CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Reading is one of the basic language skills and it acquires a greater significance in India where English has been recognized as a library language which means that even if the Indian student does not require to speak and write in English. He/she will be compelled to read English in order to access the vast amount of knowledge accumulated every day in different branches of study. This chapter aims to outline briefly the teaching of reading in the past four centuries and then moves on to record recent theory and research in teaching pedagogy.

Past, Practice and Theory:

Fries (1962), notes that the discussions in English regarding the methods and materials for the teaching of reading began about four hundred years ago with John Hart’s book of 1570 titled A Methode or comfortable beginning for all unlearned, whereby they may bee taught to read English, in a very short time, with pleasure. After Hart’s work a tremendous amount of material related to the problems of reading was published. In fact people, had been learning to read and teaching to read from the time of the invention of the first graphic symbols used for writing. But the teaching of reading became a public problem with the development of democratic forms of government and the recognition of the need to
educate the children of all the people. In response to this need, studies were conducted in order to examine the teaching of reading and find the best way thereof. In America researchers such as W. S. Gray, Arthur Traxler and Emmett A. Betts put in a great deal of effort in recording classroom practice and research in reading pedagogy approximately from 1930 to 1960. On the basis of the accumulative research, one can distinguish at least three basic approaches to reading from the beginning of the 16th century to the end of the 19th century.
The Phonic Method:

The phonic method aims to begin the teaching of reading to children through a “phonic approach” in which the graphic symbols are made to match the sound of the words. In other words, instead of using the traditional English alphabet, a phonetic alphabet is used so that the child is not confused by the difference between the letter and its sound. It was John Hart (1551) who drew attention to the difficulties of learning to read arising from “misnaming of letters”. He also took account of the diversity of sounds attached to some of the letters and provided certain special symbols so that the spelling followed the rule of each symbol having only one sound and the same sound having only one symbol. His method is therefore a phonic approach using a rather consistent phonetic alphabet which he employed in his above mentioned book, “A Methode or comfortable beginning ...”. Hart was followed by other writers who dealt with the matching of English sounds with their alphabetic representation during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Through the years of 17th and 18th centuries all the grammar books had a section devoted to orthographic, that is, the letters of the alphabets, their kinds and uses, the formation of syllabus and the spelling of words. These materials formed the basis of the “spellers”, the books out of which early reading was taught.
It should not be considered however, that meaning was ignored in the phonic method and a concern for the understanding of what is read is evident from Hart’s words, “the effect of writing consisteth not in the letter, but to show what is meant by the letter” (Hart, *Methode*, 1570).

**The Word Method:**

This approach to reading began in the early 19th century, within this method to quite different practices were observed. The first practice was based on a disbelief in the use of sequences of two or three letters which made up syllables but did not render any meaning. It was insisted that learning to recognize and to pronounce letters in combination must be developed through practice upon units that have meaning for the child, that is, real words.

The Word Method also had a later denotation and use, in this latter use of the term, “Word Method”, the words as wholes were first presented as unanalyzed units to be connected with pictures of objects or actions. The theory was that every word that the child learns should convey a distinct image of a thing or an act to his/her mind, so that it can be more easily remembered than the name of a letter with which the child has no natural associations. Text book writers adopted different type of word methods. Some of them paid little or no attention to the selection of words with regard to similar shapes while others greatly emphasized this feature.

**The Sentence Method:**
The sentence method is best outlined in Farnham's book, *The Sentence Method of Teaching Reading, Writing and Spelling, A Manual for Teachers* (1881). It is based on the psychological fact that the unit of thinking is a thought and therefore the sentence ought to be made the basis of reading exercises. In 1870, a number of experiments were conducted in the schools of New York, to test this theory and the results far exceeded the expectations. Farnham sets forth his views underlying his sentence method in the following words:

Reading consists, first, in gaining the thoughts of an author from written or printed language:- Second, in giving oral expression to these thoughts in the language of the author, so that the same thoughts are conveyed to the hearer.

It is important that this two-fold function of reading should be fully recognized. The first, or silent reading, is the fundamental process. It is often called "reading to one's self", a phrase significant as indicating a wrong conception of the true end to be accomplished. The second, oral reading, or "reading aloud", is entirely subordinate to silent reading. While oral expression is subject to laws of its own, its excellence depends upon the success of the reader in comprehending the thought of the author.
Farnham, also introduced the idea of silent or eye reading or the ability to look over the printed page and with the least possible awareness of the words used, to fully understand the thoughts expressed. He discouraged the development of the translation of written symbols into oral language in which the reader either pronounces each word so that he actually hears it, or he thinks of the pronunciation. In each case the thought is not formed in his mind directly through the written language, but indirectly after the written words have changed into oral expression. This process should be avoided as it is slow and laborious. Farnham believes that the object in teaching should be to make every learner an eye reader that is, to give him/her the ability to look directly through the written expression to the meaning. Farnham believes that when the habit of sight-reading is acquired, oral reading will require little attention. When the students have mastered the ability to assimilate the thought from the printed page directly, they will have little difficulty in giving it proper oral expression in the language. Farnham thus makes the getting of the thought the first aim of reading, and demands the every technique and method in use of teaching of reading must contribute to the student’s growth in the habits of “thought” reading.
SECTION II

Recent Theory and Research

Although there are various theories which attempt to explain how a reader is able to derive meaning from written language. Most of these theories can be categorized into three major groups: bottom-up, top-down and interactive views of reading.

A bottom up view of reading characterizes it as a one way flow of information of beginning with the visual input and proceeding through a series of progressively higher order processing stages until meaning is derived. Thus, the focus is on the recognition and the identification of graphic symbols and relating them to their corresponding sounds. This view is supported by Bloomfield (1942), and Fries (1963).

A top-down view of reading emphasizes the role of higher cognitive processes that generate meaning based on contextual information and the background knowledge, and reading strategies that the reader brings to the reading task. Proponents of this view of reading consider the reader actively engaged in deriving meaning directly from the page without the use of an intermediate speech-code, using knowledge of syntactic and semantic systems of language, the discourse constraints of the passage and extralinguistic knowledge or topic related to the reading material. This view is supported by Goodman (1967), Smith (1971), Neisser (1967) and Ryan and Semmel (1969).
The interactive view of reading tries to integrate both the above mentioned views and proposes that the reader draws upon both graphic and contextual information in abstracting meaning in written language. This view of reading attempts to explain the process of reading within an information processing analysis of language comprehension (Massaro, 1975, Rumelhart, 1976).

**Bottom-up view of reading:**

Till late 1960s, reading was seen mostly as a process of picking up information from a page in a letter by letter, word by word or sentence by sentence manner. During the 60s under the influence of audiolingualism teaching of reading concentrated on the study of grammar and vocabulary or the practice of pronunciation. Though this view of reading was strongly criticized during the 70s and 80s, now it is being recognized as an important factor in the acquisition of the reading skill. The development of automatic perceptual/identification skills is considered as critical to fluent reading by many cognitive psychologists (Adams, 1990; Perfetti, 1991; Stanovich, 1986, 1991). Automaticity may be defined as occurring when the reader is unaware of the process, not consciously controlling the process, and using little processing capacity (Adams, 1990; Stanovich, 1990). The main focus of automaticity research has been at the feature, letter and word levels, playing a crucial role in descriptions of lexical access employed by fluent readers. Many researchers now believe that
automaticity is a necessary skill for fluent readers, and many less skilled readers are so because they lack automaticity in lower level processing. In fact, some cognitive psychologists now argue that the lexical component of fluent readers become encapsulated; which means that the process of lexical access during reading does not employ contextual resources (Stanovich, 1990). The question of whether sentence patterns fall within the notion of automatic recognition is under debate at present. (Perfetti, 1990; Rayner and Pollatsek, 1989).

Apart from automatic recognition skills, knowledge of vocabulary and sentence pattern is obviously critical to reading. The role of language structure in reading comprehension in second language context has been supported by research (Barnett, 1986; Berman, 1984; Eskey, 1988). Knowledge of vocabulary has similarly come to be recognized as a critical feature of reading ability (Nation and Coady, 1988; Stanovich, 1986).

**Top-down view of reading:**

The top-down view of reading probably originated with the research work done by Goodman (1967, 1985) and Smith (1971, 1979 and 1982). The research and persuasive arguments of Goodman and Smith evolved in a psycholinguistic model of reading. Goodman argued that reading is a selective process, since fluent readers did not have time to register all the words on a printed page and suggested that good readers use the background knowledge that
they brought to the reading task and then read by predicting information, sampling the text and conforming the prediction. Smith also agreed with Goodman's view that reading was an imprecise, hypothesis-driven process. He also argued that sampling was effective because of the redundancy built into natural language as well as the abilities of the readers to make necessary guesses entrances from their background knowledge. In fact, Smith asserted that the reader contributed more to reading than the visual symbols on the page.

Clarke and Silberstein (1977) proposed implications for teaching based on Goodman and Smith's theory of reading. They suggested that since reading was characterized as an active process of comprehending, the students needed to be taught strategies to read more efficiently such as guessing from context, making inferences about the text and skimming ahead to fill in the context. The goal of reading instruction for teachers was to provide students with the range of effective approaches to the text, to use pre-reading activities in order to motivate them, and enhance conceptual readiness by supplying background knowledge, and to provide students with strategies to deal with difficult syntax, vocabulary and organizational structure. Coady (1979) while reinterpreting Goodman's psycholinguistic model argued that the reading process requires three components: lower processing strategies, background knowledge and conceptual abilities. According to him, beginners
focus on lower level process strategies such as word identification, whereas more proficient readers focus more on abstract conceptual abilities and make better use of background knowledge.

In the 1980s much ESL reading theory and practice extended Goodman and Smith’s perspective on reading. In other words, the role of background knowledge was emphasized during this period and lower level, bottom-up processing strategies were played down. These researchers proposed different versions of schema theory as a useful notion for describing how prior knowledge is integrated in memory and used in higher level comprehension processes. Implications of schema theory seem to be useful in improving reading instruction and it became a major focus for research on ESL reading in 1980s. The research conducted by Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) proved that activating content information pays a major role in student’s comprehension and recall of information from a text. Carrell (1987) also investigated importance of formal schemata, that is, structures of knowledge about language and textual organization, and found this to be an important contributor to reading ability. Carrell (1988b) also argued that lack of schemata activation is a major source of processing difficulty with second language readers. This has been corroborated not only through culture specific text comparisons but also using discipline specific text comparisons of readers [Alderson and Urquhart, 1988].
Schema theory has provided a strong rationale for both pre-reading activities and comprehension strategy training (Carrell, 1985, 1988a; Floyd and Carrell, 1987). Some researchers have even argued that a high degree of background knowledge can overcome linguistic deficiencies (Hudson, 1982). The major implication of this research for classroom teaching is that students need to activate prior knowledge of a topic before they begin to read. If they lack this, they should be given at least minimal background knowledge from which to interpret the text (Barnett, 1989; Carrell, 1988a). Thus schema theoretic views propose that in order to understand a text properly readers need to activate their background knowledge about text organization as well as the conceptual context of the text which are referred to formal and content schemata respectively.

The coming back of bottom-up views:

In a reaction to the over emphasis on top-down schema theoretic views of reading there emerged a series of research that stressed the lower level processing of reading such as Perfetti (1985), Stanovich (1986), Eskey (1988) McLaughlin (1990), and Segalowitz (1991). They have all emphasized the importance of automatic lower level-processing in second language context. It has been found that less proficient readers often appear to be word bound, which demonstrates that students are ‘stuck’ on words. Psycholinguistic models of reading explained this phenomenon by maintaining that if students were stuck onwards it was because they did not sample
rapidly enough and were afraid to make guesses and take chances. However, more current views of this learner problem argue that students are word-bound mainly because of inefficient bottom-up processing. Their reading is slow and laborious because of their consciously attending to the graphic form and, in a second language context there are often too many new forms for students to which they can attend efficiently. No amount of guessing will overcome this deficiency and lead to automatic word recognition.

Related to automaticity issue is a realization that the knowledge of vocabulary and syntax are crucial components in reading comprehension. Many researchers have proposed a language threshold for second language abilities (Clark, 1980; Devine, 1987). It means that below a certain language proficiency threshold comprehension processes can not be used efficiently in L2 reading.

**Comprehension strategy training:**

One dimension of top-down views of reading is the realization that readers bring with them skills and strategies to the reading task which assist in comprehending the written text. Some of these strategies might be inherent but others need to be taught. Research on comprehension strategies has acquired a greater importance since 1980s. It has been found that younger and less proficient students use fewer strategies and also use them less effectively in their reading comprehension (Garner, 1987; Nist and Mealay, 1991).
Students who monitor their reading comprehension, adjust their reading rates, consider their aims and objectives in advance, prove to be better readers (Carrell, 1989b; Devine, 1987). Research has attempted to understand better the specific context in which comprehension strategies improve comprehension, the specific training procedures which are most effective and the student variables such as age, proficiency, and need which influence strategy instruction. Strategy, training experiments with second language students are relatively few in number. Carrell (1985) demonstrated that teaching students to recognize the organizational structure of text improved student's abilities. Barnett (1988a) reported improvement in reading comprehension from a year-long strategy training programme in reading.

Casanave (1988) highlights the importance of training students in comprehension monitoring in ESL reading. He maintains that successful reading comprehension involves not only readers' ability to use appropriate content and formal schemata. It also depends on how to monitor what they comprehend and their ability to take appropriate strategic action. L2 reading research and pedagogy, according to him might fruitfully be expanded by studying how different types of L2 students might be assisted in monitoring their reading comprehension. Drawing ideas from studies conducted in L1 context, he suggests the employment of
reciprocal teaching (Palincsar and Brown, 1984) and the use of think aloud procedure with students (Bereiter and Bird, 1985).

Reciprocal teaching by Palincsar and Brown focussed on helping young readers with special reading problems learn to recognize obstacles in comprehension and take strategic action. They chose the activities of summarizing and questioning for this type of teaching. While these activities are by no means unique and unusual, the way of teaching them, that is by means of interactive dialogue which is the essence of reciprocal teaching is novel. In these interactive dialogues teachers had the students become aware of where they were on and off track and how to get back on track.

Think aloud training used by Bereiter and Bird employed a think aloud procedure to help young readers learn to monitor their comprehension and take required strategic action. They conducted two studies: one in which they identified potentially teachable strategies and the other in which they tested how teachable the four identified strategies were. These studies suggest the most effective technique for teaching comprehension monitoring and strategic repair. Teachers can explain and exemplify common comprehension problems and fix-up strategies in the classroom. Later on, students practiced the strategies themselves by reading in a low voice or silently and marking in specially prepared text which strategies they were using.
Thus Casanave suggests that our underlying knowledge about monitoring behaviours of readers might be viewed as "strategic schemata" which, in addition to schemata for content and form, influence how they understand what they read and learning to articulate this knowledge is considered to enhance learning at least in the classroom context.

**Interactive views of reading:**

Interactive views of reading can refer to two different conceptions. First, it can mean the general interaction that takes place between the reader and the text. The reader constructs the information contained in the text on the basis of knowledge drawn in part from the text and in part from his/her background knowledge (Barnett, 1989; Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983). The second implication of the term is that reading involves the interaction of many component skills in simultaneous operations. In other words reading employs both an array of lower level, automatic identification skills and an array of higher level comprehension or interpretation skills (Carrell, 1988b, 1989a; Eskey, 1986; Eskey and Grabe, 1988). These two perspectives are complimentary, through most individual researchers tend to distress one perspective over the other or ignore either of the two.

Schema theory is a useful theoretical metaphor for the reader's prior knowledge but it is difficult to know exactly how this prior knowledge is invoked and used. And many researchers
question theories which can not be explicitly defined. Thus, interest in schema theory appears to have waned in the recent past and there have emerged a number of current versions of interactive approaches to reading which tilt more towards the processing of lower level linguistic structure (Perfetti, 1985, 1990; Stanovich, 1990). The reasons for this orientation seem to stem from extensive research on eye movements as well as focus on letters, words and sentences. Recent research on eye movements has demonstrated that fluent readers read most words on a page. These studies show that some eighty percent of content words and forty percent of function words are directly focussed on in reading (Adams, 1990; Carpenter and Just, 1986). These studies suggest that fluent readers are not only extremely rapid in their recognition skills but they are also précise. Thus, an interactive approach to reading is one that takes into account the critical contribution of both lower level identification skills and higher level comprehension and interpretation skills.
SECTION - III

(1) Implications for the Classroom:

The utility of research findings is mainly in their application to the classroom context and incorporating them into curriculum guidelines and teaching practices. Recent research seems to highlight the following aspects of reading pedagogy:

A content centered curriculum: Content provides learner motivation and purposeful activities. In a content centered reading course, students participate in the selection of content. Nelson (1984) suggests one technique of selecting content by involving students in the process. This technique is a group discussion during which the teacher encourages the students to mention topics which are of interest and relevance to them.

(2) Development of Skills and Strategies:

Specific skills and strategies of reading should be given high priority and practiced consistently. Practicing teachers have started voicing their concern about the development of these strategies and skills in students. For example Dubin (1982) refers to "mature reading strategies". By mature reading strategies Dubin means the strategies employed by an efficient reader which are the result of an active and continuous interaction between the text and the reader. The strategies mentioned by her which need the attention of classroom teachers in their teaching of reading comprehension are the following:
(a) **Adjusting attention according to the material:** Because all reading matter is not of the same type, different types of material require different reading modes. Some passages should be read fast without consideration of details while others require careful and deliberate attention.

(b) **Using the total context as an aid to comprehension:** By using the total context, Dubin means the skill of surveying the text which means considering the table of contents, the title page and so on.

(c) **Skimming:** Skimming means reading quickly to get an overall idea of the subject matter of a passage. The first quick reading helps in finding the main ideas of paragraphs or larger chunks of the text. Mature readers use the technique of skimming with all kinds of materials to determining whether an item deserves further attention.

(d) **Search reading:** Search reading is a more attentive approach than skimming in which the reader makes use of key words or groups of synonymous words and expressions which the author has utilized to avoid repetition. The reader looks for repeated elements that present no new ideas or topics; for example, most expository writing in popular journals contains elaborations in which the writer accumulates various examples to illustrate a few ideas. These portions should be skipped over quickly.
(e) **Scanning**: Scanning is a strategy which is quite distinct from skimming and involves looking for particular information. For example one scans the pages of a newspaper to find a particular article; on the other hand one scans the pages of a telephone directory or the index of a book looking for a particular item.

(f) **Predicting/guessing/inferencing**: Research shows that reading is selective and good readers move their eyes quickly over a printed page, picking up meanings from chunks of the texts. On the word level, the reader guesses the meanings of unfamiliar words by the use of context as well as word formation. On the syntactic level he/she extracts the meaning on the basis of his/her knowledge about the sentence pattern as well as the context.

(g) **Critical reading**: Critical reading is the most sophisticated form of reading which means reading “between the lines” or understanding implied lines meaning in the text. In critical reading, the students should also be given practice in distinguishing between facts and opinions. This also involves understanding the author’s tone approach, purpose and style.

(h) **Use of textual discourse devices/sign post expressions**: Effective readers make use of all the syntactic and rhetorical features that the authors provide. Textual, discourse devices provide unity or coherence to a piece of writing. In expository writing, unity is achieved through the words and phrases the writer employs to
connect the ideas in sentences, paragraphs and larger segments. It is also important to teach the students to use the signpost expressions which indicate what the writer is going to say in the next part of the text. Awareness of the structure and movement of a passage not only facilitates understanding of a passage, but also removes many of the difficulties at word and phrase levels which deter inexperienced readers.

To sum up, the above are the main strategies and skills employed in efficient and fluent reading and need the attention of the reading comprehension teacher. The teachers require to help the students practice, develop and use these skills and strategies.

(3) **Use of background knowledge to pre-reading activities:**

Research shows that it is also important to activate and provide students with relevant content and formal schemata through pre-reading activities in the classroom, through the following activity types:

(a) **Understanding rhetorical structure of the text:** The importance of rhetorical organization of a text in relation to reader's background knowledge of text structure has been noted in several studies over the past few years which reveal that reading comprehension can be significantly enhanced by teaching text structure and helping the students to identify and use the various structures. So, if reading
classes include a study of different course structures this will improve reading comprehension, retention and recall.

(b) **Activating and providing content schemata:** Research also suggests that it is important to activate and stimulate student’s background knowledge of the content of the given text and if it is lacking, it should be provided to the student’s specifically through pre-reading activities. The teacher should be aware of the gaps in the student’s social and cultural background knowledge. For example, for Indian students references to festivals such as Thanksgiving, Halloween may have no meaning. Henry (1984) suggests the technique of using “reader generated questions” in a discussion as a pre-reading activity in order to equip the students with the required background knowledge related to a text. Spack (1985) suggests, “a write- before you-read technique” in order to stimulate student’s background knowledge. This exercise requires that students’ right from their own experiences about an idea or event contained in the story which the teacher plans to teach.

(c) **Understanding of vocabulary and syntax:** Research has also demonstrated that the knowledge of vocabulary and syntax is a crucial factor in efficient reading, though every teacher knows this from his/her own experience and does not really need this information from research. Bottom-up reading or development of the recognition of words and sentences should also be given their
proper place in any reading instruction programme. Teachers should help the students with tackling difficult vocabulary through the strategy of guessing on the basis of word-formation and context. Likewise, they should also be taught how to extract the meanings of sentences on the basis of sentence structure and context. However, it is also important that they are helped in acquiring a large enough vocabulary and relevant sentence patterns in order to enhance their reading comprehension. Wiriyachitra, (1974) suggests four techniques for sentence comprehension because when reading a textbook or article, it frequently happens that although a student knows every word in a sentence he/she still can not understand what the sentence means, specially when it is long and complicated.

The techniques are as follows:

(i) **Sentence analysis**:- Whenever a student does not understand a sentence he/she should analyse it by breaking it down into its different parts. Of course, to do this properly the students must be taught to recognize various sentence patterns.

(ii) **Recognizing punctuation**:- Punctuation like words, helps to convey the writer's ideas. Therefore the students should be encouraged to use their knowledge of punctuation in order to help them understand the meaning of the text.

(iii) **Recognizing reference terms**:- A reference term is a word which is used to replace another word so that the writer does not have to
repeat the same word again. The students should be encouraged to ascertain what the reference term means in each case.

(iv) Recognizing signal words: - By signal words the writer here means signpost expressions or connectors which help the reader in understanding the movement of the text and show the relationship of one element to another.

Apart from sentence analysis Wiriyachitra, (1974) also emphasizes the need to teach the students paragraph analysis and understanding how the material is organized in the passage by finding:

a) topic, b) finding the main idea, c) finding major supporting details and d) finding minor supporting details.

(4) Development of Metacognitive Skills and Strategies:

It has been found that metacognitive knowledge and skills are also an important component of fluent reading which involves knowledge about cognition including knowledge about language. As related to reading, this includes recognizing the more important information in a text, adjusting reading speed, taking notes underlining, monitoring and evaluating one's progress such as planning ahead or testing self-comprehension. Thus, there is a need to train the students in these metacognitive strategies in order to make them efficient readers.
(5) Silent and extensive reading:

Sustained silent reading should be encouraged to build fluency, confidence and appreciation of reading. Students also need to read extensively and should be provided with or encouraged to read materials related to their classroom context so that not only they acquire practice in fast and silent reading but also build an extensive repertoire vocabulary and sentence patterns.