

Reasons and Remedies for English Comprehension and Production Problems for Pakistani University Students– A Review Article

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Abstract:

This review paper aims to capture the reasons and remedies for English comprehension and production problems for Pakistani University students. A thorough review of the literature reveals that the ESL Pakistani paradigm poses many problems for university students, including the knowledge of the language and knowledge about the language. Most Pakistani students' reading problems are vocalization, sub vocalization, word blocking, stamina, regressions, and others. This study also discusses some activities, such as before-reading, during-reading, and after-reading activities, so students improve their comprehension and production in English. Addressing the target language comprehension and production problems requires a comprehensive approach that includes exposure to English in various contexts, interactive teaching methods, focused instructions on pronunciation and grammar, opportunities for meaningful practice, and a supportive learning environment. This study also recommends some activities like before reading, during reading and after reading activities for better reading comprehension among Pakistani University students.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Problems, Faculty Visual Perception, Vocalization, Sub vocalization, Word Blocking, Stamina, Regressions, Barriers, Remedies, Solutions, Reading Comprehension Activities, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a crucial challenge faced by most Pakistani university students. They find it hard to acquire a neutral accent. Firstly, pronunciation challenges can be a key issue that makes it difficult for learners to be understood by native English speakers, and it can also affect the overall communicative abilities of the speakers. Secondly, Pakistani learners may struggle to master grammatical rules and sentence structure. Common challenges include verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, word order, and articles.

At the same time, building a strong vocabulary in English can be challenging for ESL learners. Expanding one's vocabulary requires exposure to a wide range of words and their

meanings. Developing skills such as organizing ideas, constructing coherent paragraphs, using appropriate vocabulary, and employing correct grammar and punctuation can be demanding. Lack of practice, fear of making mistakes, and limited opportunities for conversational practice can hinder the development of fluency and oral communication skills in Pakistani university students. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes exposure to English in various contexts, interactive teaching methods, focused instructions on pronunciation and grammar, opportunities for meaningful practice, and a supportive learning environment.

Reading Comprehension (RC)

Comprehension is the understanding or being able of what is read. This understanding comes from the interaction between the written words and how they trigger knowledge outside the text or message. Comprehension is a creative, multifaceted process dependent upon four language skills, viz., Phonology, Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics.

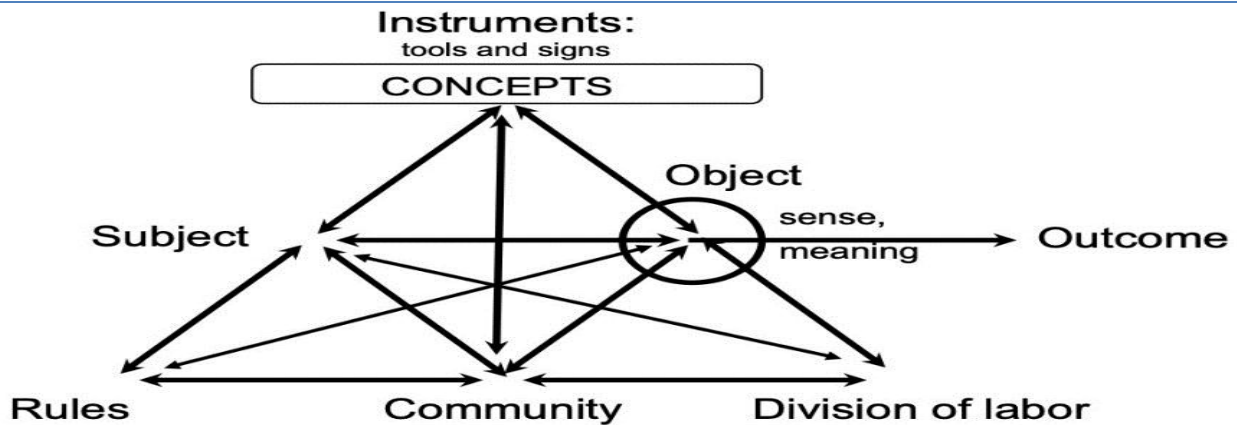
There are following levels of Critical Reading/ Reading Comprehension:

- Reading Comprehension
- Reading Comprehension with Reference to EFL(English as a Foreign Language)
- Reading Comprehension with Reference to EMI(English as a Medium of Instruction)
- RC Skills
- RC Strategies
- RC Strategies with Reference to EFL and EMI

Approach/Theory of Reading Comprehension

Engestrom's Second Generation Activity Theory 2001

Engestrom advocates the study of artifacts 'as integral and inseparable components of human functioning' but he argues that the focus of the study of mediation should be on its relationship with the other components of an **activity** system (**Engestrom** 1999).



<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Virtualisation-of-Administrative-Work-Environment-Adam-Effah/9289f0b81b3d77aa776065c6fbf0dec1051f8d02>

- To progress the development of activity theory, Engeström expanded the original triangular representation of activity to enable an examination of systems of activity at the macro level of the collective and the community in preference to a micro-level concentration on the individual actor or agent operating with tools.
- This expansion of the basic Vygotskian triangle aims to represent the social/collective elements in an activity system by adding the elements of community, rules, and division of labor while emphasizing the importance of analyzing their interactions.
- In Figure 2 above, the object is depicted with the help of an oval, indicating that object-oriented actions are always, explicitly or implicitly, characterized by ambiguity, surprise, interpretation, sense-making, and potential for change. (Engeström 1999).
- At the same time, Engeström drew on Ilyenkov (1977, 82) to emphasize the importance of contradictions within activity systems as the driving force of change and, thus, development.

LEVELS OF READING COMPREHENSION:

Different levels of meaning could be obtained from the same material.

He suggested four levels of reading.

- Literal level
- Interpretative level
- Significance level

- Evolution Level

In literal level the focus is On translating the meaning of the word. According to this literal comprehension refers to the information and data with a specific text. It is considered as the initial and basic level of reading comprehension. Students can use literal comprehension to grasp the information from the text more efficiently.

In interpretive level the focus is on material's context. In interpretive level the emphasis is on what the words actually implies or what's the hidden meaning behind the given words. At this level a student needs to have information through which he can relate to text and understand the intended meaning of the author. It helps the students to have an understanding of the text rather than focusing on the complex words and terminologies used by the author.

In significance level the focus is on implications which also involves applications. It is the ability that reader has understood the literal meaning as well as the interpretive meaning now he can easily analyse and interpret the data to draw conclusions and judgements.

In evaluative level readers givefeedback about the data in their own words. Evaluating comprehension includes the understanding and reaction of the reader beyond the text. Here the focus is on the relationship between reader and the message given within the text.it encourages the reader to draw conclusions and make judgements during and after reading.

Perception:

The term “perception” at both word recognition and meaning level. Perception can be easily explained as the interpretation and understanding of something.

Comprehension:

Comprehension involves literal and contextual meanings of the data. In literal comprehension (key word, skim reading and scanning) the focus is on the direct information that the words depicts in the text. By this students can locate the information efficiently and easily. Keywords contain most of the meaning of the complete text. Implied meanings are the connotative meanings which refers to the meanings that are associated with the word beyond dictionary level on the other hand literal meanings are the denotative words which is commonly called dictionary meaning.

Reaction:

Reaction refers to the response and feedback of the readers towards the text. The focus is on the perception of the reader and his views about the text. For reaction a reader first understands the text then analyses it critically to generate an argument and sometimes he adds references to make his argument and reaction more strong and accurate.

Assimilation:

It is the overall attachment and summary of Perception, Comprehension, and Reaction.

Robinson does not subdivide assimilation.

Significance of the Study

The study holds significant importance within the context of Pakistani higher education. English comprehension and production are crucial skills for academic success and professional development in a globalized world. However, Pakistani university students often encounter challenges in these areas, hindering their ability to effectively communicate and engage with academic material. By investigating the reasons behind these comprehension and production problems and proposing potential remedies, this study aims to address a pressing issue in Pakistani education. Understanding the root causes of these challenges can inform targeted interventions and instructional strategies to enhance English language proficiency among university students. Ultimately, improving English comprehension and production skills can empower Pakistani students to excel academically, participate more actively in global discourse, and enhance their career prospects in an increasingly competitive job market. Thus, this study holds promise for positively impacting both individual students and the broader educational landscape in Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ngabut's (2015) research shows that reading theories and reading comprehension encompass various perspectives and models that aim to explain how readers understand and interpret texts. Key theories include the bottom-up model, which suggests that reading comprehension starts with recognizing letters and words and building an understanding of larger units of meaning. Conversely, the top-down model emphasizes the reader's background knowledge, predictions, and expectations in comprehending text. The interactive model combines elements of both, proposing that reading involves a dynamic interaction between the text and the reader's knowledge. Schema theory highlights the role of the reader's pre-existing

knowledge structures (schemas) in making sense of new information. More recent approaches, such as metacognitive strategies, focus on the reader's awareness and regulation of their comprehension processes, emphasizing skills like summarizing, questioning, and predicting. Research in this area seeks to understand the cognitive processes behind reading and to develop effective teaching strategies to enhance comprehension skills across different age groups and proficiency levels.

Mackee's (2012) paper covered the period from 1995 to 2011, which witnessed significant advancements in the research on reading comprehension, marking a shift towards a more nuanced understanding of the process and the factors influencing it. This era emphasized the multidimensional nature of reading comprehension, recognizing it not just as a linear process of decoding text but as a complex interaction of cognitive skills, linguistic abilities, background knowledge, and motivational aspects. Meanwhile, key findings from this period highlight the critical role of vocabulary knowledge and syntactic understanding in facilitating comprehension. Research pointed out that a reader's ability to understand and infer meaning from text heavily relies on their vocabulary size and ability to grasp sentence structure and meaning.

Ahmad et al.'s (2017) article consolidates essential guidelines for creating effective reading comprehension assessments, emphasizing the critical balance between testing theoretical understanding and practical reading skills. It highlights the necessity of constructing tests rooted in comprehensive linguistic and cognitive theories and reflecting the diverse and real-world contexts in which reading occurs. Key findings advocate for tests that assess a range of reading strategies, from basic decoding to complex inferential thinking, ensuring the inclusion of varied text types and genres. This approach aims to provide a more accurate measure of a reader's ability to interpret and engage with texts, considering different purposes for reading and integrating prior knowledge and critical thinking skills. The review underscores the importance of validity, reliability, and fairness in test design, suggesting that a well-rounded reading comprehension test should challenge students to demonstrate their reading proficiency in a way that is equitable and reflective of their true comprehension capabilities.

Budiarti et al. (2019) present insightful findings on the efficacy of incorporating RC strategy instruction in a first year course based on the self-study conducted by the instructor. The study highlights the positive impact of explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies on students' reading proficiency and engagement with course materials. The

instructor implemented various instructional approaches, such as direct instruction, modelling, and guided practice, and observed improvements in students' comprehension skills, vocabulary acquisition, and critical thinking abilities. Moreover, the self-study emphasizes the importance of providing ongoing support and scaffolding to students as they develop their reading strategies, fostering a collaborative learning environment where students feel empowered to apply these skills autonomously. The findings underscore the value of incorporating explicit reading comprehension instruction into the curriculum to enhance students' academic success and promote lifelong learning skills.

Sumaira et al. (2022) present findings that underscore the effectiveness of targeted instructional interventions in enhancing reading comprehension skills among university students. Through explicit instruction, modelling, and practice activities tailored to students' needs and proficiency levels, the study observed significant improvements in students' ability to comprehend complex texts and extract key information. Additionally, the research highlights the importance of fostering a supportive learning environment that encourages active engagement with texts and provides opportunities for students to apply and transfer their comprehension strategies across various disciplines and contexts. The findings suggest that systematic and scaffolded approaches to reading instruction can empower university students to become proficient and confident readers across their academic pursuits.

Navarrete's (2019) research paper consolidates key insights from various reading comprehension theories and instructional strategies, advocating for a holistic and adaptive approach to teaching reading. It emphasizes integrating cognitive and metacognitive strategies tailored to individual learner needs, highlighting the importance of activating prior knowledge, monitoring comprehension, and employing interactive reading practices. The findings suggest that effective reading instruction transcends mere decoding skills, incorporating strategies that foster deep understanding and critical thinking. The study underlines the role of educators in guiding students through the process of constructing meaning from text, using a repertoire of strategies that encourage active engagement and reflection. The overarching conclusion is that a balanced approach, combining theory-driven practices with flexible, student-centred teaching methods, can significantly enhance reading comprehension skills.

Elleman & Oslund's (2019) literature provides a comprehensive synthesis of key findings and implications drawn from a wide range of studies in the field. It highlights the importance of evidence-based practices in reading comprehension instruction, emphasizing

the need for educators to integrate research-based strategies into their teaching methodologies. The review underscores the role of policy in supporting effective literacy instruction, advocating for initiatives that prioritize professional development, access to high-quality instructional materials, and targeted interventions for struggling readers. Overall, the literature review informs educators and policymakers about the latest research findings and best practices in reading comprehension, aiming to improve student literacy outcomes.

Kirby's (2007) study comprehensively examines reading comprehension's fundamental aspects and developmental trajectories. Drawing from various theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, the review explores the multifaceted nature of comprehension skills, encompassing decoding, vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, and metacognitive strategies. It delves into the cognitive processes in understanding text, highlighting the interplay between linguistic and cognitive factors. Furthermore, the review investigates the developmental progression of reading comprehension from early childhood through adulthood, shedding light on the factors contributing to individual differences in comprehension abilities.

Farid et al.'s (2020) research study presents findings that underscore the importance of employing targeted instructional approaches tailored to adult English language learners' specific needs and characteristics. The study observed significant improvements in participants' text comprehension skills through explicit instruction, scaffolded practice, and strategic support. Strategies such as pre-reading activities, vocabulary instruction, comprehension monitoring, and summarization techniques enhanced learners' ability to comprehend and interpret written texts. Additionally, the research highlights the significance of creating authentic and meaningful reading experiences that connect to learners' interests, backgrounds, and real-world contexts. Overall, the findings suggest that implementing a repertoire of effective reading strategies can effectively support adult English language learners in developing their comprehension skills and achieving proficiency in reading.

Discussions and Observations

Developing Reading Speed

According to Francis Bacon, reading 'maketh the full man'—and this epitomizes the reading instruction goal. Reading is the root cause of success and growth. One should develop the habit of reading to enrich and vast knowledge. We want to read rapidly to share the experiences of the rest of mankind. To stay up to date about current happenings, one should

read more. Reading is like a light that brightens one's mind. It produces heat, which fuses ideas and light that evokes thoughts and feelings in the mind. On the contrary, a flaming torch can cause destruction; by analogy, reading may have abuses and uses.

David Russell once said that a writer only begins a book; it is a reader who completes it. The reader absorbs what he can from the printed pages, and then his thoughts and perceptions carry him beyond the mere print. A book is considered good if it has a good effect on the reader's mind.

There is a story of a centipede who had no problem travelling about until he thought about which leg he would move next while engaged in walking. The centipede's experience might lead us to guess that continuously thinking about eye movements while actually reading will not lead to more effective reading. However, understanding how the eyes function in the reading process could lead to insight into what can be done to achieve more effective reading habits.

Barriers to Speed-reading

Inefficient reading habits come in the way of rapid reading and act as barriers to one's reading speed. Some of the common reading barriers are Faulty visual perception, Word-by-word reading, Regression, Finger pointing and head swinging, Vocalization, Sub-vocalization, Lack of stamina and etc. Let us discuss these in detail.

Faulty visual perception: Some readers may have perfect vision but have a visual perception problem, which causes faulty recognition of words. This is because a lot of words have similar configuration, and this can lead to some problems for the readers. It is observed that people usually make mistakes while uttering similar words. These reading problems cause the wrong pronunciation to get drilled in the reader's mind. Some readers have difficulty with the return sweep. When they read, they tend to re-read the lines again. This habit causes the reader to spend double the time in reading.

Word-by-word reading: One who reads word-by-word is usually a slow reader. He cannot show reading speed or comprehension of the reading matter. Since he can not grasp many words in a single fixation, he cannot dare to go faster. He will not be able to grasp the meanings and context. As a result, he even makes unnecessary errors in word recognition, which means still slowing down. It is advised to take more words in one fixation to widen

their recognition span. Taking more material in larger, meaningful, thoughtful units will go a long way to eliminate these barriers.

Regression: Regression refers to the backward movement along the line or print. In regression, a reader re-reads the words or phrases for the second time with the backward movement of the eyes. If one does a lot of regression, it is a sign of poor reading. Sometimes, the regressive movement of the eye is justifiable, as the reader might want to understand the meaning of the lines, but developing a habit of regression is bad.

Finger pointing and head swinging: Finger pointing means that a reader reads only one word at a time, which slows down the reading speed. The movement of the finger can never be as fast as the movement of the eye. Finger-pointing often suggests that one is giving more concentration to the word than it actually requires. Instead of focusing on word location by pointing the finger at it, the focus should be on the idea that the author is trying to express. Head swinging, on the other hand, is also an unnecessary body movement while reading. Many people move their heads from one fixation to another when they are reading. Many people believe that head movement can speed up reading, but it's not true. The eye is capable enough to read without the assistance of neck muscles; it will only cause fatigue.

Vocalization: It is very common to see people in libraries, trains, or bus stops reading by moving their lips or murmuring. This is referred to as vocalization. A person can only speak 150 to 200 words in a minute, so vocalization reduces the reader's reading speed, as silent reading is much faster than one's speaking rate.

Sub-vocalization is a type of vocalization in which no movement of speech organs happens, but inner speech goes on in the mind of the reader. It is like the reader is saying each word to himself and listening to each word. This does have an effect on the reading speed. The focus while reading should be on the author's ideas and not go through the motions of having an "internal radio announcer reading each word."

Lack of stamina: Some students do not like reading. Lack of stamina reduces reading speed because reading requires focus and energy. If someone gets tired easily, they might read slowly or take frequent breaks.

Lack of motivation and reading interests: If one is interested in reading, then he will be a good reader, and a motivated reader is one for whom reading is a part of his daily life. It is a

well-known fact in psychology that habits are formed by repeating some acts that motivate us. Once a habit is developed, motivation is not required; they have their own ability to energize themselves. Lack of interest in reading activity makes one a slow reader, and lack of motivation hinders one's own reading speed. Sometimes, a person has the capability to read faster, but due to lack of interest, his reading speed gets slow.

The problems, reasons, and solutions mentioned above can be summed up as follows:

Figure 1 Faculty Visual Perception

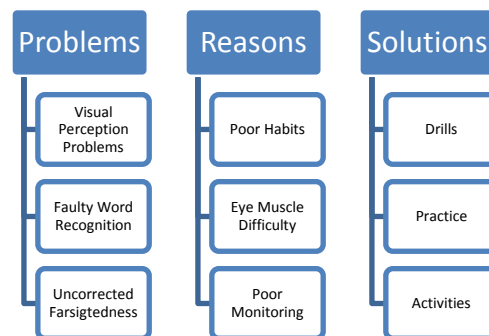


Figure 2 Word-by-Word Reading

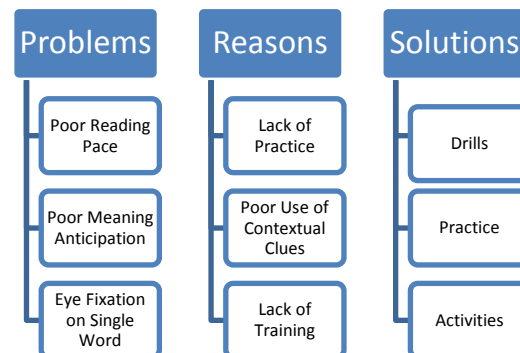


Figure 3 Regression

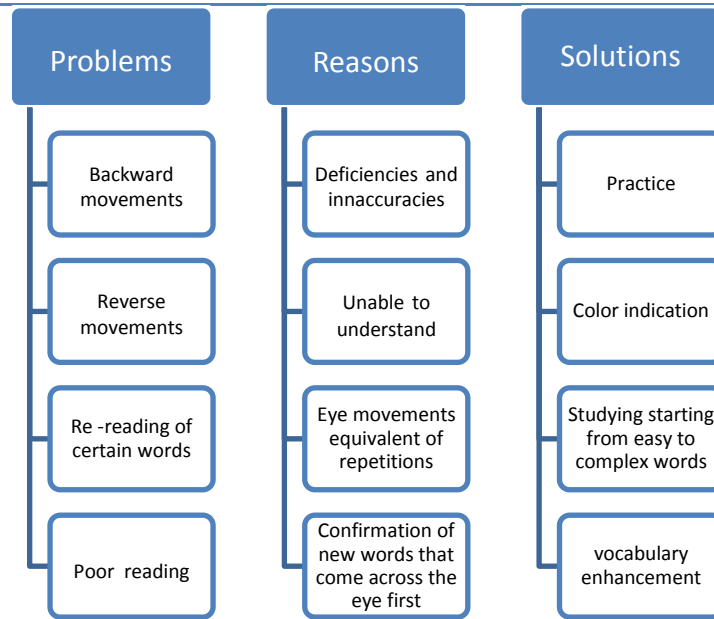


Figure 4 Vocalization

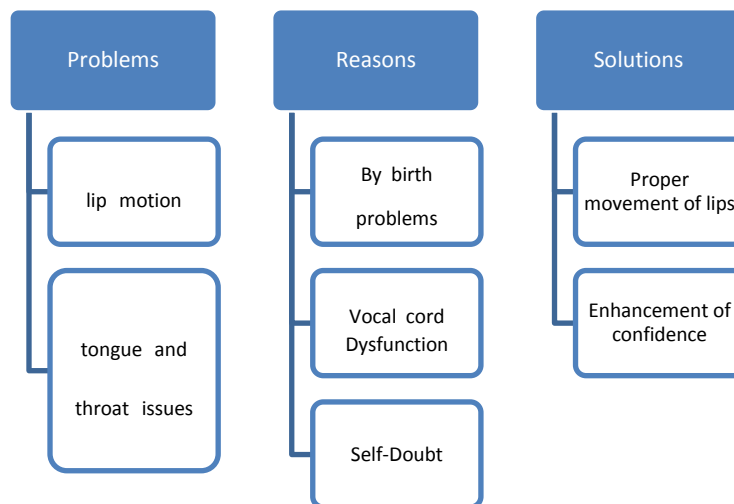


Figure 5 Sub-Vocalization

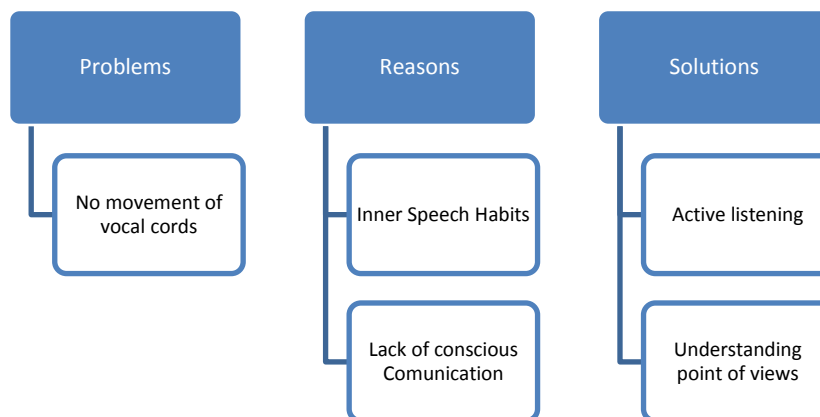


Figure 6 Finger Pointing and Head Swinging

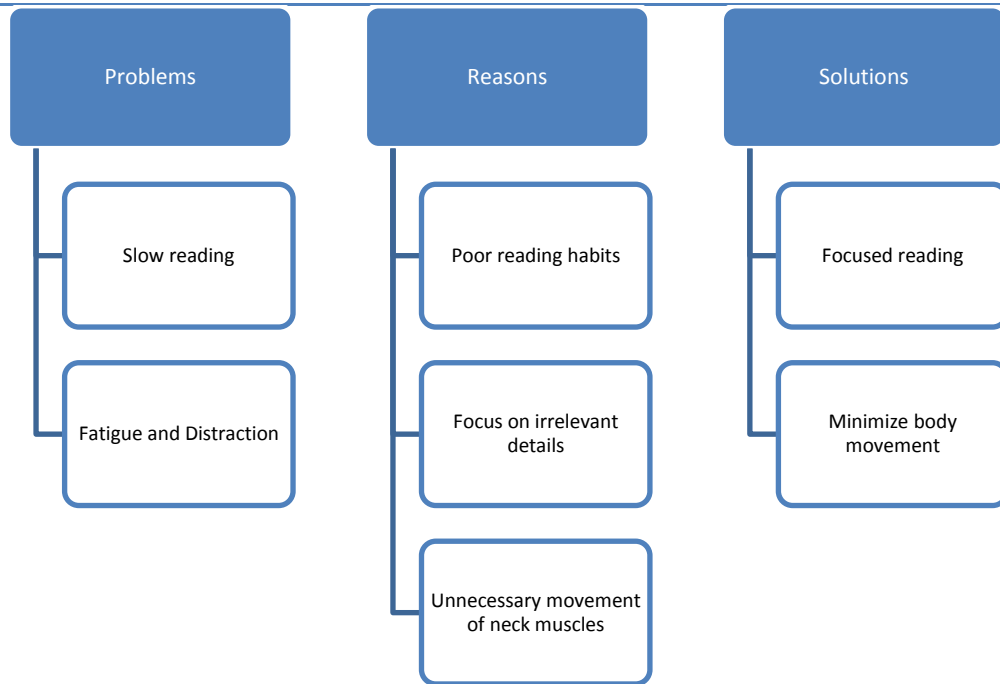


Figure 7 Lack of Stamina

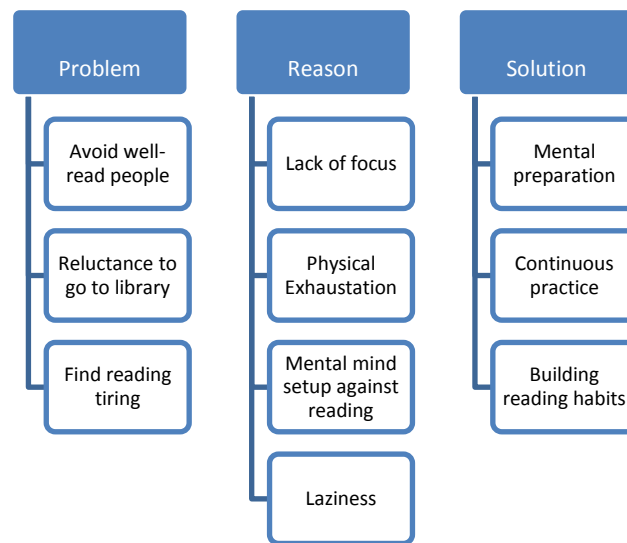
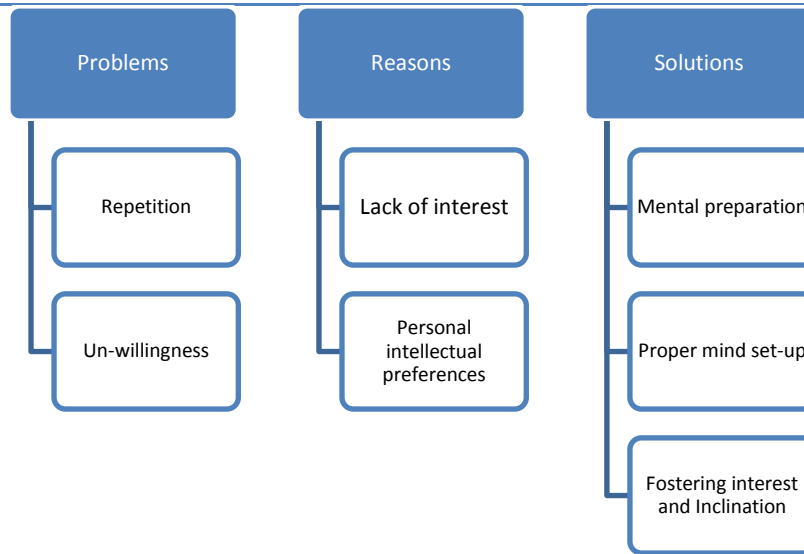


Figure 8 Lack of Motivation and Reading Interests



Prominent points for practicing speed-reading:

- a) Decide if you really want to increase speed reading or not.
- b) Read for at least thirty minutes daily and practice reading.
- c) Practice reading daily until it becomes a part of your routine.
- d) Avoid reading when you are tired; you must be active while reading.
- e) Use different sources to select the reading material.
- f) Read rapidly without getting distracted by the tough vocabulary or writing styles.
- g) Comprehension levels tend to decrease when one practices fast reading.

To enhance the speed reading skills

- i. Improve word recognition skills.
- ii. Expand your span of recognition so that you can read in larger thought units.
- iii. Minimize the habit of vocalization and sub-vocalization.
- iv. Avoid regression and do reading with focus.
- v. Maintain a record of reading, and every time you read, try to break the previous record.
- vi. Try to build reading stamina.
- vii. Maintain strong motivation and interest in reading.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, Speed reading is a practice that is mostly suitable for people with high vocabulary, word recognition ability and comprehension. If one wants to improve his reading skills, he should first try to improve these things. First, reading fast without understanding what the words mean is useless. Regular practice can improve reading, starting with reading from easy material. For example, when physical exercise, one starts from easy and gradually increases the difficulty. Re-reading helps to develop reading stamina. In short, one needs to put in some effort initially, but eventually, the skill and habit will be developed.

Pakistan faces various language issues due to its linguistic diversity and socio-cultural factors. Language proficiency and access to education in the dominant languages can have socioeconomic implications, affecting employment opportunities, social mobility, and participation in the global economy. Language is deeply intertwined with cultural identity. Preserving and promoting regional and minority languages in Pakistan is important for maintaining cultural diversity and heritage. Addressing language issues in Pakistan requires a comprehensive approach that includes language policy reforms, improved language education, increased access to quality English language instruction, and greater recognition and promotion of regional and minority languages. Furthermore, fostering a multilingualism and language awareness culture can contribute to better communication, understanding, and inclusivity in Pakistani society.

Recommendations:

Following are some of the recommendations in this regard:

Before Reading Activities

"Before reading activities" comes under "Strategies to develop Comprehension Reading Skills". The following are some activities we should use before reading to understand the meaning of the text very well. These are:

Anticipating the Content:

The teacher can also say before the learners look at the text (lesson 'Hockey' class VIII). "We are going to read something about Hockey. What things you might read about?" **For Example:** Game, Team, Match, Gold medal, Trophy etc. The two initial activities in reading text can be:

First Reading:

Scanning the text to see if all the items listed on the blackboard are in the text.

Second Reading:

Listening to items in the text which they had not predicted.

Anticipating both Content and Form:

The teacher's aim here is to recall known language and activate the language that the readers may expect to come across. **For Example:** The words like 'play', 'start', 'win' etc.

The anticipation work is based on the principle that we understand the familiar better than the unfamiliar. Hence, pictures help the learners anticipate work.

Vocabulary Work:

Even if the learners are interested in the subject matter of the reading text, they will soon be interested if they find the vocabulary too difficult. The teacher may take up the keywords whose meaning is essential to understanding the text. Students may also be helped in knowing the meaning of the new words using illustrations, demonstrations, synonyms and definitions.

Word Formation and Polysemy:

Knowledge of word structure and form also helps in reading comprehension. **For Example:** Understanding the meaning of affixes (prefixes and suffixes) and how they are used is very useful in dealing with new words. Students should be made aware of affixes as soon as they encounter simple ones found in their textbooks, such as teachER, UNhappy, DISagree, etc. Polysemy means more than one meaning in language. **For Example:** The words ('Kind', 'Hide'), etc. Knowing the different meanings of a word (polysemy) is essential for correct understanding in reading.

Purposes:

To activate prior knowledge.

To stimulate interest.

To focus and maintain attention.

To generate relevant vocabulary.

While Reading Activities

The following are some of the important while-reading activities:

Identifying the Main Idea:

The students can use skimming to find the main idea or suggest a title for the reading passage. They can also be asked to identify the topic sentence of a paragraph.

Finding detail in a Text:

Students will use scanning to find out specific information in the passage.

Following a Sequence:

If the text has a sequence, the reader can understand it without knowing the meaning of all difficult words. Otherwise, the reader will have to read the passage more intensively.

Inferring from the text:

It means to "read between the lines". It is a higher level of comprehension. The reader has to make a guess or work out what the writer actually means and has not stated explicitly in the text.

Recognizing the Writer's Purpose and Attitude:

The reader should try to find out the writer's purpose (e.g., to teach or to amuse), which will determine his attitude (e.g., serious or light), aggressive or polite.

Recognizing Discourse Feature:

Discourse is the way in which interrelated sentences are combined in a coherent text. Discourse makers tell the reader the kind of relationship between the two parts of the text, helping him comprehend the first part. **For Example:** The words, 'first', 'then', 'next', 'at once', etc., indicate a sequence of events.

Purposes:

1. To help the readers monitor reading.
2. To focus on the relevant part of the text.
3. To scaffold reading.
4. To activate prior knowledge.
5. To intricate new and existing information.
6. To evaluate content.
7. To monitor predictions.
8. To draw and test conclusions.

Intra-lingual Problems:

These are:

9. Irregularities and Ambiguities E.g., "wented" for "went".
10. Disagreement of Tenses, E.g.,
11. They left before I arrived. (incorrect)
12. The train had left before I arrived. (correct)
13. Errors of Idioms: E.g.,

14. My head is circled. (Incorrect)
15. I feeling giddy. (correct)
16. Confusion, E.g.,
17. This is the boy which meet me yesterday. (Incorrect)
18. This is the boy who met me yesterday. (correct)

Remedial Steps/Solutions for Common Problems in English:

19. We should change our attitude and use a proper accent in a particular language.
20. We should find out the causes of these problems.
21. We should promote traditional learning.
22. Proper/Meaningful use of Articles.
23. Correct Use of Prepositions.
24. Correct use of Tenses.
25. Proper agreement of Tenses.

After Reading Activities

Completed Reading Task:

While the reader has completed some reading tasks, some follow-up will be valuable for the teacher and his learners. However, checking on the reading activity is only the first step. We cannot exploit the learner's reading experience through further activities. The teacher can ask comprehension questions or hold a class discussion. The discussion also allows weaker students to make up for their comprehension deficiency.

Translation:

Translation can be another follow-up activity in reading comprehension. It demands not only a literal understanding of the text but also a sensitive response from the reader.

Purposes:

26. To Identify the main idea.
27. To Identify the critical information.
28. To Summarize Key Information.
29. To remember Key Information.
30. To assist comprehension.
31. To remember a sequence of events.
32. To understand relationships and connections.

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