

## THE EFFECT OF STRATEGY INSTRUCTION ON TEACHING ESL READING

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### ABSTRACT

Strategic reading has become a widely recognised phenomenon in the recent years. Researchers now agree to the fact that strategic reading is vital in academic pursuits. This study was conducted as a response to the need to develop effective reading habits in ESL learners. The study attempts to find out the feasibility of a few reading strategies in a context where the students are not accustomed to strategic reading in the second language. The findings reveal that these strategies have a positive effect on the students. It has been noted that the students actively participate in the class; they look more articulate and show greater confidence in their approach. Further, their comprehension abilities are also enriched. The participants were 14-year old high school students, who were from a rural background and are at a beginner level proficiency. This paper is divided into three sections. The first section discusses *The Need of Strategic Reading* while the second one talks about the *Rationale* of the reading strategy named Semantic Impressions. The third one details the *Implementation* of strategy and its *Outcome*.

*Key words : Reading , Strategic Reading , Semantic Impressions, Comprehension*

**Reading strategies:**

Strategies are defined as any mental operations that the individual uses, either consciously or unconsciously to help him or her learn. Strategies are goal oriented; that is, the individual initiates them to learn something, to solve a problem, or to comprehend something. Strategies include, but are not limited to, what have traditionally been referred to as study skills such as underlining, note-taking, and summarizing, as well as priming, predicting, reviewing prior knowledge or activating schema, and generating questions.

**Need of Strategic Reading:**

Reading strategies are important as they facilitate the reading process and make the reader an effective reader. Strategic readers actively construct meaning as they read while interacting with the text. They set purposes for reading, select methods of accomplishing these purposes, monitor and repair their own comprehension, and evaluate the completed task (Nuttal, 2004). A strategic reader constructs, examines and extends meaning before, during, and after reading for a variety of texts."Teachers who understand that reading is a strategic process establish environments that provide opportunities for children to learn language and learn about language while they are using language for real purposes" (Halliday, 1985). More than half of all states have passed new reading legislation since 2019, mandating that schools use materials, instructional approaches, and assessment tools that align with the evidence base on how children learn to read.

One of the many problems students face nowadays is not their inability to read but their lack of interest, indifference or rejection of reading. Studies based on

reading habits have particularly focused on the importance of the promotion of specific strategies to capitalize on their interests, make reading materials accessible, build a conducive environment, allow time to read in school, provide significant adult models and use motivational techniques (Clary, 1991).

### **Rationale of Semantic Impressions:**

Researches in reading comprehension show that when students interact with an unfamiliar text in the foreign language, the first challenge seems to be its vocabulary (Grabe & Stoller, 1997). When the text has many new words, students quickly despair and are discouraged. The connection between vocabulary knowledge and success in reading comprehension tests has been shown in many studies, such as Bossers (1992), Coady (1993), and Grabe and Stoller (1997). Till now many researches have been conducted that throw some interesting light on vocabulary instruction. A summary on the same was presented by Partnership for Reading Agency (2002), which says:

- Children learn the meanings of most words indirectly, through everyday experiences with oral and written language. They do so by engaging daily in oral language, listening to adults read to them, and reading extensively on their own.
- Although a great deal of vocabulary is learned indirectly, some vocabulary should be taught directly. This can be done through specific word instruction (teaching specific words, extended instruction that promotes active engagement with words, and repeated exposure to words in many contexts) and word learning strategies (using dictionaries and other reference aids, using word parts, and using context clues).
- Vocabulary instruction should focus on important words (key words to help readers make sense of the text), useful words (words they will

encounter often), and difficult words (words with multiple meanings, idiomatic words, etc.).

Richek (2005) however, opines in his article, “Vocabulary instruction is tedious and ineffective”. So, he points out that instead of making them learn new words, focus should be given on making the students use new words.

Semantic Impressions engage students in designing original stories and expository articles that incorporate key reading vocabulary. This strategy helps students internalise meanings by using words in a certain order to compose their own story before they read a published story (Richek, 2005). The idea behind using this strategy is to encourage the students to become more creative. It should be noted here the “Semantic Impression” is not only about teaching words. The strategy improves the students’ abilities to write and revise sensible narratives (Richek, 2005). This also gives them a pride of authorship and encourages them to write well. The aim of this strategy is to:

- Help the students maximize their reading comprehension by mastering critical story and content area vocabulary.
- Increase students' reading fluency and understanding by effectively preparing them for new vocabulary before they read.
- Expand students' ability to determine word meaning from context.
- Enable the students to create stories and use the language confidently.

### **Implementation and Outcome:**

To use this strategy, I selected a story entitled, “The smell of bread and the sound of money” for the eighth grade. Once I entered the class I gave them the brief introduction to what the strategy meant. I told them that I would write down some words on the board and they had to make a story using those words

and once they had done, they would have to narrate it to the class. I also instructed them that for this task the class would be divided into groups. They had to discuss amongst themselves and write down a story. I went to the board and wrote down a few words in the order of their appearance in the story. The words that I selected were: stingy, delicious, smell, court, complaint, eagerly, Jingle.

Then I discussed the meanings of the words. But I did not give them the meaning directly. I used the words in a few simple sentences so that they could understand them from the context. I also told them four rules to be followed while framing the story and wrote them on the board:

- a) Thinking about the story with a proper beginning, middle, and end.
- b) Thinking in terms of a problem and solution.
- c) Using the words given on the board again and again if needed.
- d) Making use of two characters in the story, that is, a baker and a poor man.

I gave them fifteen minutes to discuss and come up with a story and write that down. While they discussed and wrote the story, I was roaming around monitoring them. After they completed their stories, I asked each of them to narrate the stories to the classroom and to compare them with one another. Then I asked them to read and compare the original with their version. Once the reading was over, we discussed the original collectively and found out where the writer differed from them. I also helped the students revise and edit their stories in turn. That included fixing problems such as punctuation and grammar. I also added a few short sentences to complete the stories. After the end of the session, the students were very happy about the way they created a story and were filled with immense confidence. The strategy not only enlarged their vocabularies, but also made them understand the particulars of a narrative. Most

importantly they learnt new words, comprehended the lesson well, and created stories all in fun.

When I asked them for feedback on the strategy, all of them came up with the opinion that “the class was really interesting.” They were very buoyant over the thrilling experience of learning new words as well as writing down a meaningful piece of narrative. The strategy had the potential to improve learners’ interest along with fostering their reading, writing and organising skills.

On the whole, the students enjoyed the entire activity. They were in high spirits at the thought of something coming out of their mind. As the original story was very close to what our students had written, they also didn’t have much difficulty in comprehending the meaning of the story. In fact the students performed really well too in the question-answer section given at the back of the text. This reiterated the fact that comprehension level was high with the group. In short, the strategy was a huge success as it not only made the students comprehend the lesson well but also taught them grammatical intricacies such as use of punctuation marks, use of capital letters and so on.

On the whole, I reached a conclusion that by using such new strategies of reading we can encourage the students to learn in a funny way. This not only paves the way for joyful learning but also reaffirms the approach towards learner-centred activity with maximum scope for interaction. But to achieve that we need to train our teachers first so that they can use such methods effectively and can make the best out of it.

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