learning situation will help us to draw up a realistic programme of action for them.

The teacher has three very powerful instructional resources in teaching reading. These are **experiential reading, time and communication skills.**

1. Experiential reading

To be able to provide experiential reading and exposure to language means involving children in various reading, writing and thinking experiences. The first step in this strategy is to highlight the significant aspects of the experience that the children have to understand in order to participate in the reading activity. These include reading, questioning, predicting, analysing word meaning in context, reading in phrase groups and so on. The teacher should demonstrate how these are done and then provide sufficient opportunity for the children to interact with print or thinking experience.

Experiential reading is quite different from giving children verbal rules to follow. You cannot "tell" the uniqueness of a good story or the way some stories are typically structured. Children must experience good stories and discover why the stories were enjoyable. You cannot also tell children how to read words in phrase groups. They must learn by example the difference between word-by-word reading and reading words in groups. As children listen to the teacher reading out aloud, seeing and listening are co-ordinated as they try to simultaneously see and listen to the text. You cannot tell children when to draw inferences and how to use questions as an active aid to constructing or reconstructing meaning. The teacher shows how this is done and the role of the questioner must then be experienced by the learner. After these experiences, some guiding principles may be given for inferencing, for formulating questions and answering questions.

2. Time

This is a very valuable resource which is within the control of the teacher. Usually this is not recognised as a resource at all. How teachers plan their own time in interacting with children and the way children use their time alone and with other children are important determinants of what is learned. A teacher who uses most of the instructional time to maintain order and give directions has little time for demonstration, individualised work, feedback or directly teaching the reading skills and strategies. Children should be given enough time to interact with print so that they learn to read or learn how to use reading for personal, social and academic purposes.

3. Communication Skills

This resource involves knowing about how to talk, when to talk, what to say and how to say it. People vary in their ability to use their communication skills. Consequently they relate to one another in more or less cooperative or productive

ways. The teacher who uses communication skills effectively is much more likely to carry out the plans set for the course and thereby ensure the productive use of pupil-time in the classroom. An over-enthusiastic teacher may actually prevent the learner from learning by doing most of the talking, generating most of the questions and providing all the answers. The learner is, unnecessarily, passive during most of the class time.

Active listening is one of the communication skills which the teacher can use profitably. It entails listening for what the speaker intends to say rather than merely hearing how something is said. By doing so, the teacher can judge quite specifically the strengths and weaknesses of the learners and adjust the programme suitably. Requests for reformulation through questions such as "Can you say that another way?" and the ability to paraphrase implied in questions such as "Do you mean....?" reveal one's capacity for listening actively. The teacher will also have to exercise extreme patience in trying to find out what the child is saying.

The teacher's communication skills are important for one more reason. Language is a highly personal and valued part of the child's self-concept. The teacher who does not respect the children's dialect or ignores their attempts to use language to control the environment and explore meaning prevents them from believing in themselves as persons capable of knowing what there is to know in school. We should realise that learner - helplessness can set in quite early due to the teacher's lack of sympathy for the learner's world view and his/her capacity for communication. The teacher by using language that signals the proper attitudinal meanings can aid children to become more confident of their reading abilities, to be more effective participants in the classroom, to be more willing to respond to challenging questions and to be more willing to participate freely and actively in discussions. By tactful communication the teacher builds trust in the children which encourages them to participate in the learning opportunities provided by the teacher.

Let us see how well we remember what we have discussed by answering the following questions:

Check Your Progress 3

1. In what way can the child be considered as a teacher?

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2. What are the resources which children bring to the learning situation?

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3. What aspect of reading is highlighted in experiential reading?

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4. Why are effective communication skills necessary for a good teacher?

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10.5 UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF READING

The foundational knowledge for teaching reading consists of 'knowledge of' and 'knowing how'. Both classes of knowledge are necessary for teaching reading. Knowing how to carry out specific instructional methods does not necessarily help teachers decide why and for whom they should be used. A good knowledge of the nature of reading helps teachers to interpret a child's reading performance and to select the methods required to facilitate further reading development. At the same time it is valuable to know how to design and implement a classroom organisational scheme that is well suited to the needs of the different levels of learners in the class.

While reading is not a subject in the sense that Mathematics is a subject, it is essential that the teacher should understand the nature of reading and the reasons for the patterns of change in the performance of reading, so that it can be organised like other subjects and not thought of merely as a peripheral activity. The ability to chart the course of reading growth of children, from little acquaintance with how to read to reading fluently with proper comprehension, gives the teacher the confidence to decide about the type of reading instructions and the individual experiences from which a child might best profit. Besides, knowledge of what reading is, provides a meaningful context for evaluating the validity of programmes, materials and methods of instruction. It is a great strength to the teacher to be able to analyse the relationship between the content of a programme and the performance outcomes claimed to be produced by it.

10.6 READING PROGRAMMES

It is important to establish basic goals and their priority for instruction in the kindergarten, primary and secondary stages. Programmes for teaching reading vary considerably in their major instructional goals and procedures for helping children to achieve them. However, most teachers have to work with whatever published reading programme is available. To make the best use of it, teachers must first of all understand its unique features and its rationale. Then assess whether it suits directly or marginally the programme which the teacher has decided for the class and then adapt it or use it as a supplement to the basic programme. This means that the needs of the children are given priority rather than the merit of a programme on its own terms.

Reading instructions consist of methods for how to teach children to read and to involve them in reading-related language experiences. The teacher's tasks are:

- a. to teach in a way that is suited to the cognitive and language development of the child;
- b. to teach sound-letter correlation, word identification skills, word grouping strategies, comprehension strategies and ways of relating reading, writing, discussion for personal, social and academic purposes;
- c. to achieve the same instructional objective through alternative methods;
- d. to vary the instructional environment to make it interesting to the learner as well as to the teacher;
- e. to be able to offer alternative methods to help children with specific types of reading problems; and
- f. to be aware of methods to suit the demands of children who are quite advanced in their reading growth, compared to their peers.

To be able to handle these situations efficiently, the teachers must know how to design their own eclectic programmes by combining several programmes.

Teachers will have to create instructional conditions in which pupils will be able to spend a significantly larger portion of time actually reading, and teachers can spend most of their classroom time in teaching new skills and strategies directly. It seems as if these conditions would be quite easy to achieve. They are not. It requires considerable thought and self-discipline to organize a good classroom plan for teaching reading.

In this connection, formal and informal procedures for assessing the reading performance of groups and individuals will be of much use to the teacher. The teacher must be familiar with the basic rules of test construction and know how to interpret test scores. This knowledge can be used to analyse published reading measures. Usually teachers neglect the knowledge of how tests are constructed. This is a mistake. They even go to the ridiculous extent of saying that they are not interested in testing and that it is the job of the specialist. They forget for a moment that without proper testing from time to time the teacher cannot proceed with teaching. Therefore, it is imperative that every teacher has a basic knowledge of what is involved in testing and how tests are to be constructed. Especially so with teachers of reading, if they want to help children with severe reading problems. Ordinarily, at the beginning of the year a test given to the pupils, will give some indication to the teacher of how to organize the programme.

Let us now see how well you followed the discussion in this section. Answer the following questions:

Check Your Progress 4

1. What are the two types of knowledge important in the teaching of reading and how are they related?

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2. What is involved in the teaching of reading and how is this related to the various demands on the teacher as well as the teacher's knowledge of testing procedures?

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10.7 TEACHING READING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Teaching reading in the mother tongue (L1) is different from teaching reading in a foreign language (L2). This aspect is quite often forgotten and the methodology adopted in teaching reading in L2 is based on the assumptions about language consciousness of a learner in his or her L1. In L1 learners know already how to produce and respond to the auditory signals in their language and in learning to read in L1 they have only to learn to respond to the visual forms which represent the auditory signals. But in L2 they have to be taught the auditory signals in that language — how to produce and respond to them. Even though the basic requirement of decoding print may be common to both L1 and L2 all the other aspects of L2 have to be learned afresh by the learners. In this respect, in L2 the learners have to learn the process of reading itself. The exposure and reinforcement from the environment which is readily available for L1 is restricted in L2 and so extra effort is needed to sustain the various correspondences, especially the graphophonemic one.

Reading is primarily a process of decoding a particular writing system into language. In the L2 situation, the learner has to initially master audio-lingually the oral counterpart of the material to be read. The teacher must give audio-lingual exercises as a prerequisite to the introduction of reading. The ability to distinguish the various sounds in L2 and produce them without causing any confusion, will help students in learning to recognise the written forms.

Students learning to read are learning to perform linguistically and it is necessary that they should produce accurate responses automatically to visual signs and in constructing meaning through previously established oral language. They need a great deal of organised and intensive oral practice to sharpen their visual perception and discrimination so that they can develop quick recognition of visual signs necessary for efficient reading. The first reading experience must be limited to the exercises and content materials which have been made familiar to the students aurally and orally. The teacher should help the learners to recognise and respond quickly as they look at these visual symbols. Learners need intensive practice before they can transform print to speech patterns in L2.

In teaching students in their own language, little time need be spent in clarifying concepts conveyed by words and phrases. Native speakers already know the oral language which they will learn to read. But in the case of L2, the teacher will have to ensure that the concepts in L2 are understood unambiguously by the readers. The teacher will have to provide for linking sound and structure directly through the association between language and behaviour, something similar to the experience of the learners in their mother tongue.

At the introductory stage of teaching reading in L2, the teacher should give an intensive oral practice of vocabulary and structural patterns before introducing the graphic symbols in L2. A lot of emphasis should be given to the explanation of concepts. The same sequence -- Listen, Repeat, Practice -- used in the audio-lingual method, will be effective at this stage of reading. In order that the reading activity be meaningful, the teacher should give beforehand an aural review of the necessary patterns and associate them with their visual referents.

In the first stages of reading development, the learners may be asked to **repeat each sentence in the lesson, line by line**. This would fix the sound patterns through which the meanings of the graphic symbols may be realised and established. During this stage, gestures, pictures, labels, and flash cards can be used to help the learners to recognise the symbols.

After the preliminary oral drills, the second stage of reading uses the **LOOK and SAY method**. For young children the teacher follows the same sequential order used in teaching the auditory forms of the oral language, i.e., listening, repeating and practising in sentence patterns. The teacher shows the printed symbol (either on a flash card or by writing the word on the blackboard) for visual recognition.

During the drill for recognising the graphic symbols of words, the teacher may

- a. refer to the configuration or general shape of the word;
- b. call attention to some peculiarity about the word; and
- c. use a context, such as allowing the pupils to supply the word when it is omitted from a sentence.

Then drills must be reinforced by making learners **SAY** the word being presented as they **LOOK** at it carefully and apply it to the sentence patterns they are learning to read. It is a great help to the learners if the written forms of the words are placed near the visual referents they illustrate. The picture clues are an excellent aid in helping learners fix in their memories the graphic forms of new words. Activities such as Flash Card drills, finding words and forming them for the class to see and repeat, matching words to the pictures that explain them and matching words to words may be very effective at this elementary level.

The objective of the Flash Card game is to collect cards by correctly saying the word printed on it. The teacher holds up a card which bears in large letters a word to be mastered visually. The one who says the word correctly gets the card to keep until the end of the game. With a little practice and proper teacher control the game can be conducted quickly and quietly and with much enthusiasm. The child who collects the largest number of cards at the end of the practice wins the game.

To supplement this activity the teacher could devote a short time during each reading class to the repetition of basic sentence patterns while students look at the written forms. For very young students this practice offers an opportunity for repeating in chorus basic sentences from the prescribed text itself. The teacher also elicits full sentence responses of the same basic patterns by holding up question cue cards.

- ° The next step in reading development begins with the reading of the narrative found in the lesson. In the elementary classes, the children should be encouraged to use markers line by line, as they read the sentences in the lesson silently. This silent reading should be followed by individual oral reading to check both comprehension and oral production.

With very young children, this narrative reading may be varied by the use of "experience chart" reading. The children form certain basic sentences from their daily experiences. The teacher writes the children's sentences on the experience chart or the blackboard. The children then read them chorally, silently and then individually.

At the advanced stage the teacher may present shorter and more simplified sequences from the longer sections in the reading text. The teacher writes the difficult words on the blackboard for the students to look at while the sequences are being spoken. Then the students may read the longer sequence from the text silently and the teacher may verify their comprehension by asking questions and asking for summarising statements.

The teacher must remember that in developing reading skills in the foreign language the students have not only to be taught reading but also the oral skills. The differences in sound and structure between the native and foreign language should be

highlighted and adequate oral practice should be given to the learners to make the sound symbol correspondences as well as the word-concept correlations familiar to them. The teacher of English as a foreign language should bear in mind the following points:

1. learning to read in the foreign language demands the initial activity of intensive oral preparation, familiarity with materials and correlation of sound patterns with visual referents to establish meaning through meaning bearing auditory patterns;
2. reading in the foreign language should not be introduced until the students have mastered all essential sentence patterns and lexical items in an automatic form both aurally and orally;
3. choral drills with books closed and open, with kinesthetic aids to ensure correct pronunciation and intonation help develop reading skills through word groups rather than through word-by-word transference;
4. silent reading should be introduced gradually as a sequel to oral practice, in the beginning stages of reading; and
5. frequent tests in both oral and written forms help students to consolidate their comprehension and oral production of the longer reading passages.

Now answer these questions:

Check Your Progress 5

1. From your reading of the earlier units in this programme how will you differentiate a foreign language from the mother tongue?

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2. What is the major difference between learning to read in one's mother tongue and learning to read in a foreign language?

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3. What are the difficulties in establishing the graphophoneme correspondences while teaching reading in a foreign language?

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10.8 LET US SUM UP

Teaching reading is one of the most basic and challenging tasks of the elementary class teacher. The history of human civilisation and education emphasize the importance of reading. It is considered the responsibility of the teacher to guide its development.

Reading development involves the integration of cognitive knowledge, language knowledge, reading skills, and reading strategies in order to make sense out of printed materials. The act of reading entails the construction and reconstruction of meaning at all stages of reading development. Children vary considerably in their reading development both in the rate at which they progress and in their use of reading for personal, social and academic purposes.

Teachers who have a good knowledge of the reading process and the stages of reading development can be more confident about how to teach reading and how to relate the foundational areas of knowledge in planning classroom instruction.

The teacher should develop a sound knowledge base for teaching. This knowledge base should help the teacher not only in choosing alternatives and combinations of what to do in the classroom but also in questioning the assumptions that underlie reading programmes, methods, plans and measures.

The teacher has the most influence on the extent of the child's reading progress. There is no programme that is best for all children. By artfully combining several strategies, the instructional programme can be made to benefit all the learners. By a clever use of time, communicational skills and experiential reading the teacher will influence positively children's reading growth.

10.9 SUGGESTED READING

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5. Smith F. *Understanding Reading*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.