

# Improving the English Reading Skills and Reading Strategies of Elementary School Students

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## ABSTRACT

Reading skills contribute to a child's reading ability - in other words, how well they can read and understand what they're reading. There's a wide variety of reading skills that children develop and work on throughout their elementary education and beyond. This article has focussed on the importance, ways and specific measure to improve the English reading skills and reading strategies particularly among the elementary school students by considering on the challenges and difficulties faced by them. The suggestions and implementations on this paper are solely accumulated from the various reviews, videos from various social media platforms, Google, YouTube and also from the researcher's experience. The suggestive measures mentioned on this paper will eventually benefit the targeted students, however there is a bigger role for a teacher to be in action as a facilitator and a constant guide.

**Keywords:** Reading skills; Reading Strategies; Elementary Students.

## INTRODUCTION

In India, English was introduced with the arrival of East India Company who initially used the language for trade and commerce activities in the country and later, with the spread of the British Empire; it came to play a significant role in the political and educational life of the country. The main aim of education is to modify the behavior of an individual. Through education an individual tries to adapt to his environment and adjust with the changing needs of the society.

Reading is one of the four main language skills alongside listening, speaking and writing. It comes after listening and speaking and is usually the third language skill that we learn in our language. While reading, we examine various written symbols such as letters, punctuation, and spaces and use our brains to translate them into words and sentences that we understand. We can either read quietly (in our brains) or vocally (saying every word).

To be able to read, we need to be able to:

- Identify the words we see (word recognition);
- Understand what they mean (comprehension);
- Connect words and their meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate (fluency).

According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, reading is the single most important skill necessary for a happy, productive and successful life. Reading is a basic life skill and the

lack of reading comprehension affects students' academic growth. It is the cornerstone of child's success in school and consequently throughout one's life.

Before dealing with the different skills and the role of each one to raise the reading level, it is important to describe what a reading skill is. To do so, one can refer for instance, to Urquhart and Weir (1998) who define it as "a cognitive ability ... to interact with a written text." Moreover, Paris et al. (1991) point out that "the reading skills refer to information processing techniques that are automatic." That is to say, encompassing all the processes required unconsciously for the act of reading to take place. Reading is a basic skill. It is a keystone for a student's success in college, in fact entire life. Without the ability of reading, opportunities for personal fulfilment and Job success definitely will be lost.

For many students, learning to read is challenging, and the process is made more challenging when it is unclear. Without proper reading strategies, many children struggle, and a large proportion fall behind when they are unable to acquire the skills needed to read material appropriate for their grade level. The term "reading strategies" refers to a broad category of explicit and purposeful actions that help readers translate written words into meaning. All students benefit from decoding and comprehension strategies, but English language learners, beginning readers, and struggling readers need them the most.

### **IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH AS A LANGUAGE**

English is widely regarded as one of the most important languages in the world for several reasons. Firstly, it is a Worldwide Communication. Over 1.5 billion people speak English, either as a first, second, or foreign language, according to estimates. Secondly, English has become the language of international business and commerce. Proficiency in English opens up a wide range of career opportunities and enhances employability in the global job market. Thirdly because of its impact on culture English has significantly influenced international media, entertainment, and society. Understanding English helps people to interact with a variety of cultural expressions and promotes cross-cultural engagement. Fourthly, the most significant Internet and Technology. It is the language of programming and coding, opening doors for people to work in the IT and software development industries. Fifth, the travel and tourism sector makes extensive use of English. It encourages cultural exchange, improves relationships, and travel experiences. Lastly, on the path to personal development, learning English may be revolutionary. It provides doorways to many viewpoints, concepts, and cultural traditions. Cognitive abilities including creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking are improved. Expanding social networks, fostering self-confidence, and gaining access to a multitude of educational options are all benefits of being fluent in English.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India recognizes the importance of English as a language and emphasizes its role in the education system. Here are a few ways in which NEP 2020 highlights the significance of English:

- As a medium of instruction, children should be taught in their mother tongue or regional language until at least Grade 5.
- Multilingualism and multi-literacy, acknowledging the value of learning multiple languages.
- Global communication and employability.
- Access to Knowledge and Information.
- Digital Learning and Technology.

It's important to note that while the NEP 2020 recognizes the significance of English, it also promotes the preservation and promotion of regional languages and encourages a balanced and inclusive approach to language education.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Some of the reviews for this study are: Gilakjani (2016) Saravanan (2016) Vandhana (2015) Jeyamala (2014) Sankarakumar (2014) Sruti (2012) concluded that beyond doubt the reading increases subject knowledge and reading strategies will develop reading and contribute a positive growth. It was found that reading comprehension was positively related to reading attitude and dependence but negatively related to anxiety. Other factors found to be related to reading comprehension were reading readiness, academic motivation and quality of class room teaching, educational status of parents and social and economic compulsions. Nehru (2017) has found that the learners find mind maps more useful than the conventional classes that aimed at providing reading practice in their school and students grew more confident in reading after using mind maps. Ali Al Shra'ah (2021) aimed the effect of developing reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition among Saudi students using Kahoot. The findings of this study indicated that using Kahoot as An instructional strategy enhances students' reading comprehension and vocabulary development.

From the review of research conducted on developing strategies for improving reading skills to identify the tasks involved in reading and comprehension, to develop reading strategies to assist students in performing the tasks involved in reading and comprehension, and to develop reading and comprehension skills through these strategies, through strategy training, to determine the success of the approach through an experiment and to utilize reading strategies to improve their reading habits and abilities, which will increase their reading speed, comprehension, and retention, and to build acceptable Academic Reading Skills in English. The study found that as a result of the intervention strategy, the achievement of reading ability increased significantly in appreciation and reorganization levels in the low group students, and that reading increases knowledge and reading strategies will develop reading and contribute to positive growth Jeyamala (2014) Sruti (2012) Priya (2011) Priadersini (2008) Rahman (2007) Margarita (2006). Küçükoğlu (2013) on her action research aimed on the effective reading strategies in order to improve reading skills in language classes has found that the student had an improvement to a great extend have been tutored about the reading strategies.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE ARTICLE

1. To Know and explain about the reading skills and reading strategies.
2. To suggest the ways to improve the reading skills and reading strategies of students.

## WAYS TO IMPROVE THE READING SKILLS AND READING STRATEGIES IN ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

The suggestions are prepared according to the objectives of the study.

The following are some simple and effective ways to improve the ability of the students in their reading skills:

1. **Personalize reading materials:** Students can gain a better comprehension of the content by considering how it relates to their own lives. Making personal connections with the book through writing it down. Students can understand the material, which allows them to perceive how it relates

to contemporary events.

2. **Perfection in problem-solving:** Incorporate real-world problem-solving abilities into the program. Pupils can jot down possible answers to the problem and then discuss them as a class or in small groups.
3. **Use all five senses to engage diverse types of learners:** Including activities that will encourage learning and understanding which will allow the pupils to use additional senses while they read. Students should annotate the text while reading with a pen or pencil. Students should take turns in reading the word aloud.
4. **Always keep objectives of reading in the mind:** Students must keep the objectives of reading in their mind while reading English text it will help them in comprehending a text. This can help them take action in developing their reading abilities, and pupils will be more aware of how they are progressing.
5. **Engage with student-led reading activities:** Students process reading material and curriculum in a variety of ways. A teacher should be able to understand what works best for each student individually while applying reading exercises to assist the class to understand complicated concepts.
6. **Revisiting and rereading confusing sentences and texts:** Revisiting the parts that were confusing for the students (or that might simply need a quick refresher) can help students gain a more complete picture of what he or she is learning. This will also help and ensure that the student is able to understand upcoming material in the text. Keeping a record or list of words that students are unfamiliar or struggling with. Encouraging students to look those words up in a dictionary to learn what they mean. Then, find ways to use them in a sentence that they can write themselves.
7. **Talk it out:** When the student has finished reading, they should talk about what they have just read together. Teacher should ask the student what he or she learned and his or her thoughts. For longer reading materials, like novels for book reports, make discussion questions you and your student can talk about together after each reading session.
8. **Break down reading:** Breaking up long and difficult reading into segments helps to make it more digestible. Shorter parts will aid in student engagement while the class examines the content. It can bring confidence in students for their knowledge of a difficult subject.

Reading strategies are techniques and activities that helps the students to develop language and reading skills. Strategies that improve decoding and reading comprehension skills benefit every student, but are essential for beginning readers, struggling readers, and English Language Learners.

*Following are the reading strategies to improve the reading skill:*

1. **Keep a sharp eye on visual clues:** Does the book or text include any images that represent the text? Readers must use the clues from the text to create a picture in their head. They use all their senses and imagination to create their mental image. Students should take a look at any visual clues in the text to see if they see any clues that will help them to decode the text.
2. **Sound it out:** Students struggling with a particular word should break the sentence phonetically and say each sound separately out loud. This should help them piece together tricky words and understand how sounds interact.
3. **Summarizing:** This allows the reader to digest small snippets of information in a simple structure. The students are able to understand the basics of the text without needing to read it all. Using summaries as a reading strategy can help students identify key information and phrases in a text.

4. **Ask questions:** Elementary students learn to ask and answer questions to clarify meaning and ensure they understand what they have read. To help this reading strategy, students should be encouraged to ask questions before, during and after reading.
5. **Make predictions:** Written and visual clues are used by the readers from the text as well as their own personal experiences to make predictions about what might happen before, during and after reading. Using this strategy in reading helps student become more confident in understanding key features of a story and piece together clues in writing.
6. **Story Mapping:** Story mapping is a great reading strategy that teachers and parents can use when working with fictional texts. This strategy uses templates such as “Story Mapping Boxes Worksheet” to create a visual 'map' of the story plot, characters, setting and themes.
7. **Comprehension monitoring:** It is a form of metacognition. This strategy involves the ability of readers to know when they understand what they read, when they do not understand, and to use appropriate strategies to improve their understanding when it is blocked.

In both the suggestions the teacher plays a vital role in imparting above mentioned abilities and strategies of reading. It is in the elementary period/stage of the students' life where a reading skill has to be enhanced and developed. The above mentioned strategies do not confine only with the English subject but it also has its relevance with all the pedagogies.

## CONCLUSION

Students who like reading are more likely to engage with texts, experiment with different genres, and look for opportunities to read on their own. By fostering a love for reading, students are more likely to engage with texts willingly, leading to improved reading skills, a broader vocabulary, increased comprehension, and enhanced critical thinking abilities. The Reading skill is very much essential for the elementary school students because it equips the students with necessary knowledge and understanding not only for building their own life but also for contributing positively to the socio-economic development of the nation. The promotion of the reading skill and identification of reading strategies of the elementary school students and turning them into lifelong learners are quite important for building a knowledgeable society.

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