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Reading Skill: A Key to the Development of Language Acquisition

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Abstract

Every human being more or less wants to express something to somebody for which one needs a language. Some expressions of poets, singers, artists, writers, social workers, leaders, politicians and philosophers are placed in printed materials - newspaper, periodicals, journal, magazines and above all books by means of language for future generations to come. Moreover, the same thing in same language can be expressed by different people in different ways in various places. Thus the scope of language gets enlarged day by day coming contact with other languages as the river gets widened running continually over years accompanied by other small drains, rivulets etc. Needless to say, unfathomable is the depth of language that cannot be measured in single day or effort. The vast arena of language may be cultivated by the habit of constant reading which involves both speaking & listening skills. By reading one moves in the world of language. One cannot acquire the use of language unless and until one is exposed to it. It is the style of language that helps the speaker to attract and win everybody's heart. This paper examines how language skills are cultured by reading activity.

It also explores possible ways of how reading skill, firstly; enriches the readers with profound vocabulary, secondly; enables them to use language with clarity, accuracy and fluency, and last but not the least; makes the speakers well communicative, interactive, and economic in effective use of language. Lack of language creates a communication gap and this small gap invites a massive misunderstanding which very often spoils unity, integrity, brotherhood among the users, and after all makes human beings dumb and dull.

Keywords: Language Acquisition, Language Skill, Reading, Printed Materials

1. Introduction

Man is an extraordinary creation of the Almighty. He has been gifted with everything by God except peace. Man is the only creature who can read, write and speak and it is the power of language along with the five senses which enables him to dare to face every challenges given by air, water, fire, hypnotizes the power of ferocious wild animals like tiger, elephants etc. explores the planets and satellites, captures all animals, birds, reptiles and keeps them in his clutches, imitates all dreams to overcome each and every hurdles, thinks the unspeakable, describes the unseen, touches the untrodden and foresees the future. He has the capacity to create something new and at the same time may destroy them without caring for the consequences. It is the power of his language which can pacify the anger of the angry, quench the thirst of the thirsty and satiate the hunger of the hungry and thus wins the heart of the foes. It is the use of language that transforms an enemy to a friend. Man is the only being who can preserve something by recording the details in the form of art, architecture, sculpture and literature for the future generation to come. His curiosity of swimming like a fish in the water, flying like a bird in the sky and reaching the remote place within the twinkling of an eye makes the impossible possible. Nevertheless he is not content to what he has already possessed of and strives to conquer the whole world. His creation of science, technology, computer, Internet, electricity is the best instances towards the fulfillment of his desire.

2. Why the Second Language Needs to Be Acquired

Man is not confined to a particular place language, culture, literature and society. His enthusiasm to excel others and inquisitiveness to explore the world leads to the acquisition of a Second Language, Third Language and Foreign Language for better understanding. As language is a means of communicating one's emotions and feelings to others, it is the best medium to reach the unknown. In this context acquisition of second language is very much essential to fulfill the needs of the hour. The acquisition of second language is different from the acquisition of first language. The former needs grammatical rules, words and sentences structure whereas the latter needs no such prescribed rules for acquiring and using the language. The First Language or the Mother Tongue can't be taught, it can be grasped naturally. But in case of English as a Second Language, it requires much effort, interest, hard work, regularity, innovative methodology, techniques and approaches to have mastery over the Language. Hence, before going to the various sources of Second Language Acquisition it is inevitable to highlight the following importance and necessity of learning English.

2.1 English as a Second Language

In most of the Countries including India English is taught as a second language which is compulsory to all students starting from Primary School to College level. English is called second language because it is learned after the first language, i.e. native language in a particular region. Students are also examined a paper carrying 100 marks to be qualified in the formal education system.

2.2 English as an Official Language

Official language refers to the language used by the Government of a State not by the country people. In India English is used as an Official language since the British Rule till date specifically in the field of Government Administration, Judiciary & Legislature . All the official works relating to the proceedings of meeting, decision taken by the concerned authority in different departments are recorded in English. Note sheets are also maintained in English for its approval.

2.3 English as a Medium of Instruction

Medium of Instruction means a language which is used during the time of teaching the students in the classroom. Not only in India but also in major parts of the world English has been adopted as a medium of instruction. In English medium Schools, English as a second language in Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools, various Colleges and Universities students are being taught in the medium of English language.

2.4 English as a Global Language

English is so widely spoken over the globe that English is considered to be a global language. It is very often regarded as the world language – The Lingua Franca of the mordent era. English is also taught as foreign language where it is not an official language or Second language. English language paves the way of exploring the scope of knowledge of the Universe.

2.5 English as a Window on the World

English is a common language in the sense that it enhances communication to people across the world. It helps to come contact with socio-cultural, religious, economic & scientific developments of the whole world. It also gives us glimpses of the various occurrence taking place in the world. Moreover, it provides the essence of modern knowledge in all fields of human activities. That's why Jawaharlal Nehru, the First Prime Minister of India rightly said, "English is our major window on the world" Similarly F.G. French says, "a traveler who can speak English will find somebody who can understand him wherever he may go, anyone who can read English can keep in touch with the whole world without leaving his own house".

2.6 English as an International Language

English, as International Language is the concept of the English language as a global means of communication in numerous dialects and the movement towards International standard for the language. English is the 6th Official language of the UNO. Though English is the mother tongue of England, America and Australia, it has already been used as second language and foreign language all over the world.

2.7 English as a Library Language

As students, teachers, scholars & researchers depend upon a Library which is the store house of books, encyclopedia, journals, newspaper & magazine etc. for making notes, writing research paper. English language is similarly a dependable language because most of the standard books and journals are written in English. Hence English is truly called a library language because all types of modern information in any branch of knowledge is more easily available and accessible mostly in English language or books translated in English. The Kothari Education Commission (1966) is worth quoting on this point, “while the goal is to adopt the regional language as Media of Education we should like to stress again that this does not involve elimination of English. In fact, English, as an important Library Language would play a vital role in Higher Education. No student should be considered as qualified for a degree, in particular a Master’s Degree unless he has acquired a reasonable proficiency in English (or in some other Library Language). The implications of this are twofold ; all teachers in Higher Education should be essentially bilingual in the Regional Language and in English, and all students particularly Post Graduate students should be able to follow Lectures and use reading materials in the Regional Languages as well as in English”.

2.8 English as a Link Language

English is considered to be the Link Language in India because India is a multi-lingual country where more than 22 regional languages are constitutionally recognized. English is used as the interlinking language between the people speaking different languages. As a Link Language it acts as bridge to connect between the culture tradition, custom, habits of two countries and builds deep relation in the domain of Foreign Affairs.

2.9 English as a Language of Trade & Commerce

English is a Languages which is used for national and international trade and commerce. The rules and regulations, up-to-date guidelines, the history and literature of various products manufactured indifferent parts of the world are written in English, for example, The product of medicine is mostly written and described in English only.

2.10 English as a Language of Science & Technology

English has been adopted as the de facto Universal Language and this results a great impact on scientific and technological communication, although many countries still publish Journals in their native languages , English is currently the best way to share one’s research findings with scientists and technologists in other parts of the world. Now all the scientific and technological developments are easily available in English. Unless we are exposed to English Language, we may not be able to understand the inventions and innovations of science and technology and its accessories.

2.11 English as a Language of Higher Education

In order to pursue higher studies abroad the knowledge of English Language is very much essential at the present day. English is not only the medium of instruction but also the language used for day to day communication in the environment one lives in. If one does not have good English skill, he or she can’t opt for higher study across the world. Further all competitive examinations for higher studies and service are conducted in English Language. It also resumes as a compulsory subject in almost all competitive exams.

2.12 English as a Language of Press & Media

It is the Electronics Media that transforms the whole world into a global village due to Mass Media and Press we are getting any information in any discipline and day to day events sitting in the corner in our house within a twinkling of eye. It is the popularity of English Language that covers all the national and internal Channels like ‘Discovery,’ ‘National Geography’, ‘Animal Planet’, BBC and so on are available in English. It is only due to the English Language which is employed in the area of Press & Media that can enable us to see the whole Universe at our home.

2.13 English as a Language of Employability

The ability to use a language efficiently is very much required to remain employable. Communicative skills are also requisite parameter for one’s professional growth. The ability to express one’s ideas fluently in both written as well as oral form of language in English draws the attention of the employer. English being the most commonly used language in the corporate world, the working knowledge of English is one of the most significant employability skill. In the various multi-sector companies and associates consideration of the candidate’s ability to communicate effectively is one of the major selection criterion.

2.14 English as a Language of Computer and Internet

There is no denying the fact that English is the most accessible Language for Computer and Internet. All the modern software that computer follow to perform various functions such as programming or connecting to the Internet are in English Language only because of its flexibility. Without the knowledge of English Language one can’t use the computer or internet system. The adaptability of English Language makes it easier to use the language of mobile, computer and internet.

2.15 English as a Language of Superiority

English Language is the symbol of superiority, power, prestige and respect. It is a general human tendency that the person speaking English appears to be the most intelligent, smart and dynamic. Naturally speaking English dominates others. It is the English Language that can reach some one in the pinnacle of destination and make him a world figure. It was the English version of “Geetanjali” by R.N.Tagore that brought the International fame and recognition “the Nobel Prize” for Literature in the year 1913 to him and his country.

2.16 English as a Language of Knowledge

English seems to be the mother of all knowledge as all knowledge of the world is available in English, in terms of science, humanities, social science, space science, technology, information and communication technology, Literature or any other allied subjects. Indeed the English language helps one to get into the world of knowledge.

3. Sources of Second Language Acquisition

So far as English as a second language is concerned it can be acquired by means of multitude of sources, for example, learning four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing), watching TV, listening to Radio, involvement in classroom and social interaction, using multimedia technology, mobile, internet, blogs, e-dictionary and many more. The study of this paper concentrates on Reading skill which is one of the best ways of learning English as a second language.

4. What Is ‘Reading’

To define reading in a single sentence is an uphill task. No single definition can give the full meaning of reading. However, reading can be defined by different authors, critics, educationists and linguists in different ways. The following definitions along with critical analysis vividly address the main objectives of Reading skills.

4.1 According to R. Flesch (1955), “Reading means getting meaning from certain combinations of letters. Teach the child what each letter stands for and he can read.....words are written by putting down letters from left to right.”

This definition clearly tells that by reading one comes in contact with letters, words organized properly in language and tries to identify them.

4.2 According to K S Goodman (1967) views “Reading is a precise process. It involves exact, detailed, sequential perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns and larger language units.” It says that reading gives the reader clear idea of perception and identification of letters, words and sentence because of well spelt, well structured and well sequenced of letters and words. Thus reading confirms the readers of the correct spelling of words and proper arrangement of words in a sentence.

1.3 According to C. C. Walcott & Mc Cracken, “Printing is a visual means of representing sounds which are language. Meaning is in these sounds. We want to equip the child to term the written word into a spoken word (whether he actually he utters it or not) so he will hear what it says, that is, gets its meaning.”

Here it shows that reading involves three skills simultaneously such as reading, speaking and listening. It is true that when someone reads something he speaks to himself and listens what he speaks. Moreover, by reading the reader grasps the meaning of words and sentence.

4.4 According to the views of Smith, Goodman & Meredith, “Reading is the active process of reconstructing meaning from language by graphic symbols(letters),just as listening is the active process of reconstructing meaning from the sound symbol (phonemes) of oral language.”

This view tells us that by reading one can derive the meaning from both letters and phonemes. Further reading provides not only the correct use of words and sentence but also proper sense of the language used.

4.5 According to someone, “reading is the process of constructing meaning through dynamic interaction among the reader’s existing knowledge, the language of the text and the context of the situation”.

This definition clarifies that reading makes the reader aware of his existing knowledge , the language of the text and the context of the situation which enables one to use language in the right way and right place.

4.6 Wayman says, “ If the words remain words and sit quietly on the page; if they remain nouns, verbs and adjectives then we are truly blind. But if the words seem to disappear and our innermost self begins to laugh and cry , to sing and dance and finally to fly-if we are transported in all that we are ,to a brand new world, then-and only then- can we say we read.”

Here Wayman asserts that reading does not confine to just coming across words but it is a process of comprehending knowledge out of the printing materials. Above all reading

refines inner thoughts and transforms ideas from one stage to the other. It also without any doubt, recapitulates, regenerates and reproduces the best that lies in the world.

4.7 Reading is indirectly a social activity and the Reader is the social activist. Reading provides the best resources to make every impossibility in-to possibility. The reader becomes a resources become to guide and train the future generations to build an ideal society. Ben Okri rightly says “Reading is an act of civilization; it is one of the greatest act of civilization because it takes the free raw materials of the mind and builds castles possibilities”. “Reading is an actives, imaginative act, it takes works”. Khaled Hussein

4.8 According George Saunders “ Reading is a form of prayer, a guided meditation that briefly makes us believe we are someone else disrupting the delusion that we are permanent and at the center of the Universe suddenly other people are real again and we are fond of them”.

4.9 Reading is the best and cheapest means of transportation for a human being to move from place to place without any hindrances. It allows its reader to cross any boarder line with a global permit to arrive at any place at any time and to depart the sand in his own accord. The following views are noteworthy in this context.

“Reading is a discount ticket to everywhere”.

-Mary Schmich

“Reading makes immigrants of us all”. It takes us away from home, but more important it finds homes for us everywhere.

-Jean Rhys

“Reading departure and arrival”.

-Teri Gullench

4.10 Reading is food for mind and mental exercise. As sumptuous food and exercise are necessary for physical growth, reading is essential for mental growth. The amalgam of sound mind and sound body leads to a happy and prosperous life.

“ Reading is to the mind what exercise to the body”.

-Joseph Addison

“Reading enhances logical thinking and motivational analyzing skills. It helps one’s mood to be calmer and wiser. As body seeks food and water, the mind seeks knowledge”.

-Noora Ahmed Alsuwaidi

“Reading is the basic tool in the living of a good life”.

-Mortimer J. Adler

5. Why to Read

The human brain is unique. Our remarkable cognitive capacity has allowed us to invent the wheel, built the pyramids and land on the moon. In fact scientists sometimes refer to the human brain as ‘the crowning achievement of evolution’. Some of the psychologists view that human brain is compared to a piece of land .Unless and until a piece of land is cultivated it remains barren. The same way if one is not in the habit of reading the brain loses the capacity of understanding. Harvesting is not at all possible from a land without tilling and

manuring. Similarly exposure to vocabulary, dictionary, discourses, newspapers ,magazines etc. makes the brain fertile for the power of perception.

The habit of Reading makes the brain more magnetic to receive the ideas and preserves in the reservoir of human mind to flood the realm of ignorance by disseminating knowledge. Moreover, reading fills the blank of human mind and heart with perfection, efficiency and accuracy of information, facts, thoughts, views, opinions etc.

Reading brings one in the contact of various traditions and cultures which then boost up life with its rejuvenation. The cultural interaction takes one to a state of transformation. It not only brings a transition for one generation but generations to come.

6. What to Read

Sometimes it is difficult to decides what to read and what not. But the selection depends on what a reader wants to know. So far as second language acquisition is concerned it would be better to choose any book in English, more specifically literary texts, newspaper, magazine and journal in English.

6.1 Books in English

Books are the imperishable wealth of humanity. It is not just the storehouse of words, sentences and expressions but the well record of the history of ups and downs, construction and destruction of human life. Books allow readers to travel without using their feet. It gives wings to our imagination. Books are full of knowledge, joy,happiness,wisdom, and also are more than enjoyment. Books have the capacity to transform our life , help us in our hardest time, make us realize that we are not alone in this world who are struggling. Books give a solution, a new way and a new perspective to look at things and situations. Last but not the least, books improve vocabulary, the more you read the book the faster your vocabulary will expand. Margaret Fuller rightly says, “Today a reader, tomorrow a leader.” The followings are often quoted lines to serve the purpose.

“Books are the light houses erected in the great sea of time”

-S.P.Whipple

“Books are the perfect entertainment, no commercials, no batteries, house of enjoyment for each dollar spent”.

-Stephen King

“Books are the plane and the train, and the road. They are the destination, and the journey. They are home”.

-Anna Quindler

“A book is a dream you hold in your hands”.

-Neil Galmal

“A book is made from a tree. It is an assemblage of flat flexible parts imprinted with dark pigmented squiggles. One glance at it and you hear the voice another person perhaps someone dead for the thousands of years. Across the millennia, the author is speaking clearly and silently inside your head directly to you”.

-Carl Sagan

“Books are the bees which carry the quickening pollen from one two another mind”.

-James R Lowell

“Books open your mind, borden your mind and strengthen you as nothing else can”.

-William Feather

“Books is a gift you can open again and again”.

-Garrison Keillor

6.2 Literature

Literature provides pleasure and entertainment. It instructs the whole humanity, prepares to deal with the problems of life, enriches with confidence, hope and patience, perseverance; develops speech , communication, creativities , critical thinking and presentation skills; motivates , stimulates and inspires for hard work, concentration and team work; empowers understanding oneself and the world; supports healthy mind and wellbeing, emotional intelligence and empathy; assists physical and mental development, nurtures the sense of positivity cooperation, compromise, unity, integrity and friendship. However, the first and foremost aim of literature is to pass universal truth and knowledge to the mankind over ages to come. On this ground the followings are some of the most quote worthy views of literature of great personalities.

Ezra pound- “Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degrees”.

C.S. Lewis- “Literature adds to reality. It does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become.

G.K. Chesterton-“Literature is luxury, fiction is necessity”.

James Ellis- “Literature is the garden of wisdom”

Auxley- “Literature is the expression of the thoughts of society. Books are the specimen of the conversations of an age prescribed in the spirit of taste and of genius”.

6.3 Reading Newspaper and Magazine

Reading newspaper and magazines is a good habit that can provide a great sense of educational value. It uses day to day languages, carries information about politics, economy, entertainment, business, industry, trade and commerce. With this habit it not only enhances knowledge about general about general information but also language skills and vocabulary as words and expressions are used in various contexts and situations. Further, reading journal is more structured than mere fast impressions or personal reactions. It helps to prepare for class discussion by collecting insights or raising questions to pursue. Some of the critics and writers beautifully defines the importance of newspaper and magazine , such as.

“A good newspaper is a nation talking to itself”.

Arther Miller

“The newspaper is a greater treasure to the people than uncounted millions gold”.

Henery Ward Beecher

“Newspaper is the schoolmaster of the common people

Henery Ward Beecher

“Newspapers are the Bibles of worlding. How diligently they read them! Here they find their law and profits, their judges and chronicles, their epistles and revelation”.

Charls Haddon Spurgeon.

“A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer”.

Vladimir Lenin

“Newspapers widen the sphere of our sympathy they make their readers enter into the joys and sorrows of thousands of whom they would else know nothing, and for whom they would otherwise care nothing”.

Christian Nestell Balee

“One of the objects of a newspaper is to understand popular feeling and to give expression to it; another is to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments; and the third is fearlessly to expose popular defects”.

Mahatma Gandhi

7. Benefits of Reading

The following benefits may be categorized on the basis of analytical and linguistic study of reading a text.

1. Improves vocabulary and usages
2. Improves memory power
3. Increases creativity and imagination
4. Increases desire towards achieving goals
5. Gives new way and perspective to life
6. Makes one smarter, dynamic and painstaking
7. Makes one inquisitive, enthusiastic and optimistic
8. Strengthens one's brain
9. Increases ability to empathize
10. Creates a process of habit of involvement and contemplation
11. Reduces physical and mental stress
12. Alleviates depression and harassment
13. Contributes to a longer life
14. Performs mental exercise and promotes mental health
15. Improves general knowledge
16. Improves writing and speaking skill
17. Develops analytical thinking power
18. Provides pleasure
19. Develops the sense of positivity and confidence
20. Teaches discipline, punctuality and perseverance

8. Conclusion

As a rivulet gets widened over years and turns to a river. Likewise language cannot be acquired in a day or a year. The acquisition of English as a second language is a matter of life long process. No particular technique or a spoken English class can enable one to speak English fluently and correctly. Most of the language experts emphasizes that reading is the best way of learning a language and developing vocabulary, because a single word or a phrase can be used in different context or situation with different meaning. This various uses

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of language can be acquired by making the habit of constant reading text books, Literary books, reference books, news paper, magazine & journal etc. Reading is a habit and a mental exercise as well. Continuing this regular habit makes a man perfect in the development of language acquisition. After all, language makes literature and literature enables to build nation.

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