

# Improving Reading Comprehension: What We Know from Reviewed Studies

Ma. Gladymae Asantor

Graduate School of Education, Arellano University  
asantormagladymae[at]gmail.com

**Abstract:** *Poor reading comprehension is becoming a global problem confronting students and teachers. This paper analyzes studies on improving reading comprehension to generate some useful insights for effective teaching. This paper presents a comprehensive review of current literature and studies to provide an understanding of what we know about improving reading comprehension. The insights from the readings are presented using thematic approach. The identified and unifying themes are presented one after another and then a synthesis is made that provide the grounds to launch this specific study, and its justification.*

**Keywords:** Reading Comprehension, Reading Strategies

## 1. Introduction

The themes are: there are effective reading strategies that can help students improve reading comprehension; there are four inter - related components of metacognitive reading strategy to improve reading comprehension which include verbal explanation, modeling, guided practice and independent practice; reading comprehension can be improved using humor; prior knowledge help in improving reading comprehension; question technique can improve the students' reading comprehension; to improve reading comprehension, INSERT strategy is an effective tool; reading comprehension can be improved through the use of combined instructional strategy; reading comprehension is influenced by the four types of motivation which include intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative and instrumental; the students' ability to monitor own comprehension is essential in improving reading comprehension; to improve reading comprehension, students need to master micro and macro skills; there are three competencies of learning reading comprehension which include attitude, knowledge and learning skill; and adhering to the four principles of teaching reading comprehension, meaning - focused output, language - focused output and fluency development can guarantee success.

### **There are effective reading strategies that can help students improve reading comprehension**

The first theme is *there are effective reading strategies that can help students improve reading comprehension*. Putra and Suzanne (2022) found out that "there are some reading strategies that could be applied by students in the three stages of reading activities" (p.30). In the first stage, the strategies include previewing, creating question, making prediction, writing the main points of what reader already know about the text, reading introductions and summaries, and creating a pre - reading outline (Putra & Suzanne, 2022). In the second stage, the strategies include reading the selection text, visualizing, paraphrasing, elaborating, changing reading rate, inferring, note - taking, and rereading (Putra & Suzanne, 2022). In the third stage, the strategies include summarizing and reviewing (Putra & Suzanne, 2022). Following these, the reading comprehension of students is guaranteed to improve.

Other than the three - stages reading strategies of Putra and Suzanne (2022), Magnusson, Roe and Blikstad - Balas (2018), affirms the value of using strategies to improve reading comprehension. Their work concluded that "teaching of strategies is adaptive to classroom settings [and] ... is critical to engaging students in reading comprehension development" (p.208). Based from the authors, effective reading strategies greatly help in improving the reading comprehension of the students.

### **There are four inter - related components of metacognitive reading strategy to improve reading comprehension which include verbal explanation, modeling, guided practice and independent practice**

The second theme is *there are four inter - related components of metacognitive reading strategy to improve reading comprehension which include verbal explanation, modeling, guided practice and independent practice*. Mokhtari (2018) found out that "there are various validated ways to help increase students' reading comprehension performance through metacognitive reading strategies [of] instruction" (p.6). According to Mokhtari (2018):

The approach consists of the following four inter - related components. Verbal explanation: the teacher begins the lesson with a brief explanation of selected reading strategies and how they work; Modeling: the teacher models or demonstrates how to use one or more strategies individually or in groups to construct meaning from text; Guided Practice: the teacher puts students in the driver's seat, so to speak, giving them an opportunity to apply reading strategies while reading self - selected texts; Independent practice: Students work independently or in small groups. The teacher monitors progress and assists students who need extra help. (p.7)

This application of inter - related components of metacognitive reading strategy, has proven to be effective in improving reading comprehension of learners. For example, Muhid, Amalia, Hilaliyah, Budiana and Wadji (2020), concluded that "metacognitive strategies result positive in students' reading ability and further to their reading achievement" (p.859). From these authors, it can be inferred

that metacognitive strategies have great potential for improving reading comprehension of the students.

#### **Reading comprehension can be improved using humor**

The third theme is *reading comprehension can be improved using humor*. Hismanoglu, Ersan, and Turan (2018), found out that using humour in teaching reading comprehension is effective and concluded that “humour generally improved [students’] ... ability to learn a foreign language by creating a more comfortable and conducive learning environment overall” (p.291).

In another study, a similar conclusion was made regarding use of humor in improving reading comprehension. Tang, Asfiran, Chen, Haedarand Agussalim (2019), found out that teaching reading comprehension using English learning material designed with Humor Story improved the students’ ability. They also observed that “humor used in teaching has an advantage at the intellectual level that can make students produce stimuli to learn lessons ... faster, more active, and interested” (p.86). From these authors; it appears that using humor guarantee reading comprehension improvement.

#### **Prior knowledge helps in improving reading comprehension**

The fourth theme is *prior knowledge helps in improving reading comprehension*. Tavera and Casinillo (2020) found that “prior knowledge... enhance the reading comprehension of the learners” (p.541). In another study, Mokhtari (2018) found out that prior knowledge helped improve reading comprehension. It was established that “successful reading comprehension involves the use of certain reading strategies such as drawing on one’s prior knowledge” (Mokhtari, 2018, p.3). From these authors, it appears that prior knowledge help in improving reading comprehension.

#### **Question strategy can improve the students’ reading comprehension**

The fifth theme is *question technique can improve the students’ reading comprehension*. Syamsiah, Rafliand Ridwan (2018), found that “question strategy is effective to develop students’ ability to understand a reading” (p.136). In another study, Sinabariba (2020) concluded that “questioning can improve the students’ achievement in reading comprehension text” (p.18). Question strategy has the potential to improve students’ reading comprehension.

#### **To improve reading comprehension, INSERT strategy is an effective tool**

The sixth theme is *to improve reading comprehension; INSERT strategy is an effective tool*. INSERT is an approach to teaching where you get readers to insert their own thoughts in the text. According to Gurning and Siregar (2017), “INSERT gets readers interacting with the text by “inserting” their thought into the ideas proposed by the text to monitor their comprehension and make decision such as, ‘I knew that,’ ‘I don’t understand,’ and ‘That’s really important’ ” (p.193).

Gurning and Siregar (2017) found that INSERT strategy is an effective tool in improving reading comprehension

among students “students ... showed significant effect on their achievement in reading comprehension ... using INSERT strategy” (p.198). Likewise, Tanjung, Saragihand Pulungan (2021) found that “INSERT strategy was more effective ... in improving the students’ ... reading comprehension” (p.545).

Therefore, the INSERT strategy appears to be an effective tool to improve reading comprehension.

#### **Reading comprehension can be improved through the use of combined instructional strategy**

The seventh theme is *reading comprehension can be improved through the use of combined instructional strategy*. Awadaand Plana (2018) found that the use of “combined strategy instruction... is more effective than regular instruction in improving reading comprehension” (p.472). In parallel, Dwiningtiyas, Sofyan, and Puspita (2020) found that “the combination of strategies were more effective rather than [using] ... one strategy.” (p.74).

Use of combined instructional strategy, at least based on these two studies, it seems to be effective in improving reading comprehension.

#### **Reading comprehension is influenced by the four types of motivation which include intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative and instrumental**

The eighth theme is *reading comprehension is influenced by the four types of motivation which include intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative and instrumental*. According to Ahmadi (2017) there are four types of motivation that influence reading comprehension, intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative and instrumental. “Intrinsic motivation pushes the learners to learn without rewards because the need is innate and depends on their own desire; extrinsic motivation as the actions that are carried out to obtain some instrumental objectives such as getting a reward or preventing a punishment” (Ahmadi, 2017, p.2). The other two are described as follows. “Integrative motivation refers to when students want to learn a language to become part of a speech community; instrumental motivation is defined as wanting to learn a language for the need of gaining some actual aims such as an occupation, promotion, or the ability to read academic materials” (Ahmadi, 2017, p.3).

The importance of motivation cannot be underestimated (Ahmadi, 2017) however it should be considered as multidimensional reality as described above.

#### **The ability to monitor own comprehension is essential in improving reading comprehension**

The ninth theme is *the ability to monitor own comprehension is essential in improving reading comprehension*. Research has shown that monitoring students’ own comprehension is essential in reading comprehension (Elleman & Oslund, 2018; Kim, Vorstius & Radach 2018). In Elleman and Oslund (2018), “comprehension monitoring skill is necessary to improve reading comprehension across grade levels” (p.8). Identically, Kim, Vorstius and Radach (2018) found that

“explicit and systematic efforts to develop children’s comprehension monitoring, whether in written text or oral text contexts, would be important in instruction” (p.13). Students’ own comprehension monitoring as indicated above is important in improving reading comprehension.

### **To improve reading comprehension, students need to master micro and macro skills**

The tenth theme is *to improve reading comprehension, students need to master micro and macro skills*. There are micro and macro skills essential to reading comprehension that every student needs to master in order to be effective readers (Esteria, 2017). Esteria (2017) found that:

To develop students’ reading comprehension, students must be able to recognize the words, grammatical word classes, the pattern and rule of the words as the microskills. For the macroskills, students must be able to relate the clauses, pattern and structure of the language to find the communicative functions, meaning and understanding of the whole text by using their background knowledge and experience. (p.6)

Furthermore, Nurviyani, Suherdiand Lukmana (2020) concluded that “in digital era, students as reader [s] should master the micro kills and macro skills of reading comprehension to comprehend multimodal texts totally. The reading skills cover micro skills and macros kills of reading comprehension” (p.176).

Improving reading comprehension is depended on the mastery of micro and macro skills.

### **There are three competencies of learning reading comprehension which include attitude, knowledge and learning skill**

The eleventh theme is *there are three competencies of learning reading comprehension which include attitude, knowledge and learning skill*. Esteria (2017) found that there are affective, knowledge and learning behaviour competencies to successful learning of reading comprehension. “The students are expected to be more active through the activities of affective (attitude), cognitive (knowledge) and learning behaviour (learning skill) domains” (Esteria, 2017, p.11). Attitude competency include receiving, responding, valuing, and organization characterization by value set. (Esteria2017). Knowledge competency includes remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating (Esteria 2017, p.11). Learning skills competency include observing, asking, trying, logical reasoning, presenting and creating (Esteria2017).

These “skills appear to be critical in providing the foundations for the development of reading comprehension skills” (Hjetland, Lervag, Lyster, Hagtvvet & Hulme, 2019, p.761).

**Adhering to the four principles of teaching reading comprehension: meaning - focused output, language - focused output and fluency development can guarantee success**

The twelfth theme is *adhering to the four principles of teaching reading comprehension, meaning - focused output, language - focused output and fluency development can guarantee success*. According to Esteria (2017), there are four principles of teaching reading that teachers should observe that include meaning - focused input language - focused output and fluency development.

“The first principle, meaning - focused input, requires teachers to establish practice with a range of reading purposes. The second principle, meaning - focused output means that a reading course should be established interactively with other language skills such as listening, speaking and writing” (Esteria, 2017, p.6). The third and fourth are described as follows. “The third principle is language - focused learning. The teaching reading process should be able to help the students to develop their reading skills. The fourth principle is fluency development. The teaching process of reading should help and push the learners to develop fluency in reading” (Esteria, 2017, p.7).

Nodirovna (2020) found these principles to be “very important for teaching reading because they include effective methods and ways of teaching reading skills” (p.90).

It is apparent that adhering to the four principles of teaching reading comprehension can guarantee success in improving reading comprehension.

### **Synthesis**

From the foregoing discussion reflected in the themes, the following is what we have learned about improving reading comprehension from the literature and studies that have been reviewed. There are effective reading strategies that can help students improve reading comprehension; four inter - related components of metacognitive reading strategy can improve reading comprehension; the use of humor is essential; prior knowledge is important; question techniques are critical; INSERT strategy is an effective tool; the use of combined instructional strategy can make a huge difference; intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative and instrumental motivation are critical to sustain reading comprehension success; monitor comprehension is essential to improving reading comprehension; mastery of micro and macro skills matters; attitude, knowledge and learning skill are three critical competencies of learning reading comprehension; and adhering to the principles of meaning - focused output, language - focused output and fluency development in teaching reading comprehension can guarantee success.

## **2. Recommendations and Suggestions**

Based on the insights from the readings, the following recommendations and suggestions are hereby suggested to teachers for improving reading comprehension of students.

- 1) First, use a combination of instructional strategies that include verbal explanation, modeling, guided practice and independent practice.
- 2) Second, use simultaneously the intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative and instrumental motivation in teaching

reading comprehension to keep students more engaged and focused.

- 3) Third, activate students' prior knowledge and apply INSERT, an approach to teaching where you get your students as they read to insert their own thoughts.
- 4) Fourth, consider strengthening the tradition of focusing on the whole person in terms of attitude, knowledge and learning skills in teaching reading comprehension.
- 5) Fifth, apply the four principles of teaching reading comprehension which include meaning - focused output, language - focuses output and fluency development.

## References

- [1] Ahmadi, M. R. (2017). The impact of motivation on reading comprehension. *International Journal of Research in English Education*, 2 (1), 1 - 7.
- [2] Awada, G. & Plana, M. G. (2018). Multiple strategies approach and EFL reading comprehension of learners with dyslexia: Teacher's perceptions. *International Journal of Instruction*, 11 (3), 463 - 476.
- [3] Dwiningtiyas, G. N., Sofyan, D. & Puspita, H. (2020). Teachers' strategies in teaching reading comprehension. *JALL (Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literacy)*, 4 (2), 66 - 77.
- [4] Elleman, A. & Oslund, E. (2019). Reading comprehension research: Implications for practice and policy. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 6 (1), 3 - 11.
- [5] Esteria, A. (2017). *The role of PQRST strategy to improve reading comprehension in Indonesia*. University of Malang, Indonesia.
- [6] Gurning, B. & Siregar, A. (2017). The effect of teaching strategies and curiosity on students' achievement in reading comprehension. *English Language Teaching*, 10 (11), 191 - 198.
- [7] Hismanoglu, M., Ersan, Y. & Turan, Y. Z. (2018). Turkish EFL learners' perceptions on teachers' using humor in EFL classroom. *International Journal of Languages' Education and Teaching*, 6 (2), 284 - 294.
- [8] Hjetland, H. N., Lervag, A., Lyster, A. H., Hagtvet, B. E., & Hulme, C. (2019). Pathways to reading comprehension: A longitudinal study from 4 to 9 years of age. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 111 (5), 751 - 763.
- [9] Kim, Y. G., Vorstius, C., & Radach, R. (2018). Does online comprehension monitoring make a unique contribution to reading comprehension in beginning of readers? Evidence from eye movements. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 22 (5), 1 - 17.
- [10] Magnusson, C. G., Roe, A. & Blikstad - Balas, M. (2018). To what extent and how are reading comprehension strategies part of language arts instruction? A study of lower secondary classrooms. *International Literacy Association: Reading Research Quarterly*, 54 (2), 187 - 212.
- [11] Mokhtari, K. (2018). Prior knowledge fuels the deployment of reading comprehension strategies. *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition
- [12] Muhid, A., Amalia, E. R., Hilaliyah, H., Budiana, N., & Wajdi, M. B. N. (2020). The effect of metacognitive strategies implementation on students' reading comprehension achievement. *International Journal of Instruction*, 13 (2), 847 - 862.
- [13] Nodirovna, N. N. (2020). Reading sequences and principles in teaching English. *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational Sciences*.8 (9), 88 - 90.
- [14] Nurviyani, V., Suherdi, D. & Lukmana, I. (2020). Developing students' reading skill through making multimodal inferences. *ENGLISH REVIEW: Journal of English Education*, 8 (2), 175 - 182
- [15] Putra, H. E. & Suzanne, N. (2022). Students' strategies in improving their reading comprehension. *TA'DIB Journal*, 25 (1), 27 - 32.
- [16] Sinabariba, Y. E. (2020). Improving students' reading comprehension by using questioning techniques in narrative text. *JurnalSuluh Pendidikan (JSP)*, 8 (1), 15 - 19.
- [17] Syamsiah, N., Rafli, Z. & Ridwan, S. (2018). Self - questioning strategy on reading comprehension process. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research (ASSEHR)*, 267, 133 - 142.
- [18] Tang, S., Asfiran, A., Chen, Y., Haedar & Agussalim, M. (2019). The humor story in teaching reading comprehension. *Journal of Advanced English Studies*, 2 (2), 77 - 87.
- [19] Tanjung, B. J., Saragih, A. & Pulungan, A. H. (2021). The effect of teaching strategies and students' interest in reading comprehension. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 591, 543 - 546.
- [20] Tavera, G. F., & Casinillo, L. F. (2020). Knowledge acquisition practices and reading comprehension skills of the learners in Hilongos South District, Leyte Division, Philippines. *Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia (JPI)*, 9 (3), 533 - 544.