CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF READING READINESS, AND READING READINESS PROGRAMME

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2.1 Concept of Reading Readiness

The term readiness for any kind of learning refers to the stage, firstly when the child can learn easily and without emotional strain, and secondly when the child can learn profitably because efforts at teaching give gratifying results. Note that 'readiness' does not necessarily imply that a child achieves this stage only through growth or maturation. He may also arrive at readiness through having completed the prior learning on which the new learning will be based.

Readiness is a general concept which can be applied to a pupil's preparedness to undertake any particular learning task, it must be applicable to various stages of learning to read from the beginning right up to the most sophisticated forms of reading which may not be fully learned until the individual reaches adulthood. Learning to read is a continuous developmental process and readiness is a valid concept for many stages in learning.

Definitions of the term 'reading' are many and often contrasting as pointed out in the following examples:
According to Bloomfield and Barnhart (1961), 'Reading involves nothing more than the correlation of a sound image with its corresponding visual image'....

While Artley (1961) states that, 'Reading is the art of reconstructing from the printed page, the writer's ideas, feelings, moods and sensory impression'.

These two examples show how definitions of reading vary in two typical ways. Some (like Artley's) are very comprehensive while others (like that of Bloomfield and Barnhart) are very narrow.

Some specify the connection between the sounds of language and their visual form in print or writing, but other authors seem to prefer not to specify this aspect.

An excellent discussion of this question as to what exactly we mean by the term 'reading' has been provided by Dearden (1967). He shows that, for normal hearing and speaking people, reading certainly must involve some connection between the spoken and written forms of language. Obviously in oral reading it does.

On the other hand, you could open a book at its last page and read it aloud backwards until you came to the top of the first page. In this way you would have 'read' every
word in the book, but you could hardly say that you had read
the book, as Dearden points out. Thus, the translation of
print into both the sounds of spoken language as well as their
meaning, both are very important from the beginning. There­
fore, our definition of reading at the early stages of learn­
ing is that it is the recognition of the auditory and semantic
significance of printed or written words. To learn to read,
the young beginner must decode the print by translating it
into the spoken form of the language and into its linguistic
meaning.

"Reading readiness is defined as the stage in develop­
ment when, either through maturation or through previous
learning or both, the individual child can learn to read
easily and profitably."¹

The specific term 'readiness' is relatively new in
education, being first used in the Report of the National
Committee on Reading, Twenty fourth Year Book of the National
Society for the study of Education (1925) the concept undoubt­
edly goes back at least two hundred years.

In the seventeenth century, educational thinkers such
as Comenius and Locke had already recognised that the child

¹. John Downing and D.V. Thackery, 1971, Reading
Readiness, London, University of London Press, Ltd.,
p. 10.
himself should be the determining factor in the educational process, but their views were not typical of the age. Rousseau in 1762, made a more effective statement of this truth and in his book "Emile" can be seen the crude, but nevertheless clear, beginnings of the readiness concept. Rousseau felt that education should be accommodated to the various stages of the child's development. He rejected the formal teaching of the schools and educated Emile according to nature.²

Pestalozzi (1898) was much influenced by Rousseau's writings and actually tried to put some of his ideas into practice at his private schools at Stanz (1798-99), Burgdorf (1799-1804) and Yverdon (1805-1827). He felt that the educator's duty was to assist nature's development so as to secure a natural and harmonious progress. In his book 'How Gertude Teaches Her Children', he wrote:

"All instructions of man is then only the art of helping nature to develop in her own way and this art rests essentially on the relation and harmony between the impression received by the child and the exact degree of his developed powers. It is also necessary in the impressions that are brought to the child by instruction that there should be a sequence so that the

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beginning and progress should keep pace with the beginning and progress of the powers to be developed in the child."

Proebel (1887) strengthened and added to the ideas of Rousseau and Pestalozzi. As a scientist he was impressed by Darwin's theory of evolution, and saw the human being as a biological organism for which education needed only to provide nourishment and freedom. In his book, The Education of Man, he illustrates this point as follows:

"All the child is ever to be and become, lies, however slightly educated, in the child, and can be attained only through development from within outward."  

Proebel stressed that the child's growth was one of steady continuous development, this idea is only one step away from stressing that each child has its own individual pattern of growth and rate of maturation, an idea vital to the concept of readiness.

In an article on primary education, John Dewey (1898), discussed at length the subject of a child's readiness for language study in the primary grades, without actually mentioning the specific term.


He states:

"Present physiological knowledge points to the age of about eight years as early enough for anything more than an incidental attention to visual and written language".

Patrick (1899) a disciple of Dewey helped to popularise his master's ideas and in an article on readiness he states:

"Our increasing knowledge of the child's mind, his muscular and nervous system, and his special sense points indubitably to the conclusion that reading and writing are subjects which do not belong to the early years of school life, but to a later period."\(^5\)

During the first twenty-five years of this present century, three important influences helped to give a firm foundation to the readiness concept among our accepted educational principles. Firstly, Dewey's (1909, 1916, 1926) influence began to make itself felt during these years, in which he published his most important books. Secondly, experimental psychologists such as Thorndike (1913) and Terman (1919) in America, Burt and Ballard (1922) in Britain

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were evolving procedures for conducting experiments and devising tools of measurement and statistical techniques for research related to this problem.

Finally, concern was being expressed in America at the low standards of reading, and the first specialists in the field of reading instruction began to make their appearance. Huey's (1908) *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading* was the first professional book on the teaching of reading.

In 1925, the Twenty-fourth year book of the National Society for the study of education was published in U.S.A. Before this date the concept of readiness evolved slowly over a long period of intensive application and investigation of reading readiness in America. It is generally agreed that the specific term 'readiness' was used for the first time in this year book, which recognised the problem of reading readiness and suggested methods of diagnosing and remedying deficiencies in readiness.

The most influential study of reading readiness was that of Morphett and Washburne (1931) and from about that date experimental studies of various aspects of readiness became extremely numerous, growing rapidly year by year, until the years 1938-40 were reached, possibly the peak period for investigation into the nature of the concept.
In America, the number of investigations and articles concerned with reading readiness declined in the 1940s and 1950s. The main reason for this was not because it was felt that all the important aspects had been dealt with adequately, but because of a shift of emphasis with regard to readiness. Factors contributing to readiness for beginning to read were found to be the same factors which contribute to reading success at later levels and so the readiness concept was applied to all stages of growth in reading and at all levels of maturation.

But in the 1960s came a revival of interest in the concept of reading readiness on both sides of the Atlantic. In Britain during that period, there was a general increase in interest in the teaching of reading, which was associated with the re-examination of the concept of reading readiness. In the United States during the same period there was also a marked interest in reopening the issue of reading readiness, but for a different reason. It seems to have been related more in America to a growing dissatisfaction with the results of the stereotyped mass education procedures of the grade system in the schools of American public education. The discontent, however, was not directed at the mass procedures and methods of schooling. Instead, it tended to focus on what was felt to be the slow progress made by the majority of pupils.
A general concern for the lack of individualization in the teaching methods used in American school was not noticeable during 1960s, although towards the end of the decade more and more writers drew attention to this common weakness in the usual American system of grade levels.

Diack (1960) expresses well the impatience which many American educators were beginning to feel with the mass application of rules of reading readiness. He says:

"In America particularly, the actual teaching of reading has been so much delayed that many a child, instead of getting ready to read, gets bored with waiting to be taught."

It is interesting to reflect on the educational approach and teaching methods implied by Diack's final phrase 'waiting to be taught'. It certainly indicates very different view of education to that of Rousseau who laid the foundations of this concept.

It also suggests an important difference in the outlook of British and American teachers as regards readiness. A British primary school where children 'waited to be taught', something they were ready to learn for themselves, would have been a comparatively rare entity even in the early 1960s.

The view of readiness which is more typical of the modern British primary school, has received its most outspoken support from an American Psychologist, Bruner (1960) says:
'The foundations of any subject may be taught to any body at any age in some form'.

He shows that by 'in some form', he is proposing that the concept of readiness implies adaptation by the teacher to the child level of development.

Thus, the concept of readiness has evolved.

2.2 Definitions of Reading Readiness

Different educationists have given different definitions of the term reading readiness. A few of the definitions which are very famous are discussed here.

According to Harris, 'It is a state of general maturity which when reached allows a child to learn to read without excess difficulty. It is a composite of many interconnected traits.'

This means that when a child has developed certain mental characteristics to a point, he is able to learn to read without any tension. Maturational changes are orderly and sequential. Harris compares the process of reading with that of walking. He says that when a child is matured physically

then and only then he walks easily, otherwise the parent's undue haste causes a painful fall on the part of the child. In the same way, when the child is mentally matured only then he can learn reading with ease. Also, reading readiness is not a single mental characteristic, but it consists of many characteristics.

Defining reading readiness, John Downing and Derek Thackray write, "Reading readiness is defined as the stage in development when, either through maturation or through previous learning or both, the individual child can learn to read easily and profitably." 7

This means children should not be forced to learn before maturational development is adequate. Harris also notes that "without maturation the child cannot learn, without experiences he has nothing to learn." 8

The teacher can promote the child's readiness by providing for gaps in his experience.


Dechant states:

"Reading readiness is the developmental stage at which constitutional and environmental factors have prepared the child for reading instruction." ⁹

Reading readiness usually does not come at the same age for the farmer's child as for the college teacher's son, but even the professor's son may not be fully ready. The reading teacher realizes that it is not enough to know the factors that promote or prohibit adequate reading performance. He must examine the composite of factors and on the basis of them must identify each pupil's specific readiness for reading. Children need appropriate environmental stimulation if maturational development is to progress at an appropriate rate.

In Ausubel's words - "Reading readiness is the adequacy of existing capacity in relation to the demands of a given learning task." ¹⁰

It could be said that the task of learning to read would become easy if the existing capacity of potentiality in the child is adequate.

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According to Helen M. Robinson, "Reading readiness can be defined as various combinations of abilities which result from nature and nurture interacting with each other." ¹¹

The study of this definition leads to state that the reading readiness consists of abilities which are developed as a result of the interaction between the child's heredity and environment. Besides this, it brings into focus the relationship between a child's particular capacities and the kind of learning opportunities made available to him.

Nancy Larrick writes "Reading readiness means the time when a child is mature enough to learn to read without undue difficulty. It varies from child to child." ¹²

This suggests that in the process to learn to read, readiness is one of the developmental stages in the child. Also, it emphasises that there are individual differences as far as reading readiness is concerned. Reading readiness may be found at different levels at different ages in different children.

¹¹ Helen M. Robinson (Ed.) 1968. 'Innovation and Change in Reading Instruction.' The Sixty-Seventh Year Book of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part II. Chicago. The University of Chicago Press, p. 49.

Almy states - "Readiness is an educational concept concerned with the timeliness of what we wish to teach the child in the light of his ability to make use of it."\(^{13}\)

Here, Almy has tried to point out that reading readiness is the opportune moment, which, when exploited by the teacher to teach reading, would pay the maximum returns of his efforts.

Therefore, if the child is not ready to read, the teacher should not make haste in teaching him to learn to read.

Dechant has supported this view by saying, "Reading readiness is the teachable moment for reading."\(^{14}\)

It could be concluded safely that reading readiness is an opportune moment for teaching reading. It is an opportunity for the teacher to begin to teach reading to the child, because at this stage the child can learn reading with ease and peace. Not only this, but it also enjoys reading.

Grassam is apt in saying - "Readiness for reading denotes a stage of mental maturity at which a child can begin profitably to learn to read."\(^{15}\)


This definition also emphasises upon the same idea as described in previous definition that reading readiness is a stage of mental maturity at which if the child is taught to read, he will learn reading easily and profitably. If attempts are made to teach reading to a child in which reading readiness is not developed upto the level, the child will neither find pleasure nor profit from the reading. He has no desire to read.

The analytical study of the various definitions of reading readiness lead to state that it is an opportune moment, a mental maturity - which is composed of various mental abilities developed as a result of interaction between nature and nurture. Therefore, the research workers have tried to spell out the various components of reading readiness.

2.3 Components of Reading Readiness

The magic teachable moment for beginning reading seems impossible to find.

There can be no decisive answer to the question, 'when is a child ready for reading?' because there is no single criterion that applies to all children or to all learning situations. Children grow towards readiness for reading at different rates and vary widely in the various abilities, skills and understanding which make for reading readiness.
The following are the components of Reading Readiness.
If these components are developed in a child, he will be able
to learn to read without any tension, and will find pleasure
from the reading.

Components

(1) Concept of things.
(2) Knowledge of alphabet.
(3) Vocabulary.
(4) Auditory discrimination.
(5) Visual discrimination.
(6) Left to right progression.
(7) Handle the book correctly.
(8) Associate meaning to printed symbols.
(9) Pronounce the word independently.

In order to have the clear idea about these components,
they are discussed in brief in the following paragraphs:

2.3.(1) Concept of things

The child has different types of audio-visual experiences
from school, home and society. These experiences help the
child to formulate and recognise certain concepts, e.g. Banana,
Milk, Brother, Sister. If the child has varied experiences,
he will have clear concepts and understanding of many things.
This component could be very well evaluated by asking a child
to point out a particular object from a group of objects.
2.3.2 Knowledge of alphabet

Recent studies suggest that knowledge of the names of the letters of the alphabet may be one of the best predictors of child readiness for reading. They also indicate that the ability to write the letters dictated and to identify the letters named are important indicators of first grade reading achievement. Alphabet letters are also used for construction of words. Little children feel very happy while they are performing word-construction activity. If a child is able to recognise a few letters of the alphabet with the help of the pictures, he is ready for reading.

The illustration given below will clarify the situation. \( \text{M, M, C, C} \). Here, the child is asked to find out ' \( \text{C} \) ' out of four letters given in one row. Thus, the knowledge of the alphabet may be considered as one of the best components of a child's readiness for reading.

2.3.3 Vocabulary

Some children come from homes where they hear a wide range of well-chosen words. They have many opportunities to talk with others, play toys with other children and stories have been read to them in their homes. As a result, many words become familiar to them. The home may be one in which the child is to be seen and not heard. Such children come to the small size of the vocabulary interferes with learning to
read. It is quite essential that a child must have the minimum vocabulary to learn reading. This fact is particularly important in the beginning days of reading.

2.3.(4) Auditory discrimination

Auditory discrimination is the ability to discriminate between the sounds or phonetic of a language. It is evident that this skill is essential to successful achievement in reading. If the child cannot hear sounds correctly, he normally cannot learn to speak them correctly. If he confuses sounds in speech, it frequently is impossible for him to associate the correct sound with the visual symbol.

However, by hearing only, a child is able to discriminate between the pictures or the objects occurring with common initial letter sounds. For example - 2€5 , ə32m21.

When the child is able to discriminate between sounds it is to be understood that the child could learn reading easily and the presence of this characteristic indicates the sign of reading readiness.

2.3.(5) Visual discrimination

Surely one of the most important skills needed for reading is the ability to visually analyse and synthesize printed words. The child must be able to note similarities
and differences in the form of objects, pictures, geometric figures and words. Generally children have learned to discriminate between gross figures and objects. They see the differences between a Donkey and a Horse, and between circles, triangles and squares. They also have learned something about words. They have noted that some words are long and others are short, that some have ascending letters and others have descending letters and that some words look alike and that others look different.

The matching of non-word forms and pictures seem to have little benefit on letter or word perception. Reading requires the ability to distinguish each word from every other word. The child must be relatively more skilled in noting the differences among words than in noting the similarities.

2.3.(6) Left to right progression

Reading is a left to right activity. This is a new concept for beginning readers. They have not been taught to observe directions in their everyday perceptions. A 'mom' looks like a 'mom' whether the eye movement is from left to right or from right to left. Thus, one of the first requirements in learning to read is the learning to form new habits of perception. The child must perceive from left to right.
2.3.(7) **Handle the book correctly**

It is very necessary for the child to recognise which is the front of the book, how to turn the pages and how to hold a book. This component has very little to do with mental activity. It is just a training for motor co-ordination of hand and eye. It is by and large a physical activity and could be developed in children much easily than any other component of reading readiness.

2.3.(8) **Associate meaning to the printed symbols**

When the child sees the printed symbols, tries to associate the meanings of the symbols. This ability of associating meaning to symbols develops gradually among the children. The meaning associated to the symbols are likely to expand because of the varied experiences and the use of the same symbol in different situations. Therefore, all attempts should be made to develop the ability to associate the meaning with printed symbols before beginning the teaching of reading. The child is considered to be ready for reading if he is able to associate meaning to symbols.

2.3.(9) **Pronunciation of words independently**

The teaching of reading generally starts with pronunciation of the word. Therefore in the reading programme,
speech plays an important role. First the teacher pronounces the word and the child has to imitate it without any help from the teacher. The activity of teaching reading to a child should be hastened if he pronounces the words independently. Hence, this component cannot be overlooked in evaluating the reading readiness.

2.4 Concept of Reading Readiness Programme

Development means a systematic and gradual unfolding of the unit or the topic at hand in the light of newer approaches in education and teaching which may fulfil the needs of the changing society and help the child in his daily work. The child adjusts himself in the newer type of society.

Programme development is not only a type of educational material called 'a self instructional programme', it is also a type of teaching technique. Where as the first meaning refers to something tangible, used for instruction, several rather differently appearing materials are all properly called programmes. Further more, they do not have to be verbal or printed, but can be pictorial and conveyed by any medium. The second meaning refers to something abstract, one of several different types of instructional logic or strategy. They determine the conditions, the organization as well as the presentation and response media used at different points in the programme as it is presented to each student. Reading
Readiness programme is the development of learning process and language development. It can be defined as sequential activities through which pupils are supposed to pass with the help of the teachers. The activities are phased in a proper manner so as to orient the pupils towards the readiness for reading. It is hoped that the reading readiness programme induces reading readiness among the pupils who are involved in these activities of the programme. The different components of reading readiness programme are concepts of things, alphabet, vocabulary, auditory discrimination and visual discrimination. Instruction during learning period emphasized verbalization in conjunction with the manipulation of concrete materials.

The common purpose of programme is to guide the learner so that a particular set of desired changes occur in his performance.

The development of new discriminations, new cognitions and new response capabilities are the three fundamental learning processes and go on concurrently, but at a different rates depending upon the task to be learned and the learner's initial status. Each technique used to define the conditions of programme relates to one or more of these processes. Some programme techniques are used to teach the student to attend to particular things, others teach him to discriminate between similar objects (e.g. the letters 'd' and 'b'). Still others
develop cognitions, such as concepts, meaning and relationships. Some others 'shape' behaviour (eliminate irrelevant responses), 'chain' responses (sequence them) or simply bring already well-defined responses.

The teaching of reading is not carried on in a vacuum. Not all children who enter first grade are, as we have seen, 'ready to read'. Reading readiness usually does not come at the same age for the shepherd child as for the college teacher's son, but even the professor's son may not be fully ready.

It is not easy to list in sequence the major skills and attitudes that must be developed in the pre-primary and early first grade. However, research and experience indicate that for success in reading, the child either should possess or should develop in school, certain minimum levels of proficiency, in a number of areas.

2.5 Components of Reading Readiness Programme

The first requisite for beginning reading is an interest in reading. Children generally come to school wanting to learn to read. When they have discovered that what can be said also can be written, they show an even greater interest. The teacher must actively foster it by making available picture-books on various topics. The readiness skills must
be developed through class-room instruction. So the investiga-
tor developed reading readiness programme which includes
the following components of reading readiness:

(1) Concepts.
(2) Alphabet.
(3) Vocabulary.
(4) Auditory discrimination.
(5) Visual discrimination.

A good readiness programme is directed toward the
development of proficiency in these areas. The pupil must
develop proficiency in each area in the day to day activities
in the class-room.
significance for the learner to the degree that they stand for things within his experience. It is through his experiences that the child is enabled to understand the stories and materials he reads. This helps the child to understand the meaning of what he reads and also gives him the idea that one reads to get the meaning.

Meaningful concepts do not lie only in interpreting symbols but also in fixing the memory of printed symbols so that recognition is helped whenever the word is seen again. Again, meaningful concepts help the child to recognise new words through context.

Experiences for acquiring meaningful concepts must be varied, real and important. The selection of experiences must be based on the importance of those experiences in terms of life value. The experiences should not be limited to the existing interests of children. Broadening their interests and building more and more concepts should be the aim of the teacher for many children coming from meagre backgrounds having interests in only very few things. It is the duty of the teacher to arrange for the widening of their experiences. The teacher should see that the experiences provided have immediate as well as future value and are within their comprehension. Pictures are very useful in helping the children to associate meaning with the spoken word. The larger their number of experiences, the broader their background for
interpretation. Such experience is very important in clarifying and building such concepts as they will meet in their reading.

Since 'reading is reasoning', training in the ability to do problematic thinking should be another important part of the reading readiness programme. Even in the very beginning stage, the child should be trained to think, to question, to compare and relate his past experience, to select relevant ideas, to organize ideas, to make judgements and to draw conclusions.