

Reading: An Active Language Learning Skill

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<p><i>Article Info:</i> Received: August 10, 2023 Revised: August 30, 2023 Accepted: September 26, 2023</p>	<p>ABSTRACT: This article presents on some perspectives on reading. It considers reading as a robust resource and skill for learning. Reading is one of the major avenues of communication. It has occupied a good space at the Nepalese educational system. This is a review article where an in-depth information and insight has been reviewed. The techniques that are used in this study are document review and theoretical knowledge. Relevant literature is reviewed to make the study conceptually and theoretically reliable and authentic. The study shows that to read is to lead. The desire to write comes from reading. It demands both passion and compassion to be a voracious reader. It is not only receptive but an active, communicative and interactive skill. It leads to understanding, communication, capacity building, critical thinking, testing and assessment. It is the means by which every age is linked to every other. It makes possible reader's capacity for time binding, the ability to perceive himself or herself in the historic process and the fluid universe around him or her. Teaching reading is a humanizing process. Reading involves skills and thinking. It affects the entire personality. Through reading the learner can view ever-widening horizons and explore ever-new areas in the world of things, people and events. The key to learning, therefore, is the cultivation not only of the ability to read, but also of the love of reading.</p>
<p><i>Keywords:</i> Reading, understanding, critical thinking, learning, leading</p>	

Introduction

Reading has a great place in the formal education system. It is a humanizing process. It appeals our heart, head, hand and technology. It is not only taken as receptive but also an active and interactive skill. Reading is to lead. In this review article, I explore pertinent ideas on reading. What is reading? Do we read? If yes, why do we read? What does reading contribute to learning? How do we read? And how do we test reading skill? These were some nascent questions that came in my mind while I was planning to write this paper. Reading plays an indispensable role to make learners' daily life engaging, encouraging and inspiring. It can be better learnt in connection with listening, speaking and writing skills. However, it is heard from different stakeholders that the culture of reading is being diminished. It is said that many parents have a complaint to their children that they do not read sincerely both at home and school. Teachers put the same blame on the students. Adhikari (2013) asserts that the

contribution of reading to the development of overall language proficiency cannot be overrated mainly in the English as a foreign language context. The twin goals of reading are knowledge acquisition and language acquisition. He further adds that students read for vocabulary, grammar and examination preparation. Sometimes, it is difficult to develop a culture of reading on the part of students in an under-resourced environment. At this backdrop, I cultivated an interest to contribute an insight for reading.

According to Bhatia and Bhatia (2005), reading is always intelligent or meaningful reading. It involves association of the written words and spoken sounds are associated with meanings. It is the easiest way of accessing knowledge which a wise man transfers into a comprehensive graphic form as another piece for other readers. It is a source of motivation, pleasure and recreation. It contains, facts, feelings, experiences, knowledge, figures and wisdom.

The main purpose of the study is to explore ideas for reading, types of reading, and how it is significant and tested in teaching and learning process. Furthermore, the study reveals how reading contributes to thinking, understanding, communication, leading, creative writing, critical thinking, and professional development among learners.

Methods of Study

This is a review article. An in-depth information and insight have been reviewed. The techniques that are used in this study are document review and reviewing theoretical knowledge. Relevant literature has been reviewed to make the study conceptually and theoretically reliable and authentic. The study is based on secondary sources. I have used books, articles, journals to obtain information related to the themes of the study. Moreover, I have presented my own personal and professional knowledge and experiences to explore ideas for reading.

Review on Reading

Reading is taken as a receptive skill. However, the readers have to be active most of the time to understand the text. One has to maintain a flow, fluency, tone, stress, speed, silence, loudness and mechanics. It seems good to read materials to be a good writer (Morley, 2007). Similarly, the idea of Adhikari (2013) seems pertinent to state that why reading is beneficial to the readers. He presents that reading is interactive, purposive and critical process. Reading proficiency calls for extensive reading habit. Before teaching reading skill, everyone should know what reading skill is. Some thematic terms related to reading skill are briefly presented below.

Reading Comprehension

In general sense, reading refers to comprehend a written text. In other words, reading means extracting the required information from the text. In the simple way we can define reading as understanding or making sense of given text. This means the meaning of the reading text not merely lies in the text waiting to be passively observed instead while reading a text, the reader should be actively involved and work to get the meaning of the text. Khaniya (2005) asserts that in a usual way, reading is handled as reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension is defined in many ways. Grellet (1981) says reading comprehension as "extracting required information from it as efficiently as possible" (p.3). Reading varies according to the purpose of reading and type of text. For example, we read advertisement given in a newspaper is different from the way we read academic article.

There is a great controversy between the scholars in defining reading comprehension. Some argue that it is a single competence. But, others claim that it is not a single competence instead it is an inclusive term which incorporates several sub skills. In this connection, Khaniya (2005) argues, "While dealing with reading comprehension, there is also a debate on whether it is a single competence or it is composed of several reading sub-skills" (p.139). Reading, therefore, is to comprehend the text. It is an active and interactive skill (Pandey, et al., 2014). Reading is a process in which three activities are involved: recognizing graphic symbols, vocalizing these symbols, and getting the message of the printed text. There are different reasons for a learner to read different texts, for example, to read for pleasure, to read for career development, to read for higher study, and to read for writing model (Sharma, 2018).

Sub-Skills Required of Reading

As mentioned above, reading is understanding, which includes extracting the required information from the text as proficiently as possible. Therefore, it is a process of communication because the writer communicates with the reader and the reader interacts with the writer's beliefs and intension. It is one of the basic skills of language development. It includes both visual and non-visual experiences and behavior. Therefore, there are several sub-skills of reading. It means, it is a skill which is composite of other several sub-skills. According to Munby (1978), sub-skills of reading are: recognizing the script of a language, deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items, understanding explicitly stated information, understanding information when not explicitly stated, understanding conceptual meaning, understanding the communicative value (function) of sentences and utterance, understanding relations within the sentences, understanding relation between the parts of a text through lexical cohesion devices, understanding cohesion between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion devices, interpreting text by going outside it, recognizing indicators in disclosure, identifying the main point or important information in a piece of discourse, distinguishing the main idea from supporting details, extracting salient points to summarize (the text, an idea etc.), selective extraction of relevant points from a text, basic reference skills, scanning to locate specifically required information, transcoding information to diagrammatic display.

Therefore, to be a proficient reader, one has to develop the aforementioned skills. For the purpose of developing these skills, we can do several types of exercises. Grellet (1981) suggests the following exercises to develop the reading skills. To clarify the organization of the passage, the questions can be about: the function of the passage, the general organization (e.g. argumentative), the rhetorical organization (e.g. contrast, comparison), the cohesive devices (e.g. link-words), the intra-sentential relations (e.g. derivation, morphology, hyponymy) and to clarify the contents of the passage. The questions can be about: plain facts (direct reference), implied facts (inference), deduced meaning (supposition), and evaluation (p.5).

Types of Reading

All the readers have their own purpose for reading a text. That means, no readers go through a text unless they have some purposes in mind reading can be a different types on the basis of speed, noise, purpose of reading and focus of attention (James, 2010). A brief a count of types of reading have been given below:

On the Basis of Speed. On the basis of speed, there are two types of reading: slow reading and rapid reading. They are briefly described below:

Slow Reading. Slow reading refers to the reading at a relatively slow speed. It occurs in the beginning stage of reading and while reading difficult passages. It is fruitful while teaching listening (presentation stage). It is done for the purpose of understanding in-depth ideas and learning about the language system (Harmer, 2005).

Fast/Rapid Reading. Fast reading refers to the reading at a relatively fast speed. Fast reading is done by the native speakers and learners after being expert in target language (Sharma, 2018). It occurs while reading silently. This type of reading is used while reading simple text and for self-study. The activities like summarizing and paraphrasing can be given to the students for practicing rapid reading.

On the Basis of Noise. Silent reading and loud reading are the types under the noise basis. A brief description of these two types is mentioned below:

Silent Reading. Silent reading refers to understanding the required information from graphic symbols with the help of our eyes. It involves mental process without making use of organs of speech. Experiment has proved that more comprehension achieved only through silent reading. A good silent reader does not allow even the movement of lips and the use of pen and pencil on the print. The readers are not allowed to walk their heads. It is useful for self-study and library reading (Harmer, 2005).

Reading Aloud. Aloud reading involves both physical and mental process. It changes the graphic symbols into in the spoken form and interprets them. It involves pronunciation and helps in relating spelling with pronunciation. It is useful especially for lower level students and reading for others who are blind and illiterate. To read aloud, the readers should bear the good knowledge of supra-segmental features, i.e. stress, intonation, rhyme, etc. In some cases if the reader cannot maintain the supra-segmental features while reading the text loudly, the reading may convey another meaning. So, it is not better to get the students to read unseen text aloud which contains new vocabulary items (Sharma, 2018). The students are unable to concentrate adequately on the meaning of the text while reading loudly.

On the Basis of Focus of Attention. On the basis of focus of attention, there are two types of reading which are briefly described below.

Skimming. Skimming is the rapid type of reading in which the eyes of the readers run quickly over the text to discover the main ideas or gist of it. It entails the readers' ability to pick our main points rapidly disregarding what is not essential or relevant to that general idea of the text. Listeners often need the same skill to listening for main message and disregarding the repetition, false starts an irrelevance that are often features of spoken language (Rivers, 1968).

Scanning. Scanning is a kind of search reading in which the eyes of the readers run quickly over a text to find out a particular piece of information. Readers focus their attention to see whether a particular point is present in the text or not and to locate it (Rivers, 1968). It involves the checking of specific items and can also be called as 'item check reading'.

On the Basis of Purpose of Reading. There are two types of reading on the basis of purpose of reading. The brief accounts of these types are given below:

Intensive Reading. In intensive reading, students are expected to understand everything they read and be able to answer the detailed vocabulary and comprehension questions. This is more an accuracy activity, involving reading for detail. Short reading extract of a moderate degree of difficulty and contained features which merit detailed study from a basis for intensive reading practice. The purpose of intensive reading is to get detailed information from the text (Harmer, 2005).

Extensive Reading. It is a kind of reading which is done to gain a general understanding of what is written on the text (Sharma, 2018). While reading extensively, students are expected to understand the general meaning of text without necessarily understanding the each of the vocabulary items given in the text. It is a good rapid silent reading for pleasure. In extensive reading, the reader has the option of skipping the whole section he finds either too difficult or less interesting. This includes the reading of short stories, novels, magazines, etc. The purpose of extensive reading is to get pleasure as well as information (Harmer, 2005).

Theoretical Stance

Reading is taught. Some theoretical reviews pertaining to language teaching and learning are discussed here. Language teaching was not regarded as separate profession before twentieth century. In this concern, Richards and Rodgers (2001) view, "Language teaching came into its own as a profession in the twentieth century" (p.1). Therefore, the fundamental development of contemporary language teaching took place in the early part of twentieth century, as applied linguists and teachers and readers sought for the development of principles and procedures for the design of teaching methods and materials. In this concern, language teaching in the 20th century was characterized by frequent changes and innovation and by the development of sometimes competing language teaching ideologies.

Before 13th century the teaching and learning of classical languages e.g. Greek and Latin were confined to the analysis of grammar translation works and rhetoric. In other words, at that time Greek and Latin languages were taught by applying grammar translation (GT) method. In 16th century, modern languages like English, French and Italian gained importance as a result of political changes in Europe and they entered in the curriculum of European school in eighteenth century. But these modern languages (French, Italian and English) were also taught by applying the same method as the classical languages were taught i.e. applying grammar translation method. Despite the fact that grammar translation method was considered to be a method without any theoretical foundation, it dominated foreign language teaching from 1840s to 1940s and it in its modified form is still popular method in some countries especially the developing countries like Nepal. Though the GT method enjoyed more than 100 years popularity in the field of foreign language teaching, it began losing its popularity along with the development of other new methods and approaches. Since the GT method puts much emphasis on reading and writing skills, students became unable to communicate through foreign language.

In the same vein, Larsen-Freeman (2000) says that earlier in this century, this method was used for the purpose of helping students read and appreciate foreign language literature. Therefore, in the mid and late 19th century, it was opposed and rejected owing to ignoring the

developing of oral proficiency in the learners. In this regard, Karn (2007) presents that realizing the need for communication and oral proficiency in the language learners, some individual language teaching specialists developed new approaches. One of them was Marcel who referred to child language learning as a model for teaching. Similarly, the English man Prendergast argued that learners should be taught the most basic structural patterns.

Now, the job of language teaching has got its professional recognition and several new language teaching approaches and methodology have been developed. The first major paradigm in the modern language teaching was the adaptation of grammar based method which came to be known as the structural approach in the United Kingdom and Audio-lingualism the United States. Audio-lingual method became popular between 1950s and 1960s. However, it was surpassed by communicative approach later. During the same period other method attracted smaller but equally enthusiastic followers including Silent way, Natural Approach, Total Physical Response, and in 1990s, Content based Instruction and Task-Based Language Teaching emerged. It has become so interesting that approximately, every decade a new approach or methodology comes into vogue and all the methods had their heydays. Brown (1994) states on the changing EFL paradigm as schools of thought have come and gone, so have language teaching methods waxed and waned in popularity.

The primary concern of all these methods and approaches are on the classroom management, roles of teachers and students, teaching techniques and ways of motivation. In addition to these things, age, gender, caste, culture and proficiency level of students are the other major contextual elements that affect every aspect of the classroom discourse. These elements also affect classroom interaction, negotiation and interpretation of meaning. In this line, Brown (2010) presents that correctness and appropriateness, registers and styles, acceptable speech varieties in community, regional and national standards of language, national language policy and international varieties of English are some of the social and political issues that influence the classroom discussion and interaction.

Similarly, Tollefson (1995) mentions that, many language teachers and others applied linguists lack an understanding of how language learning theory and common teaching practices are linked with broader socio-political forces. Space, time, participation and engagement in the classroom management play a crucial role. Classroom is a reading and learning zone where a teacher and students interact verbally and non-verbally to generate knowledge. Therefore, teachers and students participate verbally and non-verbally in the interactions to generate knowledge. James (2010) presents that teachers are the main pillars in their professional development and educational change. They are the main source of motivation on the part of learners.

Significance of Reading Skill

Reading is known to be one of the basic skills of language development. Reader can transfer message in the written form and the concerned people get the information by reading the message. Therefore, it has become one of the important means of communication. Furthermore, different writers communicate to the reader and the reader interacts with the writers' assumptions or intentions. From the entertainment point of view also, reading is very important. We can enjoy by reading several different literary works of different writers. Therefore, one of the aims of foreign language teaching must be to make the learners proficient

in reading skill. In the same line, highlighting the importance of teaching reading skill, Rivers (1968) argues:

Recent intensive discussion of ways of developing the listening and speaking skills from the beginning stages of foreign-language study has sometimes the erroneous impression that advocates of active oral methods neglect the reading skill. As a result, foreign language teachers are sometimes accused of wishing to produce "language illiterates". (p. 213)

He further says:

Future graduates of foreign-language classes will be fluent chatterbox who are able to produce rapid-fire utterances in a foreign language but have nothing worthwhile to say, because have never have been given the opportunity to share the thinking of great minds of another culture, and so to widen the horizon of their knowledge and understanding. (p. 213)

Reading is equally important in the field of science of technology. Information relative to science and technology are being transferred with the help of reading and writing skills. So, to be touched with the recent development in the field of science and technology everybody should have the proficient skill of reading (Sharma, 2018). Reading requires us to have the patience to build a cognitive perspective. This is considered to be a prime brain-stimulating activity to sharpen mind. Individuals engaged in reading have a slower memory decline than those who avoid reading. It also improves memory and builds focus. Moreover, to use the recent gift of science and technology one has to have the reading skill because he/she will not be able to operate with science and technology in the lack of reading skills because he/she should be able to read the manuals.

From the cultural prospective, reading is very much important. Through reading different cultural texts we can gain the knowledge of different cultures of the huge world just sitting in our room (Pandey, et al.,2014). In other words, we can enrich our own culture with the help of reading and writing skills, i.e. we can write about culture and expand it through the readers all over the world. Books can be both an escape and an adventure. When we are reading, we have the opportunity to think about things in new ways, learn about cultures, events, and people we may have never otherwise heard of, and can adopt methods of thinking that help to reshape or enhance our identity.

The academic field will also be handicapped without reading skill. All books, journals, articles etc. are in the written form. So, if student lacks this skill, he or she becomes unable to read the prescribed textbook and other several different articles which are helpful to support the study. In fact, most of the academic activities will not take place in the lack of reading skill (Rivers, 1998).

Testing Reading

In teaching and learning, testing is always associated with achievement because it is a tool to measure the learner's ability in learning (Khaniya, 2005). The testing and teaching and learning refer to testing of various skills of language viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing, whereas reading means a process of retrieving and comprehending some kinds of information and ideas. Teaching and testing are so closely interrelated that it is virtually impossible to work in either field without being concerned with the other.

Testing reading is not a simple job because there is great debate among the scholars on the nature of reading i.e. whether it is a single competence or it is composed of several reading sub skills (James, 2010). However, for our convenience, it will be wise to adopt strategies to test reading as a combination of a set of several sub-skills.

There are several test items to test reading. We can use different test items of reading according to the type of reading materials, the purpose of reading and the level of learners (Pandey, et al., 2014). Some test items which are used in testing reading are: true/false, multiple choice, close test, short answer questions, completion item, etc. A brief description of these items is given below.

Multiple Choice Items: In this type of test, a question is given with three, four or five options. Students have to select one that is the based answer to the questions. *Short Answer Question:* It is another type of test item used in testing reading skill where the students have to give a short answer to the question on the basis of the text they have read (Sharma, 2018). These questions help the teacher to evaluate his students and to measure how much the learners have known whatever was taught. *True/False Item:* It is one of the most widely used tests to check reading comprehension. This item is easy to construct then multiple choice items. In true/false items, statements are given related to the message of the text and students have to find out whether the given statements are true or false. *The Cloze Test:* In recent years, the cloze test has become popular among ESL/EFL teachers. In this test, some words are deleted at a regular interval. Generally, a fifth or seventh word from the text is deleted and students have fill the blanks using their ability or capacity. They have to fill exact word or an appropriate word without destroying the meaning of text.

Insights

The study explored that reading is an active and interactive skill although it was taken as a passive skill traditionally. A reader indirectly interacts with the writer while reading a text. Therefore, reading is a social, cognitive and interactive skill. A good reading is meant for writing and leading. It is necessary to develop the habit of reading from the early stage of teaching and learning. There are different types of reading such as slow and rapid reading, aloud and silent reading, skimming and scanning and intensive and extensive reading as per the interest and level of the learners. The sub-skills of reading are predicting, extracting specific information, extracting detailed information, getting the general picture or gist, recognizing discourse functions and patterns and deducing meaning from the context. Reading is one of the language skills that satisfies human need and hunger for knowledge. It increases the professional knowledge and updates our common senses with the things happening around us. The literature demonstrates that we can transfer our message in the written form and the concerned people get the information by reading the message. Therefore, it has become one of the important means of communication. It is human centric since learners involve in reading. Furthermore, different writers communicate to the reader and the reader interacts with the writers' assumptions or intentions. From the entertainment point of view also, reading is very important. We can enjoy by reading different literary works of different writers. The study found these test items to test reading. We can use different test items of reading according to the type of reading materials, the purpose of reading and the level of learners. Some test items

which are used in testing reading are: true/false, multiple choice, cloze test, short answer questions, and completion items.

Conclusion

Reading, one of the major avenues of communication, is a robust and active resource for learning. It is essential to the existence of our complex system of social arrangements since it takes place in a social setting. It is a means by which every age is linked to other age. It develops a reading culture among the students, the ability to perceive himself or herself in the historic process and the fluid universe around him or her. Reading opens up doors to new worlds, provides entertainment, boosts the imagination, and has positive neurological and psychological benefits. Teaching reading is a humanizing process. Reading involves skills and thinking. It affects the entire personality of the learners. Through reading, the learner can view ever-widening horizons and explore ever-new areas in the world of things, people and events. The key to learning, therefore, is the cultivation not only of the ability to read, but also of the love of reading. Reading is an indispensable factor in modern life, interwoven with work, recreation, and other activities of young people and adults. Reading is an important means of introducing the learners to the surrounding world. The learner's knowledge is the distillation of his or her impressions gained from abundant reading. Reading, after all, contributes to thinking, understanding, communication, creative writing, leading, and professional development of learners. Furthermore, it is purposive, interactive and critical process.

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