CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Meaning of Reading

Reading is a symbolic behaviour wherein the visual symbol is employed to represent the authority symbol leading to higher order mental activity. In other words, it is essentially decoding of written symbols on a page and attaching meanings to them.

Some consider it to be creative closely allied to thinking. While others consider it as a tool for learning all the subject matter. Reading is not a general ability, but it is a complex activity with many specific abilities, and many factors have been listed to be conducive to the growth of reading ability. Factors such as physical and mental health, sight, hearing, intelligence, home and background experiences, desire to read, interest in reading, purpose of reading, reading skills, etc., contribute to the development of reading ability.

1.2 Definition of Reading

Reading is a complex activity which involves comprehension and interpretation of ideas symbolized in written text and hence it is a kind of decoding process.

Experts in reading have defined reading in different ways. Deboer and Dallmann (1967: 8-9) are of the view that the printed
pages and reading have the capacity to shape reader's attitude. Gibson (1965) also characterizes reading behaviour in terms of receiving communication, making discriminative responses to graphic symbols, decoding graphic symbol to speech and obtaining meaning from the printed page.

Betts (1966) has defined reading as a thinking process. No doubt thinking is an important aspect of reading process but not the whole of it. According to Goodman (1970), “the purpose of reading is the reconstruction of meaning”. Meaning is not in print, but it is the meaning that the author begins with, when he writes. Some how the reader strives to reconstruct this meaning as he reads. Reading is here taken to include all those processes necessary to arrive at the reconstruction of author's meaning. Jenkinson (1973) adds a new dimension to this definition when he writes about reading. Reading has been defined as the act of responding to printed symbols so that meaning is created. It has long since been recognized, however, that getting meaning from the printed page is too limited as a definition of reading. Bringing to the printed page indicates more accurately the reciprocal process between the printed symbols and the mind of the reader. Constructing meaning is also a form of thinking, problem solving or reasoning which involves analyzing and discriminating,
judging, evaluating and synthesizing. All these mental processes are found in the past experience, so that in the context of reading, the material must be scrutinized in the light of the reader’s own experience. Any definition of the reading process therefore must include interpretation and evaluation of meanings as well as construction of meaning.

Tinker (1952) has summed up the definition of reading as follows: “Reading involves the reconstruction of printed or written symbols which serve as stimuli, for the recall of meanings built up through past experience and the reconstruction of new meanings through manipulation of concepts already possessed by the reader. Such an organization leads to modified behaviour or else to new behaviour which takes its place, either in personal or in social development”.

Grey (1956) elaborates on this theme further: “A good reader understands not only the meaning of the passage but its related meaning as well, which includes all those a reader knows that enriches or illuminates the literal meanings. Such knowledge may have been acquired through direct experience, through wide reading or through listening to others”. This definition of reading includes all the
intellectual and affective process that takes place in a reader in response to a printed text.

1.3 Types of Reading

Reading may be classified as oral and silent reading, informational and recreational reading, observational, assimilative, reflective and creative readings. Yoakam (1955) has classified reading according to the form, purpose and the psychological process involved. On the basis of “form”, reading is categorized as silent and oral reading. The reader either reads to himself or to others. On the basis of the purpose, reading may be classified as recreatory or leisure reading and informational or educational or professional reading.

Reading can also be classified from the point of view of mental or psychological process into four types. The first one is observational reading, where the reader makes note of what the writer intends to write but makes no special efforts to analyse it or to remember the words or ideas. Another kind of reading involves assimilation of what one reads. Here the reader tries to understand fully and remember what he reads. The third type of reading is reflective reading, where the reader reads with a critical attitude. The last one is called creative reading. Here the reader tries to discover
ideas so that he can use them subsequently in oral or written expression.

In another way, reading is classified as skimming, scanning and extensive reading. Skimming involves quickly running one’s eyes over a text to get the gist of it. Scanning involves quickly going through a text to find a particular piece of information. Reading longer texts is usually for one’s own pleasure. This is a fluent activity, mainly involving global understanding. Intensive reading involves reading shorter texts to extract specific information. This kind of reading is otherwise known as reading for details.

1.4 The nature of reading

Reading is a comprehension or receptive skill that is the counterpart of the productive or expressive skill of writing. Reading is not a naturally acquired language ability like listening. Speaking and listening are considered as primary skills related to language and reading and writing are treated as secondary skills.

A listener listens and understands effortlessly as and when he hears speech symbols. But a reader or a writer should have a material to understand and to write with.

It mean that reading and writing are not natural skills as listening and speaking are. Listening and speaking can be
accomplished without the formal and systematic help of a teacher. On the other hand, learning reading and writing requires more help from a teacher. Even if a child is left all along in the community, he automatically picks up the speech habits, but there is little chance for a child to learn reading and writing unless there is some one to help him. Literacy skills, like reading and writing cannot be picked up by a child automatically through social interaction. Recent researches have put forward some generalization about the nature of reading and five of them are described here.

1.4.1 Reading as a Constructive process

No text is completely self explanatory. While interpreting a text, readers draw from their store of knowledge about the topic of the text. Readers use their prior knowledge to fill in the gaps found in the message and to integrate the different pieces of information found in the text. That is to say, readers construct their own meaning to the text they read.

1.4.2 Fluency

The foundation of fluency lies in the ability to identify individual words. Since English is an alphabetic language, a fairly regular connection between the spelling of a word and its pronunciation is expected. But contrary is the case. But every reader must identify
the code that reflects the relation between spelling, sound and meaning. Researchers have pointed out that irrespective of the strategies used to introduce the children to reading, the children who earn the best score in reading comprehension tests in the second grade are the ones who made sufficient process in word identification in the first grade. It is therefore argued that readers must be able to decode words quickly and accurately so that this process can conflate fluency with the process of constructing the meaning of the text.

1.4.3 Strategic Nature

Skilled readers are flexible with reference to their reading habits. They are aware that there are different kinds of purpose behind reading and according to the purpose underlying reading they are capable of changing their mode of reading. How one reads a text depends partly upon the complexity of the text, his or her familiarity with the topic and the purpose for the fulfillment of which he or she reads. Studies show that poor readers are incapable of assessing their own knowledge relative to the demands of the task and monitoring their comprehension and implementing required strategies when comprehension fails. Therefore, for one to be strategic while reading means, one should monitor the process of understanding and resolve problems that prevent understanding.
1.4.4 Motivation

Motivation is one of the underlying factors behind learning to read. It will take, for most of the children several years to learn the ability to read well. Somehow their attention must be sustained during the period of learning and they must not lose the hope that one day they will become successful readers.

1.4.5 Reading as Developing Skill

Reading is a skill that will improve through practice. The process of reading begins with a person’s earliest exposure to texts and literate culture and it continues throughout one’s life.

The above generalization holds good to the learner who is a school goer and who tries to master the mechanics or reading of his native language material. Practice helps to develop the skill in reading only in a language already known to him. Here he learns to read whereas it is quite different a practice when one learns a new language through reading. The process of reading differs in each case.

1.5 The Reading Process

Learning to read is a complex cognitive task demanding a high level integration and maturity of the use of a wide variety of abilities and skills. It is extremely difficult for an adult to analyse actually what he is doing when he reads, for the process has become
so automatic and speedy. Neither can the adult remember the steps he took and the difficulties he experienced when he first began the task of reading.

The psychological processes involved in reading are highly complex. Modern researchers on the psychology of learning view reading as something beyond the ability of simply associating printed symbols with their meaning. Hildreth (1958) is of the view that reading is a two-fold process. First there is the mechanical process or aspect, the psychological responses to the print consisting of certain oculomotor skills, the eye movements, etc. through which sensations are conveyed to the brain. Second, the mental process through which the meaning or sense impression is perceived and interpreted making use of the processes such as thinking, inferencing etc. as the eyes move rhythmically across the lines of print, sensations are received which are interpreted almost instantly by the mind as ideas expressed in languages.

Goodman (1971) has described reading as “Psycholinguistic process by which the reader, a language user, reconstructs, as best as he can, a message which has been encoded by a writer as a graphic display”. He views this act of reconstruction as been a cyclical process of sampling, predicting, testing and confirming.
Attempts have been made to study the components of reading also. Strang (1961) identified the components of reading under four factors namely, perceptual factor, word factor, interpretation factor and speed factor. Perceptual factor is related to the ability of perceiving the details. The word or vocabulary factor governs the fluency in reading and comprehension. The interpretation factor reflects the ability to deal with the meaning of works in context. The reasoning factor involves the ability to see relations among ideas and to give proper weight to each element. Thorndike’s (1917) analysis as a reasoning process gives importance to attention which involves establishing and evaluating the relative importance of words, phrases and sentences as one reads a text.

A mature reader engages in the following activities as and when the reads: (a) He decodes printed words; (b) Comprehends meaning; (c) reacts to the meanings he has developed and (d) uses some of the meanings. Thus reading process consists of four aspects: (1) word recognition, (2) comprehension, (3) creation and (4) application.

1.6 The Skill of Reading

Like other languages skills, reading English is also a complex skill involving the use of a number of simultaneous operations.
So far, we know very little about the complex mental process associated with learning and the use of language, and therefore any attempt on the analysis of the skill of reading is bound to be largely speculative in nature. The following are some of the skills listed by Munby’s (1968) communicative syllabus design.

1. Recognizing the script of a language.
2. Deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical item
3. Understanding explicitly stated information
4. Understanding information not explicitly stated
5. Understanding conceptual meaning
6. Understanding the communicative value (function) of sentences and utterances.
7. Understanding the relations within the sentences.
8. Understanding the relations between the parts of the text through lexical cohesion devices.
9. Understanding the relations between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion devices.
10. Interpreting indicators in discourse
11. Recognizing indicators in discourse
12. Distinguishing the main idea from supporting details.
13. Identifying the main point or important information in a piece of discourse.
15. Selective extraction of relevant points from a text.
16. Basic reference skill
17. Skimming
18. Scanning to locate specifically required information
19. Transcoding information to diagrammatic display.

1.7 Factors Affecting Reading

Many factors including physical and psychological factors affect reading. Motor co-ordination, vision, hearing, speech and general health are some of the physical factors which play an important role in the process of learning to read. Some psychological factors affecting reading performances are mental and emotional maturity, mental and emotional stability. The house and school environment also has a decisive effect on the reading success of a learner. It can either facilitate or retard the development of effective reading. Some learners grow physically and mentally at the same rate as their age mates but make less than average process in reading. Such children are termed as deficient children or readers from the point of view of reading.
1.8 Reading Retardation

Physical deficiencies, mental immaturity and confusion developed during the learning process are some of the factors creating reading difficulties among learners. Physical deficiencies include special sensory defects such as poor vision and learning are more general bodily conditions such as low vitality due to malnutrition.

1.9 Learning Theories and Reading

Classroom practices in reading are based upon certain theories of learning advanced by educational psychologists. The major theoretical positions are:

1. Learning to read depends upon habit formation.
2. Habits are strengthened through reward and reinforcement.
3. Practice must be provided for habits to form.
4. Skills develop in an orderly manner from the simple to the complex form.
5. Motivation is important in learning to read
6. Meaningful tasks are learned easier than non-meaningful ones.
7. Tasks requiring automatic response must be over-learned.
8. Knowledge of process is an aid to learning.
9. Successful experiences build the strength needed to accept failure.
The important learning principles advanced by the associationalist like Thorndike, psychologists and others assume that learning to read is a habit formation, which is refined through trail and error method, through law of exercise and law of effect and is promoted through practice and appropriate rewards.

Another group of psychologists, called the field theorists advanced another view regarding learning process. They give more emphasis to the relationships among the factors found within a given learning situation, to the factors which influence the learners perceptions and to the view that the whole is more than the sum of the parts. One of them reminds us that habits are formed with due exposure given to particular situations revealing certain attitudes, feelings and emotional aspects. Toleman (1949) tells us through his (Tolman's) sign-gestalt expectational theory that students learn to expect certain results as reward for certain responses.

1.10 Reading Approaches

In our present state of knowledge there is no known correct or perfect approach available to teach reading. Methods of which appear to be highly successful for a set of teachers and a set of children may not be suitable at all for another set of teachers and children. This is because the process of learning to read is a complex
mixture of individual abilities, skills and personality traits. Two methods of teaching reading normally adopted are whole method and phonic method. There has long been a conflict between the use of whole word retain method and phonic method and research continues even today to give very conflicting reports about the validity of these two methods. The answer may well be that this conflict is based on the fact that there is no ‘royal road’ to reading. Rather a child has his own personal way of approaching the task of reading. Whatever be the teaching method, the learners approach reading only in relation to their own abilities, skill and interest.

1.11 Reading and Scholastic Achievements

No wonder proficiency in reading has been found to be closely related to success in school achievements. Long back an invention by Lee (1933) demonstrated clearly the importance of reading for general scholarship in the primary grades. In another study Bond (1938) also found significant correlation between general reading comprehension and average scholarship in the school. She concluded that there is a definite need for teachers of the subjects other than language and literature to instruct their students to develop particular reading skills that are important for the study of their own subjects.
General readings skills are important for the child, but reading of materials related to specific content area requires certain specific skills as well. Good readers have better basic reading skills which help them to become good readers even in their subjects. A number of general reading abilities have been identified that are needed while reading special subjects. These, according to Dechant and Smith (1977) include the ability to interpret facts and data, to draw conclusions and inferences, to follow the sequence and directions, to predict outcomes, to appreciate literary devices of the author, to evaluate ideas for relevancy and authenticity, to interpret graphs and charts and to remember and use of the ideas. In addition students should be able to survey materials, choose appropriate reading techniques and acquire a flexible reading rate (Dechant and Smith, 1977).

Since reading involves the use of many skills, reading comprehension in a given subject area can be broken down into many sub-skills and abilities. A student might read well materials of one content area but may be poor in reading the material found in another area. Each content has specialized vocabulary, maps, tables, abbreviations, indices, diagrams and foot notes, etc., which the reader has to master if he is associated with that area of specialization. Lorge
Irving (1957) argued that teachers teaching specialized subjects should help the child to develop his reading and other skills by formulating questions that require the application of specific comprehension skills. Through appropriate questions, the skillful teacher encourages the child to form summary statements, to examine the authority of the writer, and brings to light misconceptions or gaps in knowledge that should be remedied (Lorge Irving, 1957).

1.12 Reading and its use

Reading is a key factor in the development of knowledge and experience. Reading brings a rich experience to a reader and by means of that one may expand his knowledge. Without reading, an individual cannot gain educational achievements. Reading is an inevitable instrument for learning. Reading provides experience and through the experience gained, an individual may expand his knowledge, identity, interests and gain deeper understandings of himself, others and the world.

The aim of teaching reading are the following. “To make lives richer and more meaningful; to enable children to meet the practical needs of life more effectively; to develop social understanding and the ability to use reading in the intelligent search for truth; to promote a common culture and a growing appreciation of the finer
elements of contemporary life; and to stimulate wholesome interests in reading”.

Reading is necessary for personal and social adjustment. Reading disability leads to maladjustment also at times. Gates (1933) presented evidence by way of saying that in certain instances, failure in reading may be a contributing factor behind juvenile delinquency as well as various other kinds of anti-social behaviour. Tinker (1952) opined that reading can aid young people not only to estimate their own abilities and limitations but also to understand motives of human conduct in themselves and in others, and to appreciate the varied influences that constantly play upon them as they make their adjustments. No doubt, books can furnish information necessary to meet life’s challenges and problems.

Reading gains socio-political significance because of the fact the democracy in any country can survive only when the people of that country achieve a certain level of reading competence. According to Russell to acquire the knowledge about national problems and to use judgements based on evidence requires a high level reading ability (Russell, 1949).

Reading is essential for national integration and international understanding too. It helps one to understand and
appreciate the common achievements – the unique contribution made by the people of different nations towards the advancement of human culture and civilization and the joys and sufferings shared by the whole human societies. Through reading, it is possible to build sound values and arrive at means and methods for creative living in this machine age (Strang et al., 1960). Reading opens the gateway to an ever increasing fund of information about oneself and his surroundings.

As a means of communication, reading is more versatile than wireless, television or film. It needs no equipment and can be done at any time and place. Primitive man considered reading as a magic and he was right in his assumption.

Eventhough technology has made wonders, it has not replaced reading. The printed page reaches millions still untouched by electronic revolution. Reading meets the needs which the newer media cannot fully satisfy.

In our complex system of social arrangements, reading is one of the avenues of communication, linking every age with every other. So teaching reading becomes a humanizing process.

According to Vernon, “The ability to read is generally regarded not only as the foundation of education but also as an essential possession of all citizens of civilized countries” (Vernon,
1971). According to Strang, “Reading proficiency is the royal road to knowledge. It is essential to the success in all academic subjects. In modern life, learning depends largely upon one's ability to interpret the printed page accurately and fully (Strang, 1967).

1.13 Perspectives on Reading

1. A text has no meaning by itself, it has only a potential for interpreting meaning.

2. Knowledge of the languages in which a text is written in a necessary condition for comprehension to occur but it is not a sufficient condition (one can have linguistic knowledge and yet fail to understand a text if one does not have the appropriate knowledge of the world). Use of situational knowledge (the background knowledge presupposed by a text) is an integral part of the process of comprehension. Miscomprehension can result not only due to language deficiency but also to knowledge deficiency.

3. Prior knowledge is not sufficient to ensure comprehension. This knowledge has to be identified, activated and used by the reader if he or she is to comprehend what he or she reads.
4. Comprehension is a goal oriented process. It takes place when the readers construct contexts appropriate to the textual information. This helps them to make sense out of what is actually perceived by them through the reading of a text.

5. The information actually used by a reader in order to comprehend a text is much more than the information actually appearing in a text. The mental representation of a text is a combination of the information found in the text itself and its interpretation in terms of the reader’s own knowledge.

6. Comprehending is not a simple process of decoding information presented in a text; comprehending is really creating information.

7. Reading is a prediction based activity. The process of meaning construction is suspended until a reader has read a text in its entirety. Based on a minimal sampling of the text, the reader generates predictions or hypotheses which may later be confirmed or disconfirmed. The process of predicting and meaning building is a stepwise process. It is dynamic and flexible in nature. The mental representation of a text is often refined, revised and even abandoned depending upon
the nature of information that is subsequently encountered in
the text.

8. Almost all kinds of understanding are contextual. Readers do
not understand each individual sentence in a text independently
of what has appeared earlier. They use the previous context to
comprehend the meaning of every new sentence they read.

9. No two readers are intellectually alike.

10. A text, when viewed from different contexts, can be interpreted
to mean very different things.

1.14 Reading Comprehension – An overview

Reading means reading with comprehension. If not, ‘it is
barking at print’. Reading is essentially recognizing, understanding or
getting an impression of some written material. A passage can be
properly read with varying degrees of understanding. The scale of
comprehension ranges from no understanding of meaning to complete
understanding. There are various skills that make up ability to
comprehend the material that is being read. The specific skills may be
classified according to the reader’s purpose, and according to the
length and nature of the material that is being read.

The following are the reader’s purpose behind reading a
selected material:
a) To find the main idea of the selection.
b) To find significant details
c) To answer the questions related to a selection
d) To summarize the details found in a passage and to organize them
e) To arrive at a generalization after reading the selection
f) To follow the directions and act accordingly.
g) To predict outcomes and to develop an attitude called anticipation
h) To evaluate critically and to develop the act of active, creative reading
i) To get meaning from graphs, tables charts and maps.

Getting meaning from the printed page involves the ability to perceive and understand the words in combination. Thus, the ability to recognize individual words is not enough. A reader needs to learn the ways of getting meanings from phrases, sentences, paragraphs and longer selections.

1.15 Inter-Relationships Among Comprehension Skills

Different skills are subsumed under reading comprehension and all of them are related. An understanding of these skills and their
inter-relationship is needed for intelligently guiding the learner to undergo through the successive stages of reading process.

i) Comprehension and Word Recognition

Word recognition is a pre-requisite of comprehension, but it does not guarantee full degree of comprehension. Moreover full recognition of all the words in a passage is not always necessary for the achievement of the full degree of comprehension.

ii) Comprehension and Retention

It is not at all uncommon to find a reader who could remember and recite verbally some materials even without a proper understanding of the meaning of them. Here the retention aspect is perfect but comprehension aspect is zero.

iii) Comprehension and Rate of Reading

The rate of reading and the degree of comprehension are not highly correlated. Although there is a positive correlation between rate of reading and quality of comprehension, it cannot be unconditionally assumed that a fast reader is the best comprehender. The relationship between these factors is not correlatable due to the fact that an efficient reader may also encounter comprehension problem due to the difficulty raised by the material itself. Yet it may be claimed in a loose sense that a good reader can also be a fast reader.
iv) Comprehension and Reference Materials

A reader with poor comprehension ability may lack the skill of locating information. He may not be capable of making efficient use of an index. His ineffectiveness often arises partly due to the fact that he has only a vague idea of the material he has read. Furthermore, even if he locates the needed data in a book, he may fail to select the main points and the supporting details from what he reads or he may fail to follow the directions given. A reader may also face problems when he tries to summarize the information found in reference books.

1.16 Reading Comprehension: Influencing Factors

Reading comprehension seems to involve language, motivation, perception, concept development and the whole of experience itself. It seems to be subjected to some constraints similar to the ones associated with thinking, reasoning and problem solving.

We can conveniently bring the factors which influence comprehension under two headings viz., internal and external factors. Under the internal factors, linguistics competence (what the reader knows about the language) and motivation (how much the reader cares about the task at hand as well as his or her general mood about reading, schooling and accumulated reading ability, how well the reader can read) are included.
Under the external factors, the elements on the printed page and the qualities of the reading environment are included.

The elements on the page: This includes factors related to textual characteristics like text readability and text organization.

The qualities of the reading environment: This includes factors like teacher activity that incorporates what a teacher does before, during or after reading in order to help the students understand the information found in the text. Moreover, the way peer groups react to the reading task and the general atmosphere in which the reading task is completed are also included.

It is asserted that linguistic competence is an absolute prerequisite for reading comprehension since language is the medium through which information is comprehended. Added to this, interest and motivation also influence comprehension. In general, students understand better when they are interested in a topic. By altering a student’s degree of motivation positively or negatively, it is possible to alter his or her degree of comprehension.

While the ability to identify words accurately and automatically has a direct effect on comprehension, it must be remembered that comprehension also affects duly world identification.
Factors that are in the written message which affect comprehension are word frequency, word abstractness, sentence complexity, story structure, thematic information and visual displays, etc. These can be manipulated to increase or decrease the degree of comprehension.

Finally, factors in the reading environment also affect comprehension. The home environment prepares children for reading by helping them to understand their world. The school environment, teachers, peers and classroom setting, etc. shed their effect on comprehension, both positive and negative.

1.17 Teaching Reading Comprehension Strategies

Reading is a private affair apparent between the reader and the author. The old saying “You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink”, holds good even in the context of reading. A person can learn to read if he wishes but he cannot really be taught to read, the motivation should come from the reader himself.

Good readers make use of many strategies and techniques to understand the information found in the printed texts of various types. Some of the strategies normally used by instructors are the following:
1. Helping students to identify the purpose behind reading and to direct their attention.

2. Showing students how to use chapter headings, charts, diagrams, illustrations, glossaries, summaries, bold types and other text cues.

3. Incorporating learning strategies such as imaging, note taking, integrating new information with the existing knowledge framework, making word/idea associations, predicting, confirming and questioning.

4. Demonstrating different kinds of reading techniques to be used in different reading situations such as scanning, skimming, reading for main idea, reading for details, re-reading to confirm or classify.

5. Introducing activities like summarizing, self monitoring, recalling events in chronological order, retelling in one’s own words, outlining and the use of graphic organizers, as pre and post reading text management techniques.

6. Fostering higher level thinking skills used by good readers. Introducing problem solving with selection that contain relatively simple language but which require student to process print in thoughtful ways.
7. Posing questions that invite students to analyze, make comparisons, predict and draw conclusions.

Contemporary educators agree that effective comprehension results come from the interaction of four important set of variables.

1. Reader variable (age, ability, motivation)
2. Text variables (type, feature, considerateness)
3. Educational context variables (environment, task, social grouping purpose) and
4. Teacher variables (knowledge, experience, attitude and pedagogical approach).

1.18 Taxonomy of Reading Comprehension

If a major goal of reading instruction is to develop in students the ability to think and react to written materials in a variety of ways, all teachers, and particularly middle grade teachers must have a clear understanding of what reading comprehension means. In an effort to aid teachers to gain such an understanding, a taxonomy based on the work of Bloom (1956), Guilford (1958), Sanders (1966) and Guszak (1967) may be provided to them. Reading skill taxonomy is an effort to define and classify reading comprehension abilities and to provide example of the tasks which may help in the development of each of the comprehension abilities so classified.
i) Factual Comprehension

Factual comprehension means getting ideas and information which are explicitly stated in the reading selection. The purpose behind reading and teacher’s questions designed to elicit responses at this level of comprehension may be simple or complex. A simple task based on factual comprehension may be the recognition or recall of a single fact or incident. A more complex task might be the recognition or recall of a series of facts or the sequencing of incidents from a reading selection.

Recognition requires the students to locate or identify ideas or information explicitly stated in the reading selection itself. Recall requires the students to produce from memory ideas and information explicitly stated in the reading selection. The recognition/recall tasks are further identified in the following way:

**Recall of Details:**

It is the skill of locating or identifying or producing from memory facts such as the names of characters, the events of the story, or the locale of the story comprehended from the text.
Recognition or Recall of Main Ideas

It is the ability to locate or identify or produce from memory an explicit statement representing the main idea appearing in a reading text.

Recognition or Recall of a Sequence

It is the ability to locate or identify or produce from memory the order of incidents or actions explicitly stated in the reading text.

Recognition or Recall of Comparison

It is the ability to locate or identify or produce from memory the identity and difference in the characters, events and locales that are explicitly stated in the reading text.

Recognition or Recall of Cause and Effect Relationship

It is the ability to locate or identify or produce from memory the explicitly stated reasons for certain happenings or actions reported in the reading text.

Recognition or Recall of Character Traits

It is the ability to identify or locate or call from memory the explicit statements about the personality of a character figuring in a reading text.
ii) Critical Comprehension

Critical comprehension involves the task of making use of the ideas and information explicitly stated in the reading selection and utilizing one’s intuition and personal experience in order to frame conjectures and hypotheses. In general, then, Critical comprehension is stimulated by purposes underlying reading and teacher’s questions which demand thinking and imagination that go beyond the printed page.

Inferring Supporting Details

It is the ability to predict additional facts from what the author might have exposed in the selection, which makes the selection more informative, interesting, or appealing.

Inferring Main Ideas

It is the ability to infer the main idea, general significance, theme or moral related to selection which is not explicitly stated in the selection.

Inferring Sequence

It is the ability to predict the actions or incidents which might have occurred between two explicitly stated actions or incidents. It may include the task of predicting about what would happen next if the event reported in the selection had not come to an end point.
Inferring Comparisons

It involves the ability to infer the similarity and differences in characters, temporal aspect of events or locale figuring in a reading selection. Such inferential comparisons revolve around ideas kept in opposition.

Inferring Cause and Effect Relationships

This is a task in which one makes hypothesis about the motivations of characters and their interactions in relation to time and place. This task also involves making required predictions about the cause controlling the author to include certain ideas, words characterizations and actions in his writing.

Inferring Character Traits

This task involves making prediction about the nature of the characters on the basis of explicit clues presented in the reading selection.

Predicting Outcomes

It is a task in which one is requested to read an initial portion of the selection and on the basis of this reading, he is required to make predictions about the outcome of certain events portrayed in the selection.
Interpreting Figurative Language

This is a task in which one is pushed to infer literal meanings from the author’s figurative use of language.

iii) Evaluative Comprehension

Purposes for reading and teacher’s questions, with reference to evaluation task expect responses from the student evaluative judgements. Evaluation can be made with the help of the comparing ideas presented in the selection, associating external information provided by the teacher, other authorities, other written sources or by making use of the reader’s experience, knowledge or values. In essence evaluation deals with judgement and focuses on qualities of accuracy, acceptability, desirability, worth, or probability of occurrence. Evaluative thinking may be demonstrated by asking the student to make the following judgements.

Judgements of Reality or Fantasy

The question like “could this really happen?” may be used to get judgement from the reader who can decide it on the basis of his experience.

Judgements of Fact or Opinion

Making use of questions such as ‘does the author provide adequate support for his conclusions?’, is the author attempting to sway
your thinking?, the students will be made to analyze and evaluate the writing. For this, the students will use knowledge they have on the subjects, by this procedure the students may be made to analyse and evaluate the intent of the author also.

**Judgements of Adequacy and Validity**

Questions like is the information presented here is in confirmation with what you have read on that subject from other sources? Can make the reader compare written sources of information, with a view toward deciding agreement and disagreement or completeness and incompleteness.

**Judgements of Appropriateness**

Questions like “What part of the story describes the main character better?” push the reader to make judgement about the relative adequacy of different parts of the reading selection and to answer the questions regarding appropriate aspects of the text.

**Judgement of Worth, Desirability and Acceptability**

Questions like “was the character right or wrong in what he did?, was his behaviour good or bad?” etc. can elicit judgements from the reader which may be based on the reader's moral code or his value system.
iv) Affective Comprehension

Affective comprehension involves all the previously cited cognitive dimensions of reading, for it deals with the psychological and aesthetic impact of the selection on the reader. The task of appreciation keeps the student to be emotionality and aesthetically sensitive to the work and to have a reaction over the worth of the psychological elements appearing in the reading selections. Appreciation includes both the knowledge of and emotional response to literary techniques, forms, styles and structures employed by writers.

Emotional Response to the Content

After reading a text, a reader may verbalize his feelings about the selection in terms of interest, excitement, boredom, fear, amusement, etc. This emotional response is concerned with the emotional impact the total text brings to the reader of a text.

Identification with Characters or Incidents

Identification involves appreciation of the reader which demonstrates his sensitivity to sympathy for and empathy with the characters and happenings portrayed by the author in the text.

Reactions Over the Author’s use of Language

Reaction means the ability to respond to the author’s craftsmanship in terms of the semantic dimension of the selection,
namely, connotations and denotations of the words and the linguistic elements used in the text.

**Imagery**

Imagery is the author’s artistic ability to paint word pictures which cause the reader to visualize smell, taste, sound or sensations. One aspect of reading comprehension is appreciating imagery.

**1.19 Principles Governing the use of the Taxonomy of Skills**

First, it is important to think of the taxonomy of skills, not as a means to a complete classification of comprehension abilities and tasks but as skills to be developed through teaching. The four major categories of literal comprehension namely recall, inference, evaluation and appreciation are logically derived in an effort to designate the comprehension abilities.

The tasks listed within each category should not be thought of as compartmentalized comprehension sub-abilities that are to be developed independently. In fact, they should be viewed as tasks which will contribute to the development of the comprehension ability as a whole.

**1.20 Language**

Language is the vehicle for inter and intra communication. It is a tool to communicate across geographical boundaries. It would
be the key that opens windows to the world, unlocks doors to opportunities, and expands our mind to new ideas. A language communicates ones thoughts, feelings to others, the tool with which they conduct their business, or the government of millions of people, the vehicle by which has been transmitted the science, the philosophy, the poetry of the culture is surely worthy of study. Moreover, language is a system of sounds, words patterns, etc. used by humans to communicate thoughts and feelings. It is said that language is intimately tied to man’s feelings and activity. It is bound up with nationality, religion, and the feelings of self. It is used to work, worship, and play by every one, whether he is a beggar or banker, savage or civilized.

1.21 English in the Global Arena

English is the major language used for international communication. As mother tongue it is spoken in England, America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand the Caribbean Islands, South Africa and in some pockets of Rhodesia, Kenya and India. As a foreign language it is used in many countries such as Japan, Germany, Russia, France etc. As a second language it is used in India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Burma, Thailand and South Korea. English thus can be rightly called the global lingua – franca or language of wider communication.
There are three important factors which contribute to get the permanent place of global arena such as its usage in science, technology and commerce, the ability to incorporate vocabularies from other languages and acceptability of various English dialects. English is described as a pipe-line for the stream of knowledge in all branches of learning. English is the language of widest international currency and a treasure house of world wide learning and research in literature, life, art, Science and Technology. Now more scientific research is properly published in English than in any other language, and the preeminence of English in commercial use is undoubted. There are the large number of speakers and learners and infinite number of translations are available in English in the world. According to British Council, “English has official or special status in at least seventy-five countries with a total population of over two million. English is spoken as a native language by around 375 million and a second language by around 375 million speakers in the world. Speakers of English as a second language will soon out number those who speak it as a first language. Around 750 million people are believed to speak English as a foreign language, one out of four of the world’s population speak English to some level of competence. It is the language of international
scientific thinking, trade and commerce, journalism, diplomacy, education and politics.

1.22 English in India

India is the only country which has different languages, cultures and customs. Even though it is bifurcated into different states on the linguistic basis, within single state people speaking different languages, live together. English is an official and also important language in India. It is a language which is widely spoken after Hindi. It is said that English is the greatest unifying link between the Hindi speaking and the non-Hindi speaking people in India. Most Indians thought that English is a prestigious language. By using it one can acquire better education, better culture and higher intellect. Obviously, Indians are mixing English language when they are conversing in their respective mother tongue. English also functions as the effective communicator among Indians who speak different languages. It penetrates legal, financial, education, business in India. English is the first language in Indian higher education. Indians and Indian Media are using unique vocabularies and expressions which derived from most of the Indian languages. India has a large number of English speakers than any other country as a second language English is an essential language, because the use of English is
required in many fields, professions, and occupations. Education ministries throughout the world mandate the teaching of English at least a basic level.

1.23 English in China

The importance of English is understood by the Chinese only by the recent times. English is learnt here in China as foreign language. Therefore the Chinese students start learning English only at fourth standard.

The Classroom alone is a room of opportunity where the students employ English language and teachers and fellow students are the people with whom the students use the English language. However, students of China are highly motivated to learn English.

1.24 English language Teaching in India

English language has been playing a significant role in Indian education and it has been used in the Indian classrooms from Pre KG to Ph.D. The liberalization of the Indian economy has brought a new impetus for the teaching/learning of English language in India. In those days students who had specialized in English joined either in teaching or in civil services, but in current age a whole new spectrum of job opportunities has been opened up to those who possess good communication skill in English. The last few decades witnessed the
proliferation of call centers, medical transcriptions centers, and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) which thrive solely on the communication skill of the personnel who serve there. Similarly, there are multinational companies which require live wire candidates with effective communication skill in English. Another important thing is that those who are desirous of immigration need professional help for clearing English tests like TOEFL, TESOL, and IELTS etc. The competence in English, therefore, is a prerequisite for every individual who aspires for modern profession in the contemporary society.

1.25 Task Based Approach

In order to develop communicative skills in English, various methods have been tried out by teachers and researchers at different levels. Krishnasamy (1986), Ramachandran (1985) and Ramani (1985) were against the uses of communicative approach at school. Yet the studies conducted by Alan Bretta and Alan Davies (1985), Prabu (1984), Shadhana Guha (1988), Sasikala (1997), and Julusen (1986) have already pointed out the efficacy of the communicative approach at school level. Rajendran (1992), Droge, Despina Maria (1994) and Mc Lerenclame (1994) used task based approaches in developing reading skill among the different language learners.
Apart from the above, innovative studies have been undertaken by some researchers in the field of reading in English. Lerner (1988) views experimental approaches such as the language experiences approaches are effective for reading and writing. The shift from form based approach to task based approach becomes a new venture in teaching language skills to the L2 learners. This task based approach has ascended to a position of prominence in L2 learning classroom. It is seen as significant further evolution of communicative language teaching, both in terms of views of language in use and the development of language classroom methodology.

With a rise of task based language teaching (TBLT) a variety of interpretations of what exactly constitutes a task have come up. According to Wills J.A. (1996) a task is, “An activity in which the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome”.

Since the advent of communicative language teaching (CLT), it is believed that language is best learned through task based activities. Many research findings in the second language acquisition reveals that the task based approach has a richer potential for promoting successful learning through the traditional methods of teaching.
Willis, J.A. (1996) defines “Tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose …. in order to achieve an outcome”.

According to Rose Beny Warran and Contant (1992) “a task based approach is one in which appropriate contexts are provided for developing thinking and study skills as well as language and academic concepts for students of different levels of language proficiency, students learn by carrying out specific tasks or projects”.

Mickaels Swan (1990) rightly says that “there are times when the same language practice can take place more interestingly and more directly if the students are simply asked to talk about themselves according to certain task”.

Nunnan (1993) defines a communicative task as “a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of competences, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right”.

Skehan (1996) writes that, “tasks are activities which have meaning as their primary focus. Success in tasks is evaluated in terms of achievement of an outcome, and tasks generally bear some
resemblance to real-life language use. So task based instruction takes a fairly strong view of communicative language”.

According to Krashen (1996) “Task based teaching can be adopted to meet the needs of all learners”.

1.26 Advantages of Task Based Approach

The advantages of task based approach are numerous, which are,

i) Task based approach is goal oriented, leading to a solutions or a product. The tasks involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language.

ii) The task based approach ensures students’ progress and learning increases.

iii) It helps the students to know there is more than one right way to do things.

iv) Students acknowledge their mistakes and try the rectify them.

v) Memories are enhanced.

vi) Self-esteem of the students increases and they fed a sense of responsibility.

vii) Work is completed and accuracy is improved.

viii) Students develop and use a personal study process.

ix) Students become strategies and independent learners.
x) Students are empowered to succeed and feel a sense of accomplishment at the end of each task-based activity.

xi) On-task time increases, students are more engaged.

xii) It is enjoyable and motivating.

1.27 Task Based Communicative Approach in Developing Reading Skill

Although reading is a difficult skill to acquire and to teach, it is one of the most needed skills in day-to-day dealings of an educated individual. Learning of a language remains incomplete without the reading aspect. The goal of reading is communication. The development of communicative ability through reading confidentially and naturally must be given early practice at the earliest possible stage. The advanced stage in teaching reading ends with productive reading which is looked upon as the ultimate stage of language learning and a superior indication of language mastery. But what chiefly matters is that teaching of productive reading has been the most neglected aspect in English classroom. This calls for a good and steady effect of the teachers of English to offer the kinds of stimulus to develop reading skills through various reading activities. These reading activities are carefully designed by the teacher of English in such a manner to achieve the goal of reading skills. For this, the teachers of
English need to have a good reading proficiency and communicative competence.

1.28 Need and Importance of the Study

As Verma K. Shivendra (1995) says that, “Every reform in education centers round the teachers and every advance depends almost solely upon their intelligence, character and skills, the teachers are the king pins of any educational systems”.

The progress and standard of any nation cannot be beyond the standards of its educational institution. The standard of any educational institution in turn cannot rise above the level of its teachers. Since education is the most potent instrument for the progress of a nation, the quality of education needs to be improved. It is universally acknowledged that any attempt at improvement in the quality of education is ultimately dependent on the quality of instruction that defined in terms of the degree in which the presentation, explanation and ordering of elements of the learning opportunities given for a learner. Therefore, teachers the lamps that kindle learning are the crucial people who determine the quality of education. Their education is a pre-requisite to the success of any innovation in education. The success of second language learning therefore heavily depends upon the quality teachers of English.
The quality teachers of English can be produced if we have good system of quality teacher education in English. Therefore, teacher education in English is utmost importance and everything necessary has to be done to ensure that the teacher education institution produce English teachers of high quality at various levels. The proficiency and competency on the part of the English teacher in developing the reading skills in English plays a significant role in second language learning at all levels of education. Realizing the situation, the study makes an attempt to develop reading skills of college students.

According to the secondary education commission (1953), the present practice of mechanically applying the same methods to dull, average as well as bright children is responsible for the difficulties faced by students at the college level. If these various groups of students are allowed to proceed at their own appropriate pace and the method, approaches well as the curricular load are properly adjusted, it will be good for all of them. It will save the dull students from discouragement and the bright students from a sense of frustration.

Thus the policies and commissions lay great emphasis in providing good and quality education to all students. Just as the maxim says, a blind can never lead a blind: an incompetent teacher in English
can never produce competent learners in English. This is particularly true in teaching reading in English. Because the proficiency in reading is a good sign of good quality education in English. Therefore, the competency on the part of the teachers in reading skills was felt as one of the valuable inputs in English language education.

Although time honoured traditional methods prove successful results in developing the reading skills of the second language learners, its contribution towards developing the communicative competence in reading is not up to the required level of learning. Therefore, the traditional method of teaching reading is to be supplemented and supported by using various strategies and approaches for successful learning outcomes.

New techniques for teaching reading are to be adopted by the teachers. The researcher felt that the lack of communicative competence in reading comprehension will pose great threat towards language attainment in English in one’s life. Therefore, a good and steady effort in this direction is quite essential. Reading comprehension is a complex process, special care and attention at every stage of education should be taken on the development of the reading skills of the learners.
In order to make students learn reading comprehension skills perfectly, the approach or techniques to be adopted should be creative, interesting, enjoyable and above all innovative. Keeping this in mind, the investigator has been on the look out for a suitable approach for developing the reading skills of the college students. Accordingly, designing task based communicative approach in developing reading skills seemed to be an authentic approach. This has led the investigator to carryout the present investigation.

1.29 Scope of the Study

Teaching of English at college level aims to develop the communicative competence of the learners both in spoken and written aspects of the language. To achieve their end, the teachers should be trained in such a way to adopt various pedagogical interventions and techniques to meet the communicative needs of the learners.

Most of the students leave the college with poor reading skills. This is because of the teachers who do not pay enough attention to the skills and ability of reading. The planned teaching on the part of the teachers using innovative teaching methodology becomes very essential. It is against this context, the present study aims at the use of task based communicative approach in developing reading skill of the college students who are the future citizen to the nation.
In order to develop the reading skill of the students, the researchers have
developed different task based communicative approaches. The researcher has designed the task for competencies which develop the
skill of reading among the college students.

The task based communicative approach has been framed in order to understand the components of different skills of reading. These tasks call for effective training because real-life reading is purpose driven it involves highly complex set of processes.

The main focus of the present study is to measure the effectiveness and advantages of task based communicative activities in developing the reading skills of the students in English. For this, the students studying in RVS College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore, Tamil nadu and students studying at Huai Hua University, China are selected for the study. The investigator feels that the task based communicative approach will be more effective in developing the reading skills, because the college students are unable to communicate better in different situations. So, the investigator made an attempt to use task based communicative approach in developing the reading skills of the college students. Further this attempt is an innovative method. Hence this new and challenging task based
communicative approach to develop the reading skills of the college students for their better performance in reading communication is selected.

The study aims to measure the extent to which task based communicative approaches enable the learners to achieve mastery level in reading English. It also aims to find out the significant difference in the achievement of the college students in terms of gender and locality.

1.30 Statement of the Problems

English is taught and learnt by the students of India as second language and by the students of China as foreign language. The Indian students give importance to the literacy skills of English rather than the oral skills of English. But the Chinese students have to give importance to all the four skills viz. Listening, Speaking (Oracy skills), Reading and Writing. So, both the Chinese and Indian students give importance to Reading skill. So, it is imperative to understand the quantum of competence in the reading skill, acquired by the students of India and China and it is also imperative to understand the effectiveness of the communicative task in developing reading skills in English among the college students of India and China. The present work is therefore undertaken to study the above issues.
1.31 Title of the Study

The title of the present study is precisely stated below:

“EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATIVE TASK IN DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS AMONG THE COLLEGE STUDENTS IN CHINA AND INDIA”.

1.32 Definition of the Key Terms

The meaning of certain key terms used in the study along with their operational definitions are given here under.

Effectiveness

According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of current English (1986), “Effectiveness means ability to bring out the result intended”.

According to Longman Dictionary of contemporary English, effectiveness is ‘ability to have a desired effect’. As far as this study is concerned, effectiveness refers to the impressive results produced in developing the reading skills by the students consequent to the use of task based communicative approach.

Tasks

T.L. Tickon in his book ‘Teaching and Learning English’ defines task as a unit of teaching – learning that generally contains
language data an activity or a sequence of activities to be carried out by the learner. A task normally has an aim, which provides the purpose for the activity; in most cases the activity goes beyond the practice of language for its own sake and it is distinct for this and other reasons from the term ‘exercise’.

**Communicative**

According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of current English (1986) communicative means ‘ready and willing to talk and give information’.

**Task based communicative approach**

Task-based communicative approach means the communicative activities organized around tasks undertaken during classroom interaction and learning. Task based communicative approach aims to improve and extend the learner’s range of skills in reading aspects of English.

**Developing**

The term ‘developing’ is used to plan, design an frame task based communicative activities.

**College students**
College students related to the students who are undergoing B.Sc. course after completing their higher secondary course which is a three year course.

1.33 Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of the present study:

**Major Objectives**

i) To find out the significant difference between the effectiveness of task based communicative approach and traditional method of teaching in developing reading comprehension skills in English among college students of India.

ii) To find out the significant difference between the effectiveness of task based communicative approach and traditional method of teaching in developing reading comprehension skills in English among College students of China.

iii) To compare the effectiveness of task based communicative approach in developing reading comprehension skills in English between Chinese and Indian students.

**Specific Objectives**

i) To find out the significant difference between pre-test and post-test mean values of control group of Indian students.
ii) To find out the significant difference between pre-test and post-test mean values of control group of Chinese students.

iii) To find out the significant difference between pre-test and post-test mean values of experimental group of Indian students.

iv) To find out the significant difference between pre-test and post-test mean values of experimental group of Chinese students.

v) To find out the significant difference between the post-test mean values of control and experimental group of Indian students.

vi) To find out the significant difference between the post-test mean values of control and experimental group of Chinese students.

vii) To find out the significant difference between mean values of male and female students in post-test of experimental group of Indian students.

viii) To find out the significant difference between mean values of male and female students in post-test of experimental group of Chinese students.

ix) To find out the significant difference between the mean values of rural and urban students in post-test of experimental group of Indian students.
x) To find out the significant difference between the mean values of rural and urban students in post-test of experimental group of Chinese students.

xi) To compare the mean values of Indian students and Chinese students in relation to sex.

xii) To compare the mean values of Indian students and Chinese students in relation to locale.

1.34 Organisation of the Dissertation

The research report consists of five chapters followed by bibliography and annexure respectively.

In this first chapter, the investigator made an attempt to raise the problem to the surface level in which a detailed information about reading and reading comprehension, need and importance of the study are dealt in detail.

In chapter II, an attempt is made to review the empirical findings related to task based communicative approach in developing reading comprehension skills with the purpose of identifying the research gap of the study. The studies conducted in India and abroad are reviewed.

The methodology of the study is presented in chapter III, the research method, hypotheses, sampling, tool of the study,
statistical techniques employed in the study are explained in great detail and clarity.

Chapter IV forms the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. The collected data are analysed at two levels – descriptive and differential.

The last and final chapter V comprises summary and conclusion of the study. A brief summary of the present study, major findings drawn, suggestions for further research are included in this chapter.

1.35 Conclusion

Communication is an essential one to convey informations. Reading skill is one of the communication skills in English, when students possess good reading skill, they can easily acquire the information through reading. Traditional method of teaching will not develop reading skill effectively among college students. Hence there is a need for introducing new approaches. Task-based communicative approach is a novel technique, which provides opportunities to all students to develop reading skills in English. In this study, the investigator made an attempt to find out whether the task based communicative approach is effective in developing
comprehension reading skill in English among college students of China and India.