CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STRATEGIES
AND READING COMPREHENSION

"Reading Comprehension strategies are like diverse tunes. They blend together and result into a harmonious symphony of the melodious tunes".

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2.1 Introduction

In words of Lawrence E. Hafner:

"In our day men read to be informed entertained, enlightened, stimulated and comforted, but to attain these goals satisfactorily in this fifth great age - the space age - it is necessary to process much information through reading and to process it with a reasonable degree of accuracy. If it is important to be a skillful, discriminating, active reader, then the schools must face the challenge of developing this kind of reader; for it is the schools that are charged with the responsibility of teaching the various skills of reading".

It is essential, therefore, to promote and enhance comprehension ability of the pupils. Much has been done in the field of Reading. Many extensive researches have opened new vistas. Readability, Reading achievement, Reading Ability, Retardation in Reading, Rate of Reading and Comprehension, Reading readiness and the effective methods to boost up reading, preparation and tryout of various tests for measuring achievement in the skill of Reading are the researches in which many researchers have dived deeply with great success. Problematic situations
have placed a challenge before teachers. "Can we improve reading comprehension? Which strategies would be profitable? To what extent? Which factors affect Reading Comprehension? These are the issues engrossing a researcher too. Those investigators who are bubbling and bursting enthusiasm have paved the way. Reading Improvement programmes, standardization of Reading comprehension tests, application and implementation of methods of teaching Reading have fruitfully ushered in.

This study is also an humble attempt of the researcher to perform an experiment in the field of Reading Comprehension. There are various strategies for updating pupils' Reading Comprehension. The investigator has tried to evolve interest provoking reading programmes, implementation of various strategies, measuring improvement or otherwise in the perspective of variables.

2.2 Important Tenets of Reading Comprehension

The destination to which the reading material intends to reach is to associate the meaning with the written symbols. It is only comprehension of an elementary type. It is like swimming on the surface. It is literal comprehension. To dive deep into the ocean of thoughts or ideas underlying the material, a mature reader must interpret words in their contextual setting. This is called Reading at the interpretation level. Reading becomes meaningful only when the reader grasps what
the author wishes to convey, but also becomes aware of the mood, feelings and attitude of the author. If the reader comprehends the implied sense of the passage and infer therefrom, he has attained the sublime height of comprehension. Inference level of comprehension develops his thinking, reasoning and critical faculties. He must become one with the author in relation to time and place. Inference, application and understanding of the passage with its broader implications are the peculiarities of a good reader. A purposeful reader comprehends the organisation of the read material. He stretches his mind and thinks as he reads. He sees the relationship between the central idea and adjoining ideas. He has to understand the logical sequence as well as conclude therefrom.

According to E.L. Thorndike: "Whatever influences general thinking or problem solving ability also influences Reading Comprehension.

2.3 Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension depends upon many factors. Factors can be classified into two broad categories: Internal and External.

The major factor is linguistic competence. Word recognition plays a vital role in comprehension. The vocabulary proficiency has close relationship with comprehension. Knowledge of syntax, semantic and phonological knowledge of words,
sentences and phrases, their inter-relationships are basic to initial literal comprehension. This mastery over active vocabulary as well as passive vocabulary, function words, and content words, structural patterns and usages would materialise the far-fetched dream of comprehension.

Interest is the mainspring of comprehension. If the reader gets interested in the material read, better comprehension will accrue. It depends upon the mental frame of the reader. Taste of a person has a positive effect on comprehension of the read material. The reading matter must be interest-provoking, satisfying one's need.

Purpose of the reader has also a great bearing on comprehension. If the purpose is served by the material, there will be attention and because of his attention, the retention will be more. Of course, retention cannot be so much effective. A person may drop many words and yet his degree of comprehension would be fair.

Motivation is of no mean importance in comprehension. It plays a crucial part in shaping comprehension level. If a person is greatly motivated, the extent of comprehension will be excellent. In the renowned schools, pupils are amply motivated. They read a lot and understand everything that they read. The alumni seek information, and read it with pleasure and profit. Motivation is the hub round which learning revolves.
Accumulated Reading ability has a decisive part to play in fructifying comprehension. His past experiences have laid sound corner stones of the vast super-structure of comprehension. The quantum and quality of the previously read material illuminates the mental horizons. Power of reading pages with comprehension depends on his past rich experiences. The value system and the attitudes towards various types of printed material will vitalize his ability to comprehend. His attitude towards a particular author or a particular type of literature may prove hindrance and hamper comprehension. His value system may prove a hurdle in comprehending the material he considers to be of mean value. These factors are not enough. If one satisfies oneself by high lighting the above internal founts of comprehension, it will be an arm-chair explanation.

Textual characteristics are of prime importance. Readability of the textual material as well as text organization have a prominent part to play. Difficulty of the concepts read will affect adversely. If plain, lucid language is used to explore the ideas, it would have a healthy effect on comprehension.

The quality of the Reading environment will prevail over the mind of the reader. What the teacher does and plans to do before or after the passage is read, What are the reactions of his class-mates, all these will entangle or solve the issue of comprehension. Strategies applied to smoothen the comprehension power also affect the pupils' comprehension of the material read.
2.4 Various Strategies for Improving Reading Comprehension

There are various strategies for improving comprehension. These strategies try to provide better environment to the pupils. They encompass a lot of activities that harness pupils' ability to comprehend. They are incentives.

They are:

1. **Request Procedure**:

   It furnishes an opportunity to the pupils to formulate and ask questions and adopt the path of purposeful and thoughtful reading.

2. **Cloze Techniques**:

   For achieving better comprehension of the material read, cloze provides a systematic deletion or dropping out of words. The alumni have to understand the context and replace and fill the gaps appropriately. It enhances their power of comprehension.

3. **REAP Technique**:

   This is also a very promising strategy for updating the analytical skill. Read, Encode, Annotate and Ponder are the steps. The acronym is REAP.

4. **Guided Reading Procedure**:

   Recalling of facts, self-correction, Recognition of implicit questions, setting up of ideas in order, brief quizzes
help the pupils in Reading Comprehension. This strategy aims at the improvement of the attitudes and skill aspects.

(5) **Directed Reading Activity (DRA):**

This strategy is associated with basal readers. DRA can be implemented for content areas also. It may be adopted for any reading selection. In the words of Betts, "First, the group should be prepared, oriented, or made ready for the reading of a story or selection. Second, the first reading should be guided-silent reading. Third, word-recognition skills and comprehension should be developed during the silent reading - Fourth, the reading - silent or oral, depending upon the needs of the pupil - should be done for the purposes different from those served by the first, or silent reading. Fifth, the follow-up on the "reading lesson" should be differentiated in terms of pupil needs". Thus it involves five steps:

(1) Readiness
(2) Directed silent reading
(3) Comprehension check and discussion
(4) Oral re-reading
(5) Follow-up activities

(6) **Directed Reading - Thinking Activity (DR-TA)**

This strategy seeks to develop in the pupils the ability to read with critical viewpoint as well as reflective outlook.
Russel Stauffer propounded and advocated this strategy for the pupils pursuing to think, learn and test. This strategy enables the pupils to frame their own purposes for reading, to extract, understand and gather information, to suspend their judgments, to examine the material to be read on the basis of their reading purposes. It aids in deciding on the basis of information gleaned from reading.

There are certain other strategies which are greatly concerned with content area reading and the improvement of study skills. They are - study guides, selective Reading Guide-o-Rama, Herringbone, SQR method, survey technique so on and so-forth.

As the investigator has selected the three strategies for improving the Reading Comprehension, it is worthwhile to study them perfectly.

2.5 **Salient Features of The Three Strategies**

(a) *Request Procedure*

(b) *REAP Technique*

(c) *Guided Reading Procedure*

(a) "**The Request Procedure**"^2

This strategy was designed by Manzo. It is directed towards questioning by the pupils on the material that is being read by them. Activeness in their inquiring attitude is also
a goal. The pupils would frame their own purposes of reading and thus try to read independently with understanding.

Pupils are in the centre. They have to develop their own questions, formulate their own purposes for reading. They have to play an active participatory role. To originate information by instilling an inquiring attitude would pave the way towards transfer of their involvement in solving the problems to different contexts. Here the teacher has to guide them to prepare model questions to provide them feedback and to help them in setting their purposes. This strategy can be fruitfully employed at all levels. It would bear fruits if a smaller number of pupils are heeded at a time. Six steps are to be followed in this strategy:

(1) **Preparation of Material**:

Here the teacher has to be cautious in selecting the material looking to the class calibre, predictability, identification proper points within the selected programme.

(2) **To make the pupils ready for the Strategy**:

Here the pupils read sentence by sentence. After reading the first sentence, they would ask a question. The question should not be vague. It is essential to familiarize the pupils with the vocabulary items contained in the passage. The teacher may also equip the pupils with the background. Oral familiarity by the teacher is also justified. The basic concepts
lending their support in understanding the passage are to be clarified. Here building interest, selecting vocabulary, creating background and awareness of the 'Request' rules would be of no mean importance.

(3) **Development of Questioning Behaviour of the Pupils**

Joint silent reading by the teacher as well as the taught, questioning by the pupils, teacher's responding the question or re-phrasing the unclear questions, then probing of question by the teacher and pupils reciprocating likewise, would be the pivotal activities. This stage would make the reading programme throbbing with life. Exhibition of good questioning behaviour, promotion of pupils' activeness, extending the thinking of the pupils, verbal or non-verbal reinforcement, integration of information on the part of the pupils are the highlights of this strategy.

(4) **Developing the Predictive Behaviour of the Students**

The teacher has to make efforts to elicit predictions. They go on reading, exchanging questions, if their prediction is not justifiable. The teacher has to decide when to terminate the strenuous efforts of going on predicting.

(5) **Silent Reading Activity**

Here the pupils read the whole passage. The remaining portion would help them in deciding their correctness. The teacher may help them but not at the cost of their chain of thoughts.
(6) **Follow-up Activities**: 

The teacher may ask them to verify or apply the information, or manipulate the story. Other fruit-bearing activities also could be given to the pupils.

**Cautions**: The teacher must deal with the individuals in the beginning and then with the groups. Immediate reference, common knowledge, translation and related information, should be the types of questions. A questioning game or activity would make the pupils ready. Modifications are desirable at times.

In nutshell, to quote Robert J. Tierney, John E. Readence and Ernest K. Dishner:

"With or without modifications, the Request procedure appears to be a very effective strategy. The various permutations of the Request procedure provide a viable tool for exploring, extending and encouraging student hypothesizing. Request facilitates student involvement in problem solving and necessitates teacher awareness of the student's level of involvement".3

(b) **REAP Technique**

When some basic thoughts are chosen from the read passage for communication are the core of this technique. This technique became fullfledged in the hands of Eanet and Manzo.4 Pupils who read the content of the text-passage internalize the gist
of that passage by discussing the ideas underlying the passage with other chums. This internalization materialises the gains. It is a kind of translation in their own words. REAP is a stepping stone for preparing mature readers and independence.

This technique has four main corner-stones: Reading the passage for diving deep into the author's ideas is the first major stage.

The second hub is 'Encoding'. Pupils encode these comprehended thoughts in their own language.

Annotation is the third pivot. Pupils annotate them in writing so that they can share with others.

Pondering the significance of the annotation is the fourth and the last lap of his journey.

There are various kinds of annotations that can be taken help of in this technique. Heuristic annotation, thesis annotation, question annotation, motivation annotation, summary annotation, critical annotation, intention annotation are some of the main types.

Even the skill of annotation is to be imparted with utmost care and caution. Recognizing and defining, discriminating, modelling the process and practising are four steps advocated by the author to have an exposure prior to the writing of annotations.
Pondering has a highly effective value. These annotations should be applied with individuals at first. The pupils read individually and prepare their notes. It is beneficial to progress check as well as conference with the teacher. Annotations can lay the pillars of extensive critique writing.

These annotations would prove to be an impetus to study habits of the pupils. The REAP technique provides a systematic procedure of gleaning, making a record and using the text content.

(c) Guided Reading Procedure:

This technique supplies a logical series of steps of imparting instructions. The group of pupils would recall the information orally which it has penetrated during silent reading. The teacher manages to confirm the details and record the relationships. This procedure will carve out an attitude of accuracy in comprehension. It is a group activity. The material should be narrative or informational but it should be delimited to the suitable length of one sitting. As Tierney pointed out:

"For primary students, allow three minutes or approximately 90 words, for intermediate students, three minutes or 500 words approximately; for junior high students, seven minutes or approximately 900 words."
Manzo suggests six steps to be followed in the GRP technique:

1. Prepare the student for the Reading Assignment.
2. Students Read and Recall Information.
3. Return to Article for Additional Facts and Corrections.
4. Organize the Remembered Material.
5. Provide students with Thought-provoking Questions.
6. Test students on their knowledge of the information.

(1) Preparing the Students for the Reading Assignment:

Some form of readiness work should be done before initiation. It might be of any other strategy. The objective or the purpose must be clear to the pupils. Pupils must preserve the details of the lesson in their minds. It leads to success of the strategy.

(2) Students Read and Recall Information:

The students would read the matter silently. The teacher has to guide them wherever they are entrapped. They have to wait till others, also complete their reading. The teacher would seek the major points, that the pupils have in memory and enlist them in brief on the black board.
The pupils who cannot tell and remind the facts would be permitted to peep into the material and the teacher would aid them by jotting additional points on the black board.

Outline is prepared with modifications. The teacher asks questions to focus the attention of the pupils on the ingredients, main ideas and allied details.

Fairly specific questions linking the previously learnt material with the present material, must follow less specific ones which would place a burden on the pupils to a great extent. The teacher's role is that of a model. This step would lead to a happy synthesis.

Short term memory of the pupils is to be checked. For this purpose, multiple choice test, short answers, essay type questions or matching tests should be used.

In the words of Tierney, Readence and Dishner:

"The GRP affords students an opportunity to read that information, to interact with others' interpretation of the material in the classroom and organize the material. The GRP is a
teacher-directed but student-dominated activity which can lead to improvements in readers' understandings".

2.6 Variables Affecting Reading Comprehension

Intelligence:

Reading is an activity which requires a fairly satisfactory level of intelligence. It is the prime mover of Reading Comprehension. Those who are having poor reading are found to possess low Intelligence Quotients. But one should also bear in mind that pupils having poor mental ability find it difficult to comprehend. High intelligence quotient is no index to a fair degree of comprehension.

Physical Factors hindering or promoting Reading Comprehension:

Physical factors also play a decisive role in Reading Comprehension. If the reader is an easy prey of fatigue or if malnutrition is the fate of the reader, adverse effect will be visible. Unhygienic, noisy surroundings, inadequate lighting would add to the agony. Even word recognition and parrot-like oral reading would also distract the attention of the pupils. If the reader has no rich, wide or varied background of reading experience, his attempts would be futile.
"If the reader has poor language background, lack of readiness, to pursue the subject; vocabulary deficiency, lack of knowledge of specialized vocabulary in the particular subject — all add to the poor comprehension."

Along with the above factors, lack of good concentration, paucity of motivation and emotional disturbances have a hampering effect. If a person is mentally upset, emotionally disturbed or full of anxieties, it will result into poor comprehension. Lack of ability of generalization can add fuel to the fire. If a person fails to adjust himself to the technique adopted by the teacher he will be victimised.

Socio-economic status of a pupil also affects his level of comprehension. His social environment will open the avenues or bar him from reading rich treasures of literature. His economic position would allow him to acquire such reading stuff as would enlighten his path. A poor pupil living in a hut, always struggling and striving to make both the ends meet will not be able to pursue excellence.

His socio-economic status will also decide his study habits. If a pupil has the company of intelligentsia, he will form sound study habits. The values attached with the strata of the society may affect his mental frame. His attitude will be a milestone of his reading success and comprehension.
2.7 References


7. Ibid., p. 35.