



THE HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES OF ASSESSING READING SKILLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Annotation

This article presents some historical evidences and theoretical principles of evaluating the learners` reading skills and its leading importance for pedagogical practice to improve teaching – learning process through reading skills. Exactly, it stresses the famous scientists` works, their main techniques and their beginning place and period of assessment different types of evaluating reading abilities. It helps educators to implement these appropriate methods to enhance the learning process among students.

Keywords: fluency, reading comprehension, self-assessment, screening assessment, diagnostic assessment, criterion-referenced assessment, text- based questions, abstract, conceptual

Introduction

There are numerous approaches to evaluate the students` knowledge and competence in target language usage these days. However, identifying their background processes and reasons is a great of importance to improve to teach and assess reading skills by clarifying which method is the most effective one. Having done this, we have a chance to utilize it in practical way. Reading comprehension is much more valuable rather than only reading without not knowing about the main gist of the text, and it is the crucial way to improve learners` reading skills. According to The National Reading Panel Report identified five components vital to developing reading skills: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Even though each component is helpful for students to improve their reading ability, it is widely believed that reading comprehension can be fruitful for learners, despite of their age differences when they are struggling with reading. This method makes reading enjoyable, fun and informative. It is important for anyone who want to succeed in either at work or study. Besides that, there are a wide range of evaluation methods and approaches of reading skills such as testing system, self- assessment, peer- assessment, formative and summative assessment and others. Most people,





however, do not take into account of their importance to show an unbiased result of students who have done a variety of reading tasks. The main reason for this is that they are ignorant about the development process of these approaches and key features. Thus, I want to present some historic evidence related to these issues below to offer more information about assessing system in English language.

It is worth to mention that reading comprehension assessment was not well until 20th century and there are many plausible explanations for the relatively late arrival of comprehension. In the 17th century, default indicator of reading progress was an oral capacity, indexed either by accuracy or by expressive fluency, in the tradition of declamation and oratory (Smith, 1966). The first systematic attempts to index reading ability by measuring comprehension date back to the period just prior to World War I. Binet, as early as 1895, used comprehension test items, ironically, to measure intelligence rather than reading achievement. The history of this period was a series of shifts in the relative importance of three factors – the text, the reader, the context – that have been used to explain reading comprehension. Prior to the mid-1960s, comprehension was all about the text. The dominant theoretical perspective in all of psychology, including cognitive psychology, was behaviorism, which was born in the early 1900s. In the behaviorism-dominated milieu, the text ruled the comprehension process and its features determined the nature and degree of comprehension any given reader achieved. First, the reader visually analyzed the relevant features of letters until those letters were identified. Next, the letters were mapped onto sounds to pronounce strings of sounds (including words). Finally, the reader listened to the output – either externally during oral reading or internally during silent reading – and achieved understanding.

Two significant events in the history of assessment happened during the 1930s and 1940s; they have considerable effects on reading comprehension assessment. First, in 1935, IBM introduced the IBM 805 scanner, which had the potential to reduce the cost of scoring dramatically by a factor of 10. It is not insignificant that the Scholastic Aptitude Test, which, in the 1920s and early 1930s, had been mostly an essay test, was transformed into a machine-scorable multiple-choice test shortly thereafter (Resnick, 1982). This development paved the way for a new generation of multiple-choice assessments for all fields in which testing is used; reading comprehension assessment proved no exception. The second important event was the publication, in 1944, of Frederick Davis's landmark doctoral dissertation in which he used a brand new statistical tool, factor analysis, to determine whether a set of conceptually distinct subtests of reading comprehension were also psychometrically distinct. In his groundbreaking 1944 study, Davis reviewed the literature describing reading





comprehension as a construct and found several hundred skills mentioned. He sorted them into nine categories that he felt constituted conceptually distinct groups; from these he devised nine testable skills

- 1 Word meanings
- 2 Word meanings in context
- 3 Follow passage organization
- 4 Main thought
- 5 Answer specific text-based questions
- 6 Text-based questions with paraphrase
- 7 Draw inferences about content
- 8 Literary devices
- 9 Author`s purpose

In the 1950s, Wilson Taylor developed the cloze procedure as an alternative to the conventional standardized test as the most common method of assessing skills in the world. Taylor began with the assumption that even the process of writing multiple-choice items was subjective. He developed the cloze technique, which replaces human judgement with a mechanical approach to item development. A test designer simply deletes every nth word (usually every 5th word) in a passage; the task of the examinee is to fill in each cloze blank. The more blanks filled in, the higher the comprehension score. Cloze implemented as the scientific alternative to multiple-choice tests of reading comprehension. It was widely used as the comprehension criterion in studies of reading.

Within psychology, the situated cognition movement emerged from the work of J.S. Brown (1989) and A.L. Brown and J.C. Campione (1994). These researchers argued that approaches to nurturing cognitive development were too abstract and divorced from the “authentic activity” that they were designed to facilitate. In their basis is to develop context-free, transferable concepts and skills, reading educators had inadvertently and inappropriately focused on the teaching and learning of explicit but abstract rules and conceptual features. Teachers would need to design activities that situate students in the specific and authentic rather than the abstract.

Others (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984) put forward more socially oriented critiques, championing constructs such as the social construction of meaning, which viewed cognition of all sorts as being distributed within community rather than encapsulated within the individuals of a community.

The same period of time also witnessed the rediscovery of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978) and Russian literary theorist Bakhtin (1975/1981). Following Vygotsky`s lead, reading researchers fixed their attention on the social nature of





learning and the key role that teachers and students` peers play in facilitating learning for an individual. Possibly the most influential learning construct in the 1980s was Vygotsky`s “zone of proximal development”, which represents the difference between learning a child can accomplish on her own and what she can accomplish with the help of others such as their mentor, parent or knowledgeable peer.

After several ways reading skills should be assessed by different ways as it is an totally complex process that can not be explained satisfactorily. There are many types of assessments to monitor students` progress. One of them is screening assessment, which is given to all students of the school year to determine which students are at risk of struggling with reading. They would rather help to identify children who need diagnostic assessments, as well as children who may require supplemental intervention. Screening assessments should be relatively fast and efficient to administer and its type includes curriculum-based measures. The second one is diagnostic assessment that is used to assess specific skills or components of reading such as phonemic awareness, phonics skills, and fluency. The results of diagnostic assessments inform instruction and intervention. Diagnostic assessments can be formal standardized tests of children`s component reading and language abilities or informal measures such as criterion-referenced tests and informal reading inventories Norm-referenced assessments are formal assessments, often used as diagnostic tools. The score compares the student`s skills to a defined population used in standardizing the tests. Definitely these types of tests are not allowed to take more than once a year. Criterion-referenced assessments are both formal and informal assessments, and are also used as diagnostic tools. The score compares the student`s skills to a defined set of skills and a goal (criterion) for mastery. These assessments are administered before instruction and after instruction to measure a student`s skill growth. Outcome assessments, also called high stakes assessments, are given to all students in a grade. They measure students` skills against grade-level expectations. Outcome assessments are used to make decisions about students, teachers, a school, or even an entire school system. Progress monitoring assessments measure a student`s overall progress during the school year or progress toward acquiring specific skills that have been taught. Examples of these kinds of measures include curriculum-based measures (CBMs), criterion-referenced tests, and informal measures such as reading inventories. These tests can be given more than once a year and, depending on the assessment, sometimes quite frequently.





Conclusion

This article studied different types of assessment approaches of many foreign scientists and their development process. In most cases, many schools, universities and educational institutions have used this type of assessment for evaluating readers' language comprehension. This helps educators on a daily basis and identifying a child's specific competences allows a teacher to place students in suitable classes that they need. They would prefer to analyse students' level and progress during the whole year by taking informal and formal assessments to check their improvement in reading ability. Nearly all assessments of all literacy skills should be designed in a way that reflects the drive towards with meaning.

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