

Evolving a Development Oriented, Comprehensive Approach using Digital Humanities to Acquire Reading Skills

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Abstract

To become proficient in any language reading becomes the most important skill to be achieved. When it comes to English, Reading becomes one of the major skills of the language. Reading can be defined as an art of comprehending words then mastering sentences to paragraphs then to the whole content. Studies have found that the more a person reads the more skilful he becomes with speaking as with the use of vocabulary. Skills of reading can be acquired through continuously reading and comprehending ,developing a full understanding over the content, fluent in the usage of the read vocabulary leading to independence in oration. The skills of reading for a non-native (ESOL) speaker is cumbersome and acquiring the skills become pretty important and integral part of life,with English becoming important as the Global Lingua-Franca. With all these factors reiterating the importance of reading as an important skill, the digital natives of today actually have failed to understand the importance of reading at all. The ability of the language usage among Non-native speakers is directly proportional to their reading habits is a research finding. This article focuses on the development oriented, approaches using the digital platform to improve reading skills and to make reading easier & comprehensible to the non-native speaker. It also analyses on the various online resources available to improve the habit of reading in young learners, and checks the effectiveness of these platforms.

Keywords: Digital natives, Global language, Reading skills, Non-native speakers, Digital humanities, Comprehensive approaches.

Introduction: Through Reading to Other Skills

Reading is an intellectual process of comprehending letters and words to arrive at a meaning, it is one the most important skill requisite to master a language. It also serves as a basic platform to share information and ideas. It can be called as a complex process of information exchange between the text and the reader of the text. This understanding may be shaped by the understanding about the culture and the community of the language read. There are lot of methods used as strategies to identify the read content, it may vary from understanding the words, symbols, to translate literally or contextually, to decipher the meaning of the unknown and integrate the knowledge for further reading. The success in this method is usually measured as reading comprehension. The interaction that happens between the reader and the read is a clear transmission of ideas, which might be in the form of symbols, letters, words and sentences. This understanding may arise out of prior knowledge, experience ,attitude and mostly the indulgence about the community and culture of the language. Readers may employ a variety of ways to decipher and comprehend. The unknown words may be identified in the context, through clues, which may be further used by the reader to integrate into their prevailing charter of knowledge. To attain this familiarity in reading, an analysis of the context and closed reading is essential.

As the power of the written word is supreme and mighty, the ideas written down has changed the destiny of nations and the world as a whole for the ideas flowing out of the pen cannot be stopped. To build on greater ideas and to shed bad ideas, to get the world moving it is the written word which has it all and to master the skills of it means we are mastering one of the greatest skills required to unlock the potential of knowledge itself. The power vested in the reading content is very high that there are governments who oppose free and honest communication across the country. Literacy is directly related to the powers of reading and understanding and population without the skills of reading could be easily manipulated.

Methods of Acquiring the Skills of Reading

The main important factors that envisage the acquisition of reading skills are understanding letters, phonology and recognizing text and oral language. To achieve this one requires proficiency in the language, and focusing on these skills becomes utmost important as these are the foundations for unhampered progress through learning to read, reading fluency, reading comprehension and finally reading with meta cognition. Reading is the only way for the brain to receive the written language. Researchers have found that the same brain areas used for learning and using a language is used for reading too. All this and many more findings clearly describe the role of reading in language acquisition. There are a zillion methods to acquire reading proficiency. But to rely on one or a few methods depend upon each individual, based upon their first language/arterial language, culture, nationality etc., Reading skills just do not happen, they occur from skills in other areas of knowledge, they don't remain the same the skills develop and become more clarified, levels of reading improvement can be directly related to the amount of reading a person does. This skill also grows with the ability to reason, to read the visual symbols and to visualise the images into words and vice versa. To know the sentence level skills, one needs to know how ideas are linked into sentences while speaking. In order to understand the concept, the ideas read should be linked into themes, and understanding the concept of theme again depends upon the social context on how the ideas are communicated.

It can also be said that the reading skill could be achieved by trying to comprehend every word and by linking the words together to form sentences. Reading also unintentionally makes the reader understand the proper grammatical form of a sentence and its structure, though this might not happen initially but at later stages.

Technology to Enhance Reading

With all these said about reading skills and its acquisition patterns, it becomes increasingly important to know that technical advancements will definitely help in procuring the skill quite easily. As technology is changing the teaching learning pattern and its outcomes, the advancements in technology has created a lot of encouragement in the part of the teacher and learner alike and technology can be an exciting tool for the acquisition of reading skill. Technology with its varied usages can definitely become a tool to impart the knowledge and literacy skills required by the information-technology based society of which we are a part of. As a result of an extensive research, it has been revealed that digital and interface texts can absolutely increase the skills of reading. Simple and ordinary applications can be used as instructional tools to enhance reading. Technology enhanced teaching/instruction methods have been fruitful for acquiring any skill. Through these platforms, the learners are well connected to the books they read, comprehend better, there by their literacy skills improve a lot paving way for fluency in communication. Talking about the digital natives or the learners of today spend approximately 3-4 hrs per day in front of the screen. This is not purely for academics alone. Whilst 10% of this total time alone can be brought under Academia the rest goes for online games and other entertainment. Teachers can use tools like Wixie to enhance the creativity of the students, they are motivated to create better by reading sources already available and to create something similar. Reading fiction definitely enhances the reader's creativity, when it comes to academia text materials fail to create the excitement that is similar to that of reading fiction. This can be dealt by combining the knowledge of that which is read with analytical skills with the help of digital platforms, that will profusely help the student to master the subject read be it fiction or text.

There are a lot of platforms to enhance reading skills of the digital natives, for eg., Rewordify, which when a text is imported into it, analyses it identifies the hard /indecipherable word and substitutes that by a simpler one helping the reader to comprehend better. Another tool like Snap and read works in a similar way as that of rewordify only that it can also be used to read text aloud, and also the replacements could be adjusted based on the levels of the reader. Newsela is basically a comprehension tool which displays the current news in snippets followed by quizzes based on the stuff that is read, this helps the reader to test themselves based on their levels of understanding. Immersion reading is just another platform that utilizes the multisensory activities, wherein the audio books have synchronised text transcriptions as well. Inspiration is another software used to create visual imagery of the characters, plots and theme summaries read. This additionally has templates with the help of which mind mapping could be taught/understood. Nothing can of course replace a book and the physical nature of it but still considering the digital natives, E-readers like Kindle will definitely engage them. Digital library and reading apps help students to read at their own pace and understanding. Students can pick their favourite e-book & e-learning platforms, can browse libraries select their own preferences and read. Sites like Bookshare, Homerstories, Skybraries, LexiaCore5 Reading, Reading IQ, Rivet, Amazon Rapid, Lightsail, Think Circa, Common Lit, Actively Learn, Amplify Reading, Literal, Study Sync, Serial Reader etc., helps in enhancing comprehensive reading skills in the digital natives.

Conclusion

Online tools are rather indispensable and the mastery of any skills of the language could be made easier with the help of the Internet. Reading skill, which is the prime skill required to master the written word can be taught or learnt with the help of online tools. The approaches that each tool employs may be different and it caters to the learning requirements of every individual. Tools are designed in such a way that it could fit in the requisite of every learner.

Reading is considered to be a challenge by teachers of any discipline, every school/college goer

should be really concerned about their proficiency in reading. There are several projects to improve this skill which could be adapted & implemented by authorities concerned. Furthermore educational institutions can develop diagnostic procedures to classify learners and their skills in reading and based on these tests comprehensive approaches could be made case wise. Implementation of web based activities for reading envisages new opportunities for readers to strengthen their abilities in reading, the selection of platforms could be made based on playful methods, that interests the student and slowly their levels of learning to read may be raised. Interactive activities for reading help the students to enhance the skill rather painlessly. To sum up, ICT enabled reading practices can definitely help the learner acquire the skill rather effortlessly. It can be used as a learning partner to enhance the orbits of reading.

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