

Introducing Purpose Enhances Comprehension in Reading Tests

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Purpose is necessary in any kind of reading activity. It helps in developing time saving habit and leads towards accurate answers for the questions raised. The reader attempts to establish the purpose by trying to answer questions such as: 'What am I supposed to remember (or talk about or recite) after having read this?' or 'What sort of questions am I likely to answer?' This experimental research was carried out to test the hypothesis that purpose based regular tests (using scanning techniques) serve as practice activities and in turn enhance not only comprehension but reading speed also. The results show that comprehension is not an automatic result of reading. The reader recalls only what he thinks is expected of him, and when he is not very clear in this expectations, he retains nothing of real value. Speed reading phenomenon is associated with reading comprehension and purpose.

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Reading is not only a communicative activity but is of great importance to students in their academic pursuits. It has generally been observed that in most Pakistani schools; one of the vital pedagogical questions is how to teach students to read efficiently. One look at the Examination Boards of Matric and Intermediate results shows that the majority of the students get bad grades in English tests as compared to other subjects. Many who succeed in getting higher secondary school certificate after hard work and repetitious rote learning prefer to read in Urdu rather than English. Therefore there is a need to raise awareness about the reading skills and its continuous application in the English language classrooms to get rid of the notion of English as a terrifying subject and change it into an interesting experience of learning a foreign language. By reading students would also be able to write better as Campbell (1992:5) asserts, 'Reading and writing support each other. The child who is receiving encouragement to read will want to explore the act of writing.'

Most of the students feel difficulty in covering up a lot of reading material in a shorter span of time. Due to inappropriate reading habits they cannot even differentiate between relevant and irrelevant material. Thus there is a need to introduce reading skills at the school or college level so that the students would improve themselves and have better performance in their academic career. Strang (1978:67) suggests that 'poor reader as he gets older is increasingly handicapped by his inability to read because his lack inhibits his achievement in every subject and dims his chances of going to college.'

There is another issue of Pakistani teachers forcing students to read aloud in the second/foreign language learning classrooms that needs some consideration. The teachers face the dilemma of correcting or ignoring the mispronounced words allowing miscuing and presenting an

incorrect modal to the rest of the class. Lloyd in Strang (1965) had clearly suggested that oral reading with its attention to pronunciation and voice quality may inhibit concentration on the meaning of what is being read. Therefore the students must read the text silently for better comprehension. However, if the teaching learning objective is fluency practice of pronunciation of English words and sentences; 'Queasy, Quentin Quailed and Quacked' activities as suggested by Shehzad (2006: 86) can be used.

The classroom environment can change depending upon the importance assigned to it by the teacher. It is necessary to make students efficient readers through activities that make sense to them and various elements such as reading techniques, teacher education, student motivation, time and money (for photocopying in the absence of relevant textbooks) work in integration for the development of purposeful reading which has been defined by Noji *et al.* (2010:12) as 'reading to learn strategies ...by focusing on a single question or concept in a series of readings'. This kind of activity focusses the learners 'on the pieces of information they need to perform the task presented to them'. There is also a need to make the reading process purposeful as it would enable the learners to relate it to what they already know. Although as Pinnell (2002: 111) suggests 'any text usually has accepted or bottom-line interpretations, readers also have their own unique remembered images and interpretations of the world and they bring these to their reading.' Moreover the learners would also be able to deal with the dilemma of 'so much information within one's everyday environment' which makes it difficult 'to discern important from unimportant content or relevant from irrelevant and even misleading information' (Alexander & Jetton, 2000: 287). Earlier Narvaez, Broek and Ruiz (1999) had not only investigated the relationship of purposeful reading with the comprehension process but also reported its effect on the inferences that the readers make while reading. The relationship of the reader's motivation, interest and manner of reading with the notion of having a purpose was reported by Knutson (1998). Sweet