CHAPTER VI

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF READING SKILL
SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF READING SKILLS

The findings of this investigation (see Chapter V) seem to suggest that our students of Standard XI have not learnt to read properly. It seems necessary that these students need to be put through some remedial course in reading. The nature of the course, its duration, the materials and the teaching technique to be used by the teacher, specific reading skills to be developed etc. will largely depend on the nature of the group of students.

In a heterogeneous class — like the one we usually have in the Junior colleges — we may find three categories of students viz; below average, average and above average. This categorization is made from the point of view of their proficiency in English, general proficiency at the time of leaving school, their reading habits, their reading performance, their interest in and attitudes to reading. Accordingly we may have three types of courses designed to help students develop the reading skills. Those who are below average will require special attention and/or a long term reading course spread over the entire year. The average and above average students may respond to a short-term intensive course (like Edward Fry's, but specially prepared for Indian students) in reading. One act plays, short stories/or unabridged novels may be
provided for supplementary reading (see Chapter II, page No. 73).

The important problems in remedial work are those which are concerned with arousing interest and maintaining effort. Without proper motivation a remedial programme is sure to be ineffective. The student in need of help in reading would rarely accomplish much without the will to learn. The motivation for remedial work depends largely upon getting pupils to assume an active mental set towards overcoming their difficulties. Arthur I. Gates makes a pertinent point when he says:

... Often the pupil is characterized not only by a deficiency but also by loss of zeal, by distaste, by disinclination to exert himself in the task and by indifference concerning the outcome of training. In such cases more is needed than mere arrangement of new materials and a new learning situation.  

And he suggests: "What is needed is greater incentive, keener application and interest."  

On a remedial course our main task should be to arouse motivation to develop the required reading skills and to help students to restore confidence in themselves.


2. Ibid.
Training in Memory

In our investigation the responses of the students to the items based on facts, inferences and vocabulary seemed to be far from satisfactory. The students could not read properly to locate facts which is a comparatively easier skill to develop than the other two skills. The skill to locate facts involves memory. And, therefore, some experts question if memory can be part of comprehension. Usually comprehension tests employ multiple choice questions to avoid this factor but even after employing multiple choice questions the load of memory remains considerable. If we accept the proposition that memory cannot be a part of comprehension then probably no test on comprehension can be relied upon as a test of comprehension.

It is a fact that 'factual' questions test memory. We expect our students to remember and sometimes retain information in their memory to recall what is read whenever necessary. This goes to suggest that it is impossible to eliminate completely the memory factor from comprehension and that memory is a part of comprehension.

Once we accept that memory is a part of comprehension we need to give our students training in sharpening their memories. A number of techniques have been evolved by experts in the field. Two widely used techniques are the PQRST and SQ3R techniques.
The PQRSST technique was introduced by George D. Spache and Paul C. Berg. By PQRSST they mean:

1) **Preview**: Read the title, first and last sentences of paragraphs. The introductory or concluding paragraphs should be read.

2) **Question**: Ask as many questions as possible on the contents during the preview. Read the headings and turn them into questions. Think of the possible answers that are expected to be answered by the writer.

3) **Read**: Read the contents and answer the questions written down during the preview and question steps.

4) **Summarize**: Prepare a summary based on the answers to the questions one has written earlier. Most of the questions should be answered by recognizing the central idea in each paragraph. The writer's main idea should be determined and written in brief.

5) **Test**: Test one's understanding of the selection by attempting to answer the questions which were written during the preview. This should be done without referring to the selection or the notes one has written earlier.

Another technique SQ3R. This has been suggested by Francis P. Robinson. Edward Fry advocates this technique.

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for the improvement of study reading and for developing memory. SQ3R technique involves the following steps:

1) **Survey:** Survey of the chapter being studied to get general idea of the contents of the chapter.

2) **Question:** Questions should be written on the main points in the chapter. This should be done by skimming.

3) **Read:** Read the chapter once again to answer the questions written during the second step.

4) **Recite:** Answer the questions orally to some other person or in writing. The answers should be in one's own language.

5) **Review:** Read the chapter after some days. This should be done quickly re-reading the chapter.

These study techniques can help our students to become conscious and systematic readers and can go a long way in improving their study reading habits. The students can retain the content of the text much longer and can select what is important and remember it.

**Development of vocabulary**

Understanding the meanings of words is a necessary pre-requisite of reading with meaning. Vocabulary is so closely related to comprehension and reasoning that some experts think that vocabulary test can serve effectively

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as a measure of general intelligence. Vocabulary is one of the factors that make for difficulty in reading materials. The other factors which cause difficulty generally are "complexities of grammar, sentence structure and subject (difficulty of ideas)." 7

A number of studies have been made as to how children learning a new language, master vocabulary. These studies show that the size of vocabulary steadily grows with each year of study but there is wide disagreement on exactly how many words children or adults know. Until 1940's studies on the size of children's vocabulary suggested that an average child entered the first grade with a knowledge of the meanings of about 2500 words. The vocabulary of the child increased at the rate of about 1000 words a year in the primary grades and 2000 words a year in grades 7 to 9. 8 Robert H. Seashore (1943) found the vocabulary of twelfth-grade students in the United States to be about 80,000 basic and derived words. 9 Edgar Dale (1965) summarizes the evidence of his research

7. Fry Eward, Teaching Faster Reading, op. cit., p. 121.
as follows:

If we assume that children finish the first grade with an average vocabulary of 3000 words, it is likely that they will add about 1000 a year from then on. The average high school senior will know about 14000 to 15000 words, the college senior 18,000 to 20,000. 10

In India there is hardly any such study made and we do not know at what rate the size of the vocabulary grows at different levels and what minimum reading vocabulary is adequate to the needs of a second language learner. But taking into consideration the size of vocabulary a native speaker of the language possesses, for a second language learner in Junior college a vocabulary of 2000 words may be the first step towards the acquisition of a more comprehensive vocabulary. The recognition vocabulary may be around 3000 words - about four times the size of the active vocabulary.

Causes of Deficiencies in Meaningful Vocabulary

There are three major causes of deficiencies in acquiring meaningful vocabulary.

1) Low general intelligence shows itself clearly in retarded language development and difficulty in understanding and acquiring the meanings of words.

2) Lack of intellectual stimulation and practice in the use of language are also important causes of vocabulary weakness. Words have meaning to a reader only when they are related to things he has experienced or knows about. Speech defects and deficiency in hearing also interfere with the acquisition of a rich vocabulary.

3) Dislike for reading is another cause. One who likes to read enriches his vocabulary continually with words and ideas that he gains from reading. If a reader had made poor start in reading he usually dislikes reading and gives up the opportunity to expand his vocabulary. Thus a vicious cycle is set up in which a person with limited reading restricts the scope to learn new vocabulary and failure to build up new vocabulary prevents improvement in reading.

How to Develop Vocabulary

In the initial stage the first essential thing in a programme is to provide children with a background of meaningful experience. Sensory experience can help to develop accurate concepts. When first hand experiences are not available use of visual teaching materials such as moving pictures, filmstrips, slides, pictures and charts can be a good substitute.
At the later stage, the most easy and natural way of increasing vocabulary is to learn them from actual experience. The student who has a wide reading experience and who frequently encounters new words, will learn them. For most Indian students the only alternative to get this experience is through reading — print is his primary source of new words.

"Intensive and extensive reading is admittedly one of the best ways to increase vocabulary power,"¹¹ says Robert Lado. These two types of reading will help students of Junior colleges to strengthen their linguistic abilities and to stimulate their interest in general reading.

Reading Between the Lines

It is controversial whether or not reading is a general ability. Some claim that it is, while others think that reading is a combination of several specific skills such as getting the main idea or predicting outcomes etc. These skills should be identified and developed in order to help the learner to comprehend what he reads. In a second language situation — and more so at the Junior college stage — the proposition that reading is a combination of specific skills would be

of help. This implies training in the acquisition of such skills as locating details that support the main idea of a selection, making generalizations on the basis of what is read etc. The Rationale of this proposition lies partially in the fact that improvement in the ability to perform one of these skills may necessarily bring about improvement in other skills. It is therefore desirable to identify various skills and impart training to improve them.

The specific skills which form a part of ability to comprehend what is read can be classified loosely according to the purpose of the reader. Nicolas Ferguson regards them from four angles: (i) literal comprehension; (ii) interpretation; (iii) critical evaluation and (iv) critical thinking. The three categories which Carl B. Smith identifies are literal, inferential and elaborative. The various skills dependent upon the reader's purpose then, are:

1. reading on the factual level
2. knowing the meanings of words
3. finding the main idea
4. selecting significant details
5. following directions

6- reading on interpretative or inferential level
7- summarizing and organizing
8- arriving at generalizations
9- predicting outcomes
10- reading at evaluative level.

Skills one to five listed above are comparatively easier skills to develop than the remaining five. Usually these are taken care of in the secondary schools and there is no point in discussing them here.

Reading on interpretative or inferential level is also referred to as "reading between the lines." In other words, for reading on this level the reader is able to understand what is implied and not directly stated. We can include in this category (a) summarizing and organizing (b) arriving at generalizations and (c) predictive outcomes.

An efficient reader should be able to make summaries and organize what he reads without doing any writing. In order to do this the reader should ask himself what the main points are, what material constitutes significant details. He must be able to find the relationship between the main points and other relevant details.

Formulating generalizations is in a sense a specialized form of summarizing. To generalize a reader
needs to note the significant details or instances to decide whether the data is adequate to generalize. Unless a reader is trained in this he may generalize on the basis of inadequate evidence or he may make too broad a generalization. To avoid this a teacher can give specific guidance not only with regard to material read as well as with regard to observation made in other situations.

Predicting an outcome is another important skill. This skill is an aspect of what we may call 'active reading' in which a reader assumes an attitude in anticipation. The skill in predicting an outcome is useful and helps the reader to get the thought more quickly than others, in remembering what is read, for he reads only the points which are new to him or are different from what he would have expected. This also helps to lessen the burden of recall.

Reading on the evaluative level is one of the most significant skills of comprehension. This involves numerous factors. The reader may question if the material is relevant or whether the author is qualified to discuss the subject etc. This type of reading is critical, active and creative in nature. The level of criticism would vary with age, maturity, language experience etc. Critical evaluation and creative thinking demand 'reading beyond the lines'.
The immediate need of a Junior college student is, training in 'reading the lines' and 'reading between the lines'. Training in 'reading beyond the lines' may be good for those who are good readers. Training in critical evaluation and creative thinking would be too ambitious in the initial stages but this is not to suggest that we should not give training in these skills.

Preparation of Materials

The syllabus of the secondary school is generally based on the Structural Approach. In the present situation we need to experiment with new methods and techniques. Readers written to structural control become dry, barren of ideas and stylistically stilted. They do not stimulate pupils to develop love for reading. While, what is said above is indisputable, there seems to be general agreement on the point that structural syllabus is quite useful in teaching structures in the initial stages. It seems, therefore, desirable to have a structurally graded syllabus for the first three classes and to relax the structural control progressively. Semi-formal and informal styles and contemporary idiom can be introduced so that students do not find the text-books dull and teachers do not complain that they are not teachable.

At the Junior college level also a review of the existing methods and materials would be necessary. The
students at the Junior college level, as discussed earlier, would require two types of reading materials viz; intensive reading materials and extensive reading materials. The intensive reading materials should comprise materials selected from different registers i.e. scientific, technical, historical, literary, commercial etc. This will add variety and satisfy the needs of students having different tastes. This will also help them when they branch off to other disciplines after this stage. The books for intensive reading should have detailed glossary and adequate suitable exercises at the end of each lesson. The emphasis in these exercises should be on reading comprehension besides vocabulary, structures, and 'precise' reading. Interest is one of the important factors. The materials should suit the mental age and interest of students. Culturally neutral background, informal and lucid style may help cultivate interest in reading.

Books for extensive reading need not be in accordance with rigid principles of vocabulary and structural selection and control. The books which stimulate a reader and sustain his interest may be considered suitable.

Work-books and manuals like that of Fry's can be of great help for the teachers as well as students.

There is a great need for 'bridge courses'. These courses could be both remedial and developmental. The courses designed at the CIEFL, Hyderabad, may prove to be useful.