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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION - READING

1.1 Meaning of reading

Reading is a symbolic behaviour wherein we employ the visual symbol to represent the auditory 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 a creative activity closely allied to thinking. Still others consider it as a tool for learning all the subject matter. Reading is not a general ability, but 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 for reading, reading skills, etc., contribute to the development of reading ability.

1.2 Psychologists on reading

Reading is a kind of thinking process. As an individual reads, the symbols on the printed page excite his or her mind in such a way to react in many complex ways which in turn brings about perception, recognition, association,
comprehension, organisation, evaluation, retention and recall. Thorndike (1917) has emphasized that unless the reader reasons correctly in the light of the data or ideas presented by the words, he will fail to get the right meaning.

According to Goodman (1968) reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game. Meaning is not inherent in the words produced by a writer, but it resides in the experience of the reader. The word is only a symbol for a concept. Its meaning depends upon the way in which it is associated with the experience of the reader. If a word represents an idea which is not within the experience of the reader, it is meaningless to him. Modern reading instructions stress the idea that reading is primarily a matter of comprehension and interpretation of the meanings of the symbols found in a text.

1.3 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 on 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 behavior in terms of receiving communication, making discriminative
responses to graphic symbols, decoding graphic symbols 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. Somehow 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 recognised, however, that getting meaning from the printed page is too limited as a definition of reading. Bringing meaning 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 analysing 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: 11) 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 organisation 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 illuminate 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.

1.4 Types of reading

Reading may be classified as oral and silent reading, informational and recreational reading, observational, assimilative, reflective and creative readings. Yoakem (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 factor '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.

Classification of reading (Yoakem)
In another way, reading is classified as skimming, scanning and extensive reading.

**Skimming**

This involves quickly running one's eyes over a text to get the gist of it.

**Scanning**

This involves quickly going through a text to find a particular piece of information.

**Extensive reading**

Reading longer texts 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.

1.5 **Characteristic of Reading**

1.5.1 **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 means 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 alone 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.

1.5.2. Views about the nature of reading

Recent researches have put forward some generalization about the nature of reading and five of them are described here.
1.5.2.1 Reading as a constructive process

No text is completely self explanatory. While interpreting a text, readers draw and bring 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.

1.5.2.2 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. Researches 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 one's who made sufficient progress 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.
1.5.2.3 **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 fulfilment 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.

1.5.2.4 **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. Some how 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.
1.5.2.5 Reading as a 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 of 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.

1.6 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 what actually 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 researches on the psychology of learning
view reading as something beyond the ability of simply associating printed symbols with their meaning. Hildreth (1953) 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 language.

Goodman (1971) has described reading as a "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 being 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 obviously plays an important part in reading comprehension. The
interpretation factor reflects the ability to deal with the meaning of words 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 of reading 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 he 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.

1.7 The skill of reading

Like other language skills, reading 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 John 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 cohesion between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion devices
10. Interpreting indicators in discourse
11. Recognising indicators in discourse
12. Distinguishing the main idea from supporting details
13. Identifying the main point or important information in a piece of discourse
14. Extracting salient points for summarizing
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.

1.3 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 progress in reading. Such children are termed as deficient children or readers from the point of view of reading.

1.9 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 or more general bodily conditions such as low vitality due to malnutrition.

1.10 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 progress 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 trial 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. Tolman (1949) tells us through his (Tolman's) sign-gestalt
expectational theory that students learn to expect certain results as reward for certain responses.

1.11 Reading approaches

In our present state of knowledge there is no known correct or perfect approach available to teach reading. Methods 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.

1.12 Naturality view

Reading being a product of civilization, it can be acquired not by nature but by nurture. It is different from the apparent skill like activity like eating and walking. Reading is
A most complex process and involves the use of many skills and abilities. One of these abilities, namely language facility deserves special mention. If reading is to be meaningful and enjoyable, then the words which the child reads should be within his own vocabulary repertoire.

As reading is a skill that could be mastered slowly by children, they must be introduced to it slowly and in an interesting fashion. Once the thirst for knowledge and the interest in books develop in a child through some motivation, one could assure the development of reading habit.

1.13 **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 reading skills are important for the child, but reading of materials related to specific content area requires
certain specific skill 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 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 materials found in another area. Each content area 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 specialisation. Lorge (1957) argued that teachers teaching specialised 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, 1957).

1.14 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 aims 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" (N.S.S.E., 43).

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: 4) 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 that 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: 4).

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., 1961: 21). Reading opens the gate way 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 many 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.

"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" (Vernan, 1971).

"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).

1.15 Perspectives on reading

1. A text has no meaning by itself, it has only a potential for interpreting meaning.
2. Knowledge of the language in which a text is written is 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 due 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 the 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.

1.16 **Teaching reading**

Linguists assume that it is not possible to teach reading independently prior to the development of speaking ability. According to Palmer (1917) to learn, however the written form of the language before acquiring the ability to comprehend the spoken form is unnatural and contrary to all our linguistic principles. It is comparable to the act of learning pedalling before learning walking. Hence, the ability to make use of speech has precedence over the ability of making use of script.
A second language teaching programme based on a formal system of the knowledge aspect of the language will not result in the acquisition of the language proper. Only a functional programme based in the basic skills will achieve the ends desired in language teaching. Such an approach calls for a training of the child in the four basic skills rather than providing the child information about the language.