

**READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RURAL AREA, TELANGANA STATE:A THEORETICAL APPROACH**Farhath Unissa Begum^{1*}, Dr. Mohd Hilmi Hamzah²^{1*}(School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy, Universiti Utara Malaysia)²(School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy, Universiti Utara Malaysia)**ABSTRACT**

Reading is a fundamental life time skill and keystone for a child's achievement in school. This paper highlights the reading comprehension skills and ways of stimulating students' interest to reading comprehension. The study adopted schema theory as model. An important aspect of this study hinges on levels of education, teachers' requirement and criteria for employment of teachers in to public school in India.

Keywords: *Reading comprehension skills, Schema theory, Elementary Schools, Telangana State.*

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a tool to students' development. It is the ability to gain knowledge of writing skills and critical reasoning. Lysenko and Abrami (2014) commented that reading comprehension is essential for the children academic and fluency development. The National Reading Panel (NRP) started its analysis on the extent of research data on reading comprehension, the following three major themes emerged:

1. Reading comprehension is a cognitive process that integrates complex skills and cannot be understood without examining the critical role of vocabulary learning and instruction.
2. Reading comprehension involves interactive processes, which is essential for development of reading skills in schools.
3. Teacher should be trained with better learning resources to enhance student Reading Skills.



Reading comprehension skills are to be comprehended accurately. It is a skill that every child needs to learn and should be able to decode what they read and make connections between their prior knowledge and deeply understand about what has been read (Pressley & Allington, 2014).

Crosson and Lesaux (2013) stated that reading comprehension is mind training not hand learning. It's a cognitive practice of understanding consequences from the printed material or from the illustrative character commonly screamed as print (Oakhill & Cain, 2012). Reading is the main element for the success of students and their academic career as well (Leu, Forzani, Rhoads, Maykel, Kennedy & Timbrell, 2015). In order to read one must have knowledge on how to comprehend words together to make a meaning to the listener otherwise there will be no persistence in reading. Reading comprehension is the most vigorous and essential skills which every student necessitate to acquire (Iyengar, Karim & Chagwira, 2016).

Brilliant pupils will master the content of academics and they read for fondness, which subsequently makes them successful in their academic goals (Aberšek, Dolenc, Flogie & Koritnik, 2015). Tactlessly, the skill of comprehending the reading is not by birth, it has to be learnt by using the strategies (Ball, Paris & Govinda, 2014). Elementary school students' were thought to read and comprehends manuscripts from numerous materials available in school. Nurturing student success in reading comprehension has been linked to associate with a societal demand (O'Reilly & Sabatini, 2014).

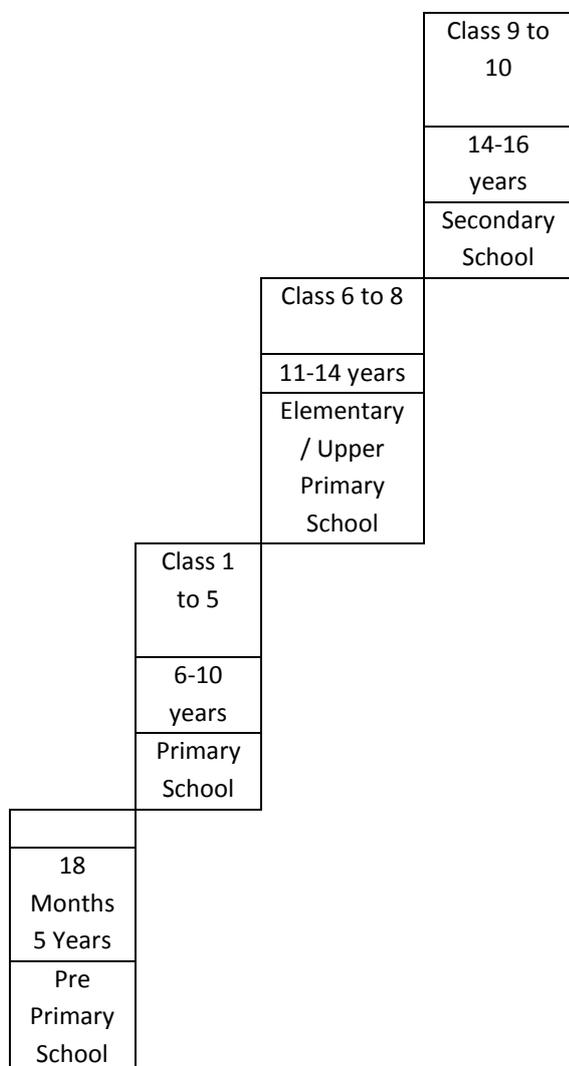
In modern years, elementary schools need to be augmented through reading participation in class to increase student accomplishment in reading. Furthermore struggling readers will not face challenges in reading words completely, but will lack basic understanding of text (Lim & Mohamed, 2014). Good teachers distinguished a range of strategies to help students understand what they read. In the context of elementary school, the teachers need to teach reading comprehension with strategies in order to make students become successful readers (Stoeger, Sontag & Ziegler, 2014). Reading comprehension has a very rich and long research, there has been ignorance on the acrimony

characteristic of work in other aspects of reading such as oral reading, reading readiness and decoding. Elbro and Buch-Iverson (2013) opined that the components in the approach to balanced comprehension instruction must include supportive classroom context and a model of comprehension instruction. They believed that a good comprehension instruction must contain both explicit instruction and specific comprehension strategy (Poolman, Leseman, Doornenbal & Minnact, 2016). Probably, the learners are likely to attain both required skills in English practically and theoretically. In their view, the students are first expected to learn all the four skills, which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Worrell, Watkins, Runge & Hall, 2015). These skills are termed as receptive and productive process; listening and reading skills are receptive process and speaking and writing are productive process.

Mostly, the researchers' are of the opinion that students are not so anxious to read extensively, but they tend to read for academics purposes in order to pass the exams. However, reading storybooks, novels and newspapers will enhance their reading skills (Worrell, Watkins, Runge & Hall, 2015). This occurrence led scholars to research on reading comprehension instruction because it eradicates reading challenges in schools. So this study is an attempt to create awareness on the importance of reading and understanding the context as well. Being one of the most important receptive skills, reading is the base for efficient communication and elates the students to contribute in any communicative activity if they have the expertise knowledge.

LEVELS OF EDUCATION IN TELANGANA FROM PRE-PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The pattern of Telangana state education starts with primary level, which is the first five years of schooling and extends up to V standard (class). The classes VI and VII are under upper primary which also known as elementary school. While classes from VIII to X is considered as secondary school.

Figure: 1.1 Level of Education in Telangana

NATIONAL READING PANEL REPORT (2000) emphasized that no child will be left behind, sets expectation that all children will read and write by 2020. Elementary schools should offer transactional tactic lessons if they want to achieve this target with the ambition of “developing students who on their own, use the comprehension strategies that tremendous readers use” (Pressley, 2014).

Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a programme for Universal Elementary Education. The SSA is an effort to recognize the need for improving the performance of the school system and to provide community owned quality elementary education in mission

mode. It also envisages bridging of gender and social gaps. “ Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat” is a national programme that is a scheme to develop the elementary education: reading, writing, early mathematics for class I and II pupils. In 2001 the government of India flag up an educational programme called “Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan” also known as Education for All Movement or Each one Teach one. This plan geared towards the improvement of English, writing and reading skills of children at age 6 to 14 years. Sarva Siksha Abhiyan is creditable programme of the government of India in globalizing elementary education that serves as an avenue for the citizens to recognize the importance of Elementary Education respectively. The programme also outlined basic education to facilitate better standard of living with reference to life expectancy, nutritional status of children and reduced infant mortality. The scheme is also known with the following mission statement “ An educated India is A progressing India”.

The candidate must possess minimum Diploma in Educaiton (D.Ed) for primary school level while Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) for a teacher to be eligible to teach in secondary school. However, District Selection Committee known as DSC is an entrance examination board set-up by the government in India for recruitment of teachers in to public schools. Majority of the teachers still have challenges in methods of teaching English language in classroom. It is asserted that teachers were facing some issues such as severe workload, lack of teaching resources and more number of students in class. Other factors impeding teachers’ ability in schools are inaccessibility of Internet facility and English digital text books (Coiro, 2012). Schools in rural community of Telangana state are confronting many challenges today. They are pressurized to improve student achievement in the face of falling enrollments, increasing budget arrears, and growing state and federal mandates.

In line with ASER Report (2014) government schools have set standards for students’ enrollment into the grade V level between 2010 and 2012. There is tremendous decline in reading skills of students in government schools of rural areas. Most of the student in grade V cannot read common text of low-



grade level book. However standard V students in private schools can also not read adequately. This Phenomenon is concerned to the society and the government of India as empirical research classified students who cannot read as "Low and Stuck" students in school. ASER research findings show that 48% of the students in school cannot read properly. The findings further reveal that 20% of the students can only read letters while 14% cannot read complete sentence but can read only words. Findings have shown that 19% of the students cannot read lengthy text but can read only sentences. Recommendations were made on the need of government to provide a specific attention to cater for these deficiencies in Reading Comprehension of the students. Furthermore it is posited that reading skills will facilitate better understanding of students. The persistence of this analysis is to scrutinize the available research on teaching comprehension reading at the elementary level in order to recommend the explicit teaching in classroom teachings.

Similarly, teachers need to have adequate language skills such as reading, speaking writing and listening which are integrated in reading comprehension. Literally studies conducted on English teaching methods, reveal students challenges in terms of pronunciation, spelling and grammatical composition(Oakhill & Cain, 2012). Authors are of the opinion that parents should support their children to study at their free time by supervising their reading habit at home. Children can engage in extensive reading in terms of grammatical development for the educational success. Apparently children like to study the most attractive book and colorful books with pictures and fictions.

National Endowment for Arts (2007) stated that 80% of the children who have their own books read what they expected to read to develop their reading skills, while those children who do not have their own books but read are below the level of 58% . The advantage of children exposure to reading at young age helps to facilitate better reading skills in schools and at home. When children read at their free time, they develop their verbal critical reasoning that promotes self reading. It is posited that children can subdue the ability to read and write English

comprehension in classroom. At the early stage, students tend to develop positive attitude to the identify alphabets, words and themes which will develop their reading comprehension skills. Carretti, Caldarola, Tencati, and Cornoldi (2014) observed reading, as a topic that should be learned by children. They emphasized that to become an efficient reader, the children require both intensive and extensive reading as it is associated to each other and complementary to each other and this is the process. The students must be devoted with their English courses and be allowed to read pleausurably at their own leisure time, provided material and encouragement as supplementary to class library. Extensive reading is a habit which leads to a brighter future in terms of their knowledge acquisition (Ward-Lonergan & Duthie, 2016).

Leu,Forzani, Rhoads, Maykel, Kennedy & Timbrell, (2015) described extensive reading as relatively rapid reading and comprehending of long texts or essay. Coiro (2012) submitted that extensive reading is essentially a private activity where the reader dwells in his/her private world of reading for his/her own interest. The authors pointed out two reasons for extensive reading. Student can improve their reading skills through extensive ways of reading which is the effective and easiest way of enhancing reading skills. Extensive reading is an educational tool for students used to read their books. The authors contented that students feel more comfortable when they are learning reading comprehension skills. Certainly, Wolters, Denton, York and Francis (2014) posited that the objective of extensive reading is aimed to develop reading skills, pay attention to teachers reading skills. The researchers asserted that student should be encouraged to read at their best moment. The books should not be so weak, so difficult and should be interesting for the students.

Silva and Cain (2015) review the reading comprehension studies of previous researches whose findings emphasis on the merit of reasoning, structures and knowledge which are components of reading comprehension. These components have vividly described in older and newer research. It considered basic concepts that have appeared in more than six decades of learning English.



Accordingly the position of this idea can be constructive and challenging for students and elementary school teachers in classroom situations.

Also, individual differences and reading comprehension difficulties can arise from variations in skills and impairments at many levels of the reading process. At one level as explained in the simple view of reading, any difficulties in word recognition or decoding (e.g. children with dyslexia) will have a significant negative impact on reading comprehension. However, even with adequate decoding skills, some readers continue to have specific comprehension difficulties (Nation, 2005), this level of students were described as 'poor reading comprehenders'.

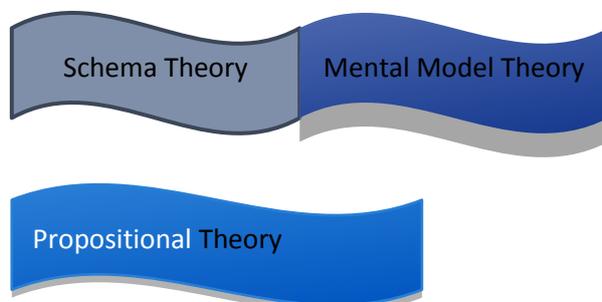
The Reading comprehension knowledge has been recognized as a topic in English language subject. Pressley and Allington (2014) discovered that school students with significant level of reading skills and reading comprehension have greater academic achievement than those who do not have reading skills. Hogan, Bridges, Justice and Cain (2011) suggested that those with reading comprehension knowledge tend to perform better than those without reading skills.

Theoretically, Rumelhart (1977) identifies three main theories of reading comprehension. These theories are Schema Theory, Mental Models, and Proposition Theory.

THEORIES ON READING COMPREHENSION

Three important theories on Reading Comprehension

READING COMPREHENSION THEORIES



Rumelhart (1977) defines a schema as the organized knowledge that one already has about people, places, things, and events. The schema theory of reading also fits within the cognitively

based view of readers. Rumelhart (1977) described schema as "building blocks of cognition" which are used in the process of interpreting sensory data, in retrieving information from memory, in organizing goals and sub goals, in allocating resources, and in guiding the flow of the processing system.

Adams and Collins (1977) have developed schema theory of reading comprehension. The theory postulate reading comprehension as a process of interaction between readers' background, knowledge and text. The theory further states that reading implications such as reading pedagogy and reading techniques are significant to improve students English language command in schools.

Schema theory has three types

1. Formal schema: refers to the background information knowledge and structure of different text.
2. Content schema: Depicted area of the content specification in certain topics.
3. Language schema: Shows relationship between words, knowledge text and vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

In Telangana rural areas numerous students live far away from libraries or preschools that can help them develop pre-literacy skills. Extra attention must be given to rural students so they can be integrated to reading strategies which will help reinforce their skills. "The strategies expanded to progress reading comprehension demands fundamental elements that are absorbed on the following: reading text correctly and confidently, upbringing knowledge and vocabulary to make sense of the content in the text, enthusiasm to comprehend and learn from the text". This will develop their listening skills, and reading comprehension, so as to improve students reading skills. It also develops skills through classroom activities that support them. A teacher should develop strategies that will foster students' interest in reading books, and dramatic activities that are helpful for the child reading skills. The teacher should also implement reading skills strategy that will stimulate student interest to read books regularly. It is very important for a country like India, which is a product of British Colonial Legacy to produce



students of International Standard in today's global and highly competitive world. Achieving this noble objective requires that students' reading comprehensive skills must be improved sufficiently overtime. Furthermore students should be motivated to achieving their goals in the academics. Even though it may involves a lot of time in the current state of teaching and learning process. The reading comprehension skills must be developed to an advance level, in order for the students to be improved. Consequently, it is important for the teachers' to maximize and utilize learning resources at their disposal in school, in order to make the students' acquired more knowledge and this will in turn effect a positive change to students reading skills in India.

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