A Reading Comprehension Strategy Training Programme

Introduction

Reading Comprehension

Reading is an interactive process that goes on between the reader and the text, resulting in comprehension. The text presents letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs that encode meaning. The reader uses knowledge, skills, and strategies to determine what that meaning is.

Reader knowledge, skills, and strategies include:

- ✓ Linguistic competence: the ability to recognize the elements of the writing system; knowledge of vocabulary; knowledge of how words are structured into sentences.
- ✓ Discourse competence: knowledge of discourse markers and how they connect parts of the text to one another.
- ✓ Sociolinguistic competence: knowledge about different types of texts and their usual structure and content.
- ✓ Strategic competence: the ability to use top-down, as well as knowledge of the language (a bottom-up strategy) or a combination of these two approaches generally known as the interactive model of reading.
- ✓ The purpose(s) for reading and the type of text determine the specific knowledge, skills, and strategies that readers need to apply to achieve comprehension. Reading comprehension is thus much more than decoding. Reading comprehension results when the reader knows which skills and strategies are appropriate for the type of text, and understand how to apply them to accomplish the reading purpose.

Reading comprehension involves much effort and strategy use. A general definition of learning strategy is “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990:8). Learning strategies are an important part of the second language learning process.

Effective reading comprehension strategies include: summarizing, asking questions, answering questions and elaborative interrogation, activating prior knowledge, monitoring comprehension, using text structure awareness, using visual graphics, graphic organizers, and inferencing.

Furthermore, reading comprehension of academic texts in higher education involves knowledge of technical terms, key conceptualizations, mental models and other forms of background knowledge. Reading strategies and discourse organization in texts facilitate the comprehension of expository texts.

In addition, the advent of electronic communication increases the need for effective reading skills and strategies in order to cope with the large amount of information available. Blended learning has shown to be a helpful tool in the training of reading comprehension strategies. Blended Learning is a further development of online learning and traditional face-to-face educational systems and consists in a combination of multiple approaches to teaching and learning, involving different methodologies, technologies, media and environments.

The purpose of this course is to provide effective training for reading comprehension strategy use of expository texts with the aid of blended learning. The components and strategies to be studied in this course are: discourse, predicting, skimming, scanning, propositional & pragmatic inferencing, and lexical inferencing, as well as reference.

1. Discourse

Text and discourse

A text is a unit of language in use. It refers to any passage, spoken or written, of whatever length, that forms a unified whole. Texts are complete in terms of communicative meaning. Articles, recipes, poems, dialogues, and road signs are some examples of text.

The meaning of a text is accomplished when it is actively employed in a context of use. This process of activation of a text by relating it to the context of use is called discourse. Thus, text can be realized by any piece of language as long as it is found to record a meaningful discourse when it is related to a suitable context of use.

Two kinds of contexts can be distinguished: an internal linguistic context built up by the language patterns inside the text, and an external non-linguistic context drawing us to ideas and experiences in the world outside the text. The latter is a very complex notion but it can be more manageable by specifying the following components:

1. The text type, or genre (for example: an election poster, a recipe, a newspaper article)
2. Its topic, purpose, and function
3. The immediate temporary and physical setting of the text
4. The text´s wider social, cultural, and historical setting
5. The identities, knowledge, emotions, abilities, beliefs, and assumptions of the writer (speaker) and reader (hearer)
6. The relationship holding between the writer (speaker) and reader (hearer)
7. The association with other similar or related text types (intertextuality)

Coherence is the trait that makes any text easily understandable to a reader or hearer. Coherence can be created by means of cohesive devices or factors. The formal links between clauses and sentences of a text are:

A. Reference
B. Substitution
C. Ellipsis
D. Conjunction
E. Lexical cohesion

A. Reference

Referring expressions are words whose meaning can only be discovered by referring to other words or elements of the context which are clear to both sender and receiver. Reference items include pronouns (he/she/it/him/they/etc.), demonstratives (this/that/these/those), the article *the* and items like *such as.* Reference can be confirmed by looking back in the text (anaphoric reference) or forward in the text (cataphoric reference).

Example:
There are a lot of points in favor of renewable energy. The fact that it uses resources that are considered to be infinite is only the most obvious one.
The subject pronoun "it" refers back to renewable energy.

B. Substitution

Substitution is the replacement of a linguistic item for another. It is used in place of the repetition of a particular item. The items commonly used for substitution in English are: one(s), do, so/not and same.

Example:
There are a lot of points in favor of renewable energy. The fact that it uses resources that are considered to be infinite is only the most obvious one.
The indefinite pronoun one stands for "the most obvious point in favor of renewable energy.

C. Ellipsis

Ellipsis is the omission of elements on the assumption that an earlier sentence or the context will make the meaning clear. Items that can be elided are nouns, verbs and clauses.

Example:
Is renewable energy cleaner than fossil fuels?
Yes, it is.
Yes, it is cleaner.

D. Conjunction

Conjunctions, also called transitional devices, are provided by those words and phrases which explicitly draw attention to the type of relationship which exists between one sentence or clause to another. These words may add more information to what has already been said (*and, furthermore, add to that*) or elaborate or exemplify it (*for instance, thus, in other words*). They may contrast new information with old information, or put another sight to the argument (*or, on the other hand, however, conversely*). They may relate new information to what has already been given in terms of causes (*so, consequently, because, for this reason*) or in time (*formally, then, in the end, next*) or they may indicate a new departure for summary (*by the way, to sum up, to conclude*).

Example:
<u>Besides</u>, renewable energy guarantees continual source of energy.
The linking word "beside" adds new information to what has already been said.

Table 1.1 A list of some common transitional devices**.** *Source:* http://owl.english.purdue.edu/

Transitional Devices	
To Add	and, again, and then, besides, equally important, finally, further, furthermore, nor, too, next, lastly, what's more, moreover, in addition, first (second, etc.)
To Compare or contrast	whereas, but, yet, on the other hand, however, nevertheless, on the contrary, by comparison, where, compared to, up against, balanced against, but, although, conversely, meanwhile, after all, in contrast, although this may be true
To Prove	because, for, since, for the same reason, obviously, evidently, furthermore, moreover, besides, indeed, in fact, in addition, in any case, that is
To Show Exception	yet, still, however, nevertheless, in spite of, despite, of course, once in a while, sometimes
To Show Time	immediately, thereafter, soon, after a few hours, finally, then, later, previously, formerly, first (second, etc.), next, and then
To Repeat	in brief, as I have said, as I have noted, as has been noted
To Emphasize	definitely, extremely, obviously, in fact, indeed, in any case, absolutely, positively, naturally, surprisingly, always, forever, perennially, eternally, never, emphatically, unquestionably, without a doubt, certainly, undeniably, without reservation
To Show Sequence	first, second, third, and so forth. A, B, C, and so forth. next, then, following this, at this time, now, at this point, after, afterward, subsequently, finally, consequently, previously, before this, simultaneously, concurrently, thus, therefore, hence, next, and then, soon
To Give an Example	for example, for instance, in this case, in another case, on this occasion, in this situation, take the case of, to demonstrate, to illustrate, as an illustration, to illustrate
To Summarize or Conclude	in brief, on the whole, summing up, to conclude, in conclusion, as I have shown, as I have said, hence, therefore, accordingly, thus, as a result, consequently, on the whole

E. Lexical cohesion

Lexical cohesion is a device known as “elegant repetition”, where synonymous or more general words or phrases are used.

Example:
Renewable energy sources do not pollute the environment with CO2 and other toxic gases that are produced by fossil fuels.
CO2 is a toxic gas produced by fossil fuel burning.

Task 1: Read this Article.

Bioenergy crops could be as bad for biodiversity as climate change

December 10, 2018

The study, which involved expertise from Durham University's Department of Biosciences, investigated the potential impacts of future climate and land-use change on vertebrate biodiversity across the planet. The authors argue there is an urgent need to carefully consider biodiversity when expanding bioenergy cropland, for example growing oil palm, maize and rapeseed.

The study, which is published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* today, Monday 10 December 2018, was led by the Senckenberg Biodiversity and Climate Research Centre and the Technical University of Munich, Germany, in collaboration with Durham University. Speaking about the research findings, Professor Stephen Willis, Durham University Department of Biosciences, said: "We found that the combination of climate change and large-scale expansion of bioenergy crops would together threaten about 36% of the habitats of all global vertebrate species, including many that are already the subject of significant conservation work.

While bioenergy is clearly an important tool for climate change mitigation, the potential impacts on biodiversity must not be ignored. A strong reliance on bioenergy to combat climate change could result in outcomes for biodiversity that are little better than would occur if we didn't implement bioenergy strategies, despite the consequent climate change implications.

[...]

https://www.sciencedaily.com/

Task 2

Reference

Write the referent word(s) at the end of each sentence.

1. Find a synonymous expression for the noun “researchers” in line 3.
2. What examples of bioenergy are given in lines 4-5?
3. What synonym replaces the noun “results” in line 9?
4. What noun phrase is omitted after the word “many” in line 12?
5. What does the relative pronoun “that” in line 16 refer to?
6. What does the subject pronoun “we” in line 16 stand for?
7. Find a transitional device with similar meaning to “in spite of” in line 17.