

## An Empirical Approach to Teaching Reading Comprehension

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**Reading as a Process of Recognition and Interpretation:** Reading involves the recognition and interpretation of written or printed material. It encompasses the identification of letters, words, phrases, and clauses.

**Comprehension as Understanding of Meaning:** Comprehension is the understanding of the meaning of the written material. It involves conscious strategies that lead to understanding.

**Reading Deals with Language Form, Comprehension with Language Content:** Reading focuses on the form of language, including the recognition of linguistic elements. Comprehension, as the end product, deals with the content of language, requiring a deeper understanding.

**Reading as Communication, Comprehension as Negotiation:** Reading is described as a process of communication from the writer to the reader. Comprehension is portrayed as a process of negotiating understanding between the reader and the writer.

**Complexity of Comprehension:** Reading is considered, in some respects, a simpler process than comprehension. Comprehension is highlighted as a more complex psychological process. It involves linguistic factors such as phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic elements. Cognitive and emotional factors are also mentioned as part of the comprehension process.

**Reader's Interaction with Author's Thoughts:** The reader receives information from the author through words, sentences, paragraphs, etc. The goal is to understand not just the literal meaning but also the inner feelings of the writer.

In deep structure, meaning can also be divided into two categories: contextual meaning and pragmatic meaning. Unlike the surface meaning of a single word, contextual meaning is realized at the sentence level and is the meaning expressed by a sentence associated with its context. This type of meaning is not decided by the word itself but by the context in which the whole sentence functions. The pragmatic meaning is communicated in the feelings and

attitudes of the writer. It is the writer's intended unspoken or unwritten meaning. In the reading process, the understanding of this type of meaning is implicative because this type of meaning lies outside the organization of language. It cannot be deduced from the linguistic system itself; it is realized at the functional level. Contextual meaning as well as pragmatic meaning calls for cognitive ability on the part of the reader. Thus, the distinction between surface structure meaning and deep structure meaning is that the former is the literal meaning while the latter is the inferential meaning.

Unfortunately, learning RC most of the students focus only on the surface structure level of comprehension and ignores comprehension at the deep structure level.

RC not only includes linguistic recognition and cognitive understanding (semantic comprehension at both surface and deep structure levels), but also tends to be affected by the reader's reactions to the content, which affect the reader's evaluation and appreciation, which become a part of the reader's RC. If there is no such evaluation and appreciation, comprehension will be incomplete. With these preliminary considerations in mind, something new and more effective in teaching RC need to be attempted. The cognitive model presented here, adapted from Wallen's and Barrett's taxonomies (Wallen 1972, Brunner and Campbell 1978), is so titled because it can be applied to students of different levels and adapted to their various needs.

**Reading comprehension task activities:** The main aspects of activities associated with the cognitive model of RC strategies are described below.

**Literal comprehension training:** Training students in literal comprehension involves employing two primary types of tasks: recognition tasks and recall tasks. Each serves a distinct purpose in assessing and reinforcing comprehension skills.

**Recognition Tasks:** Recognition tasks focus on the identification of main points within a reading selection or explicit content derived from the reading material. These tasks don't require students to generate information from memory but rather to recognize and highlight key elements. Examples of recognition tasks include identifying main ideas, recognizing specific details, or understanding the overall structure of the text.

**Recall Tasks:** Recall tasks, in contrast, necessitate students to retrieve explicit statements from the reading selection solely from memory. Teachers often pose questions that prompt students to recall specific details or events discussed in the text. Recall tasks are typically more

challenging as they require a deeper level of engagement with the material, testing not only recognition but also the ability to retain and reproduce information. The difficulty of both recognition and recall tasks can be influenced by several factors:

**Linguistic Abilities and Needs:** Students with varying linguistic abilities may find these tasks more or less challenging. Language proficiency plays a crucial role in how well students can comprehend and recall information.

**Number of Events or Incidents:** The complexity of the reading material, specifically the number of events or incidents to be recalled, can impact task difficulty. More intricate content with numerous details may pose a greater challenge.

**Content Familiarity:** Students' prior knowledge of the content can affect the difficulty level. Familiarity with the subject matter may make both recognition and recall tasks easier.

**Question Complexity:** The complexity of the questions posed by teachers can influence task difficulty. Well-crafted questions demand a higher level of cognitive engagement.

It is a common belief that recall tasks are generally more demanding than recognition tasks, especially when both tasks involve the same content. This is because recall tasks require students to actively retrieve information from memory rather than simply recognizing it when presented. The heightened cognitive load associated with recall tasks contributes to their perceived difficulty compared to recognition tasks.

**Inferential comprehension training:** Students demonstrate their inferential abilities when they use their personal knowledge, intuition, and imagination as a basis for conjectures or hypotheses. Inferential comprehension involves more logical thinking than literal understanding and is elicited by teachers' questions which demand thinking and

Some examples of inferential tasks are:

- a. Inferring supporting details: guessing about additional facts the author might have included in the selection which would have made it more informative, interesting, or appealing.
- b. Inferring the main idea: providing the main idea, theme, or moral which is not explicitly stated in the selection.
- c. Inferring consequence: predicting what would happen in cause-effect relationships or hypothesizing about alternative beginnings to a story if the author had not provided one or predicting the ending of the story before reading it.

- d. Inferring cause and effect relationships: guessing what caused a certain event and explaining the rationale.
- e. Inferring character traits: hypothesizing about the nature of characters on the basis of explicit clues presented in the selection.
- f. Inferring figurative language: inferring literal meaning from the author's figurative use of language.

### **Evaluation**

Students demonstrate evaluation when they make judgments about the content of a reading selection by comparing it with information provided by the teacher or authorities on the subject, or with their own experience, knowledge, or values related to the subject. Evaluation requires students to make judgments about the content of their readings based on accuracy, acceptability, worth, desirability, completeness, suitability, timeliness, quality, truthfulness, and probability of occurrence. The following are types of evaluation tasks:

- a. Objective evaluation: judging the soundness of statements or events in the reading material based on external criteria, such as supporting evidence, reasons, and logic.
- b. Subjective evaluation: making judgments about the statements or events presented based on internal criteria, such as one's biases, beliefs, or preferences.
- c. Judgments of adequacy or validity: judging whether the author's treatment of a subject is accurate and complete when compared to other sources on that subject.
- d. Judgments about appropriateness: determining whether certain selections or parts of selections are relevant and contribute to resolving an issue or a problem.
- e. Judgment of worth, desirability, or acceptability: judging the suitability of a character's actions in a particular incident based on the reader's personal values.

### **Appreciation**

Appreciation deals with the psychological and aesthetic impact of the selection on the reader. It includes both knowledge of and emotional responses to literary techniques, forms, styles, and structures. Activities include the following:

- Personal impression: reacting to the context, events, and characters.
- Recognition of rhetorical devices: identifying the rhetorical devices in the material and explaining their functions.

- Reactions to the style: describing and reacting to the writer's use of language and stylistic devices.
- Evaluation of imagery: identifying and assessing the effectiveness of the writer's sensory images.

### **Advantages and practical value of the model**

This model is designed for language teachers who train learners in RC. It has both theoretical and practical values.

The advantages and special features of this model are summarized below:

1. The model is applicable at various skill levels and meets different needs. For example, it can be used in teaching literal meaning and concrete facts or deep structure meaning and literature appreciation.
2. It can be used to help students comprehend the text from different perspectives and to understand the implications of the content.
3. It enables students to analyze and summarize the text as well as to distinguish arguments from supporting details.
4. It enhances students' memorization and speed-reading.
5. Because students use different modes of thinking, it develops their critical thinking and inference skills.
6. Finally, it improves students' organizational skills and self-expression.

### **Summary**

**Basic Ideas of Cognitive Theory:** Cognitive theories, in the context of education, emphasize the mental processes involved in learning. This includes how individuals acquire, store, and use information. Cognitive theories often explore memory, perception, problem-solving, and critical thinking.

**Teaching Reading Comprehension:** In teaching reading comprehension, educators draw on cognitive theories to develop effective strategies and skills. Reading comprehension involves understanding and interpreting text, and educators use various methods to enhance students' abilities in this area.

*Research paper*

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**Necessity for Beginners:** The strategies and skills used in teaching reading comprehension are deemed necessary for beginners. This suggests that foundational skills are essential for learners who are just starting to develop their reading comprehension abilities.

**Overlap of Strategies and Skills:** Some strategies or skills may appear to overlap, indicating that certain cognitive processes are interconnected. Even if they seem similar, they might serve distinct purposes in the overall process of comprehension. This underscores the complexity of cognitive processes involved in reading.

**High Demand on Teachers:** The model places a high demand on teachers, implying that effective reading comprehension instruction requires careful thought and preparation. Crafting good reading comprehension questions, for instance, is a skill that requires educators to consider the cognitive abilities of their students and design questions that stimulate critical thinking.

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