

## РОЗДІЛ 2. ТЕОРІЯ ТА МЕТОДИКА НАВЧАННЯ (З ГАЛУЗЕЙ ЗНАНЬ)

### CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES OF DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION

### ПРОБЛЕМИ ТА СТРАТЕГІЇ РОЗВИТКУ РОЗУМІННЯ ПРОЧИТАНОГО

*The paper explores the concept of comprehension and, more specifically, the development of reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is a complex process that includes such components as decoding, fluency, having a rich vocabulary, sentence construction and cohesion, reasoning and background knowledge, and working memory and attention. The development of reading comprehension requires diverse strategies such as identifying a purpose for reading, previewing, predicting, asking questions, checking predictions or finding answers to the questions, connecting the text to prior knowledge, summarizing, connecting one part of the text to another, and recognizing text structure. These strategies define factors associated with good reading comprehension and can help instructors of English notice possible problems with reading comprehension their students may have and successfully solve them. Teaching strategies include asking open-ended questions, acquainting students with different types of reading materials, discussing the meaning of words, developing students' note-taking skills, and teaching them summarizing, making predictions, and monitoring their understanding. Bloom's taxonomy or Revised Bloom's taxonomy can serve as a useful tool for successful learning.*

*Assessing students' reading comprehension levels poses an additional challenge because traditional assessment instruments are outdated. Researchers encourage teachers to develop different test formats for assessment purposes paying special attention to distinguishing between assessing lower-order thinking skills (LOTS) and higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). Suggested test formats for assessing higher-order reading skills are close-, open-ended questions, and summary writing while multiple-choice tests are recommended for evaluating lower-order reading skills.*

**Key words:** *reading comprehension, word recognition, assessment, lower-order thinking skills (LOTS), higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), Bloom's taxonomy.*

*У статті досліджується концепція розуміння та, більш конкретно, розвиток розуміння прочитаного. Розуміння прочита-*

*ного – це складний процес, який включає такі компоненти, як декодування, вільне читання, багатий словниковий запас, побудова та зв'язність речення, міркування та базові знання, а також оперативна пам'ять і увага. Розвиток розуміння прочитаного вимагає різноманітних стратегій, таких як визначення мети читання, попередній перегляд, передбачення, постановка запитань, перевірка передбачень або пошук відповідей на запитання, пов'язання тексту з попередніми знаннями, резюмування, поєднання однієї частини тексту з іншою та розпізнавання структури тексту. Ці стратегії визначають фактори, пов'язані з хорошим розумінням прочитаного, і можуть допомогти вчителям англійської мови помітити можливі проблеми з розумінням прочитаного, які можуть мати їхні учні, і успішно їх вирішити. Стратегії навчання включають постановку відкритих запитань, ознайомлення учнів з різними типами матеріалів для читання, обговорення значення слів, розвиток навичок конспектування учнів, навчання їх підсумовувати, робити прогнози та контролювати власне розуміння. Таксономія Блума або Переглянута таксономія Блума може слугувати корисним інструментом для успішного навчання.*

*Оцінка рівня розуміння прочитаного учнями становить додаткову проблему, оскільки традиційні інструменти оцінювання застаріли. Дослідники заохочують вчителів розробляти різні формати тестів для цілей оцінювання, приділяючи особливу увагу розмежуванню між оцінюванням навичок мислення нижчого порядку (LOTS) і навичок мислення вищого порядку (HOTS). Пропоновані формати тестів для оцінювання навичок читання вищого рівня – це закриті, відкриті запитання та виклад короткого змісту прочитаного, тоді як тести з вибором відповідей рекомендуються для оцінювання навичок читання нижчого рівня.*

**Ключові слова:** *розуміння прочитаного, розпізнавання слів, оцінювання, навички мислення нижчого порядку; навички мислення вищого порядку, таксономія Блума.*

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**Balatska L.P.,**

Senior Lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages for Engineering Lviv Polytechnic National University

**Vyslobodska I.M.,**

Senior Lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages for Engineering Lviv Polytechnic National University

**Drapaliuk H.S.**

Senior Lecturer at the Department of Foreign Languages for Humanities Lviv Polytechnic National University

**Stating the problem.** Reading plays an important role in the process of obtaining information since written texts in a variety of forms convey the experience accumulated by mankind over the history of its development in various spheres of life. Reading stimulates the development of intelligence, and promotes self-development and self-improvement. Reading foreign-language texts is an important component of learning a foreign language. But reading skills alone are not enough. Understanding and

perceiving the information contained in the read texts is required, and students often have problems with this. These problems can be associated with various factors. Therefore, foreign language teachers need to understand what the difficulties in reading comprehension are associated with. For these teachers, it is important to develop strategies for achieving learning objectives in reading comprehension by adjusting and utilizing the latest research and best practices of Ukrainian and foreign educators.

**Analysis of the research and publications on the issue under consideration.** The importance of developing good reading comprehension skills for learning a foreign language has been recognized by educators in many countries of the world. Different aspects of teaching and assessing reading comprehension are discussed in the publications of H.W. Catts [2], R. Alligton [1], R. Lister [7], Y. Yang [10], S. McKee [8], J. Clements [3], A.M.I. Lee [6] and others.

A paper by H.W. Catts [2] offers a review of research concerning reading comprehension from 1995 to 2011. The author defines reading comprehension as a complex activity that involves several variables. Reading strategies are discussed and how they relate to reading comprehension. Testing is another concern regarding how reading comprehension is measured. Suggestions for improving reading comprehension are presented.

Reading comprehension strategies are elaborated in the publications of Y. Yang [10], A.M.I. Lee [6], S. Zimmermann, C. Hutchins [11]. The papers contain useful practical recommendations for teachers. Papers by D. Denis [4], A. Irvan, V.L. Diptoadi [5] explore the issue of assessment of reading comprehension. R. Lister shares the experience of applying criterion-referenced assessment using Bloom's Taxonomy [7].

Overall, there are numerous foreign publications presenting research on different aspects of reading comprehension, strategies for its development, and approaches to evaluation. However, this topic is not so well explored by Ukrainian researchers.

**The purpose** of the paper is to acquaint language educators with recent research on strategies for developing reading comprehension skills and challenges related to their assessment.

**Presentation of the main material.** Reading is an essential skill in learning any language as the more the students read, the more exposed they are to the target language [5, p. 59]. It is an activity aimed at developing an understanding of a topic or subject. Reading is the combination of two processes: word recognition and language comprehension. Only the combination of both can ensure reading comprehension to occur.

Good word recognition contributes significantly to the ease and quality of reading comprehension. Students with good comprehension skills can decode printed words fluently, accurately, and efficiently. Children with word reading problems (such as dyslexia) will probably have difficulties with reading the text (they will do it more slowly than other students) and decoding words important for accurately understanding the text. They often have significant deficits in reading comprehension. That is why the concept of comprehension is important. Reading comprehension can be defined as the ability to understand a

text, analyze the information, and interpret correctly what the writer wants to say. It means that the student should be able to break the text into component parts, analyze, and re-organize ideas and information [2, p. 28].

In the early stages of reading development, the development of basic word reading skills is more important for children. As a result, word recognition skill is the major determinant of reading comprehension for beginner readers. As word reading becomes more accurate, efficient, and fluent, language comprehension takes over as the principal predictor of reading comprehension [3].

Some children may have difficulties with word reading, even when they do not have any difficulties in understanding language while some others will have difficulties with language comprehension, even when they are good at word reading. Children learning English can often read words very well. However, their knowledge of the meanings of words and, for some children, their limited knowledge and understanding of cultural differences can restrict their background knowledge, affecting comprehension [3].

Andrew M.I. Lee identified 6 essential skills for reading comprehension:

(1) **Decoding.** It is an important skill for the reading process. This skill consists of sounding out words children have heard before but haven't seen written out. Without mastering these skills children cannot move further as the other reading skills are based on this one.

(2) **Fluency.** To read fluently, children should be able to instantly recognize words. It is crucial for good reading comprehension.

(3) **Vocabulary.** To understand what students are reading, they have to understand most of the words in the text. Having a rich vocabulary is a key component of reading comprehension. One of the most traditional ways of learning the meaning of words is by reading.

(4) **Sentence construction and cohesion.** It means understanding how sentences are built to be able to connect ideas within and between sentences, which is called cohesion.

(5) **Reasoning and background knowledge.** Readers mostly relate what they have read to the things they already know and understand. So, it is important for readers to have background or prior knowledge about the world. They should also be able to understand what the author of the text meant, i.e., to understand things and ideas that were not literally spelled out.

(6) **Working memory and attention.** These two skills together perform an executive function. When children read, they take in information from the text due to attention. Working memory enables them to store the information and use it to gain meaning and build knowledge from what they are reading. An

additional component, the ability to self-monitor while reading is also related to working memory and attention. It is the ability of the readers to recognize when they do not understand something. Then they need to stop, go back, and re-read to eliminate any confusion they may have [6].

Reading comprehension is a complex, multiple-task ability with many variables. It can be divided into two main types: lower-level and higher-level processes [8, p. 46]. Examples of the lower-level abilities are word recognition and graphophonic processes while the higher-level abilities include syntactic, semantic, and other processes. To comprehend what is read, the student needs to be familiar with text structure and topic, be aware of different reading strategies, and know how to use these strategies in the processing of material and word recognition.

There are different opinions regarding reading strategies. For example, S. McKee mentions ten processes or strategies of reading comprehension. They are: identifying a purpose for reading, previewing, predicting, asking questions, checking predictions or finding an answer to the questions, connecting the text to prior knowledge, summarizing, connecting one part of the text to another, and recognizing text structure [8, p. 49]. S. Zimmermann and S. Hutchins identify seven reading comprehension strategies, namely: activating or building background knowledge, sensory images, questioning, making predictions and inferences, determining main ideas, fix-up options, and synthesizing [11]. There is also a research study that names such skills as predicting content, posing questions, recognizing text structure, integrating information, reflecting, monitoring comprehension, utilizing general knowledge, and reacting to the text, as reading strategies [10, p. 321].

Another variable related to reading comprehension is the size of the vocabulary of the reader. In order for readers to understand a text, they should be familiar with a considerable majority of the words used in it. Additionally, it is not enough to read or hear a new word once or twice; sometimes up to ten encounters with a new word are needed to acquire and develop understanding.

English teachers need to notice some clues that may mean that a student may have problems with comprehension:

- They seem to focus on the “wrong” aspect of a passage. For example, they concentrate too much on unimportant details while the main idea is lost.
- They can tell the outcome of a story, but cannot explain why things turned out that way.
- They cannot go behind what is written in a story to think about what might happen next or why characters took the action they did.
- They mention irrelevant or unimportant information when they are trying to relate a passage to something in their own life.

- They seem to have a poor vocabulary.
- The logical sequence of events in a story is beyond their understanding and they have problems reproducing it.
- They cannot distinguish the key facts from less important ones in an informational text.
- They cannot “draw a picture” of what is going on in a written passage; for example, where the story takes place or detail of what the characters look like [9].

Understanding what reading comprehension means and knowledge of factors related to it can help English teachers develop successful strategies for overcoming challenges to good reading comprehension. At the same time, properly developed learning objectives can be helpful in organizing the teaching/learning process involving reading activities to move from lower- to upper-level thinking skills.

Researchers mention some important teaching strategies for improving reading comprehension.

- As students read, a teacher can ask them open-ended questions such as *Why did things happen that way?* or *What is the author trying to do?*
- Students should be taught the structure of different types of reading material. For example, narrative texts usually have a problem, a climax, and a resolution to the problem. Informational texts may describe, compare and contrast, or present a sequence of events.
- Teachers should discuss the meaning of words as they proceed through the text, especially if they think the students are not familiar with them. They can offer some exercises using these new words and checking students’ understanding of what those words mean and how they can be used.
- It is important to teach students note-taking skills and summarizing strategies.
- The use of graphic organizers helps students break information down and follow what they read.
- It is important to encourage students to use and revisit targeted vocabulary words.
- It is worth teaching students to monitor their own understanding. This can be done by showing them how, for example, to ask themselves *What’s unclear here?* or *What information am I missing?* and *What else should the author be telling me?*
- Teachers can show children how to make predictions and how to summarize [9].

One of the factors that challenge the development of reading comprehension is related to the fact that the measurement and, hence, assessment of the level of reading comprehension is a much more complicated task than people may think. Some teachers have an outdated approach to this task and measure reading comprehension traditionally, by the ability of students to recall the details of what they have read [1, p. 16]. The result of using this type of assessment is that students are being evaluated as good, proficient readers

because they successfully answered factual questions. The problem is that these types of assessments measure the extent the students can guess what is expected from them or what the teacher wants them to think. When students are asked more complicated tasks requiring critical thinking and analysis, the results are much worse.

Test type and test format have a significant effect on students' performance. Different formats of tests will measure different aspects of comprehension. Tests should be constructed in such a way that they could assess the achievement of different levels of learning objectives. It can be achieved by developing different types of tests for assessment purposes. Different tests will focus on different aspects of comprehension. To obtain a more complete evaluation of a reader's understanding, teachers are encouraged to use different test formats. By using this approach, it is possible to identify specific strengths and weaknesses that readers may have [4, p. 288].

Revised Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives can help develop and assess reading comprehension skills. The cognitive levels of this taxonomy are ordered from lower-order thinking skills (LOTS) to higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). That is why learning objectives should be hierarchically placed in order from simple to complex, and from concrete to abstract. It is also important to remember that the teachers as educators are supposed to balance the application of LOTS and HOTS elements. Although the use of LOTS is acceptable at the beginning stages of learning, HOTS elements encourage deeper thinking activities for the students and are expected to assist them to acquire and use in-depth knowledge and skills to complete high-level tasks.

Assessment practices are a growing concern in education. One area of concern regarding reading assessment is whether it is valid and fair. As test developers continue to learn more about reading comprehension, tests in textbooks assessing proficiency in reading are becoming fairer. Test type and test format have a significant effect on students' performance. The three test formats that can be used to assess higher-order reading skills are close-, open-ended questions, and summary writing. Essay tests require students to use more thinking and analysis skills [8, p. 51].

R. Lister describes the use of the criterion-referenced approach to assessment, where the criteria are based on Bloom's taxonomy. In this Bloom-based assessments scheme, all students in the class must satisfactorily complete a set of assessment tasks that are supposed to demonstrate competence at the Knowledge and Comprehension levels of Bloom's taxonomy. Students who agree with their minimal passing grade need not complete any more assessment items. Other students, who seek a higher grade, must also complete assessment tasks at the

Application and Analysis levels of Bloom's taxonomy. Those who satisfactorily complete these tasks, can stop at this point and attain one of the two middle passing grades. Finally, students who chose to seek the highest grade must go on to satisfactorily complete further assessment tasks, at the Synthesis and Evaluation levels of Bloom's taxonomy. Students are free to decide for themselves what grade they will try to achieve [7, p. 80].

Lower-level assessment tasks are usually of multiple-choice type. The middle level corresponds to a single, substantial assignment. Synthesis requires students to develop an individual project and they are given some simple criteria. They must also give a short presentation on their project to the other students who are doing projects. Evaluation foresees a student peer review assignment. After completing their own projects, students must then peer-review and write a report on the project of two other students [7, p. 85].

Understanding what reading comprehension means and knowledge of factors related to it can help English teachers develop successful strategies for overcoming challenges to good reading comprehension. At the same time, Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives can help organize the teaching/learning process involving reading activities to move from lower- to upper-level thinking skills.

**Conclusion.** Reading comprehension was defined as the ability to understand a text, to analyze the information, and to interpret correctly what the writer is stating. Reading was described as the combination of two processes equally important for reading comprehension to occur: word recognition and language comprehension.

Important factors associated with reading comprehension were analyzed. They comprise reading strategies, the size of the vocabulary of the reader, and the challenge of selecting proper tools for measuring reading comprehension. Additionally, among factors associated with good reading comprehension, are drawing on prior knowledge and experience, drawing inferences, paying attention to sentences and text cohesion, self-monitoring, forming mental images, summarizing and retelling, and thinking about text structure. Teachers should acquaint themselves with innovative teaching and assessment practices, and develop their competence in assessing their students' reading skills. When applying reading comprehension assessment methods, teachers should bear in mind factors that can affect the assessment and work to overcome possible challenges to good reading comprehension.

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