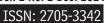# ENHANCING READING COMPREHENSION PROFICIENCY THROUGH DIASPORA LITERATURE: EMPHASIZING EXTENSIVE READING STRATEGIES FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

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Abstract
This study explores the effective use of Diaspora Literature to elevate reading comprehension proficiency among learners, primarily emphasizing extensive reading strategies. Itemphasizes incorporating diverse literary works into educational frameworks to enhance language skills. By focusing on extensive reading, learners engage with various texts, fostering a deeper understanding of language nuances, cultural contexts, and diverse perspectives. The paper delves into the pedagogical approaches employed to integrate Diaspora Literature seamlessly, emphasizing its role in cultivating critical thinking and analytical skills. It also aims to provide educators with insights into optimizing extensive reading strategies, creating an immersive learning experience that not only develops language proficiency but also promotes cultural awareness and empathy among secondary school learners.

Keywords: Reading comprehension proficiency, extensive reading, strategies of reading, Diaspora literature as a tool for enhancement of extensive reading, benefits of extensive reading

Introduction

Reading comprehension proficiency is a critical aspect of language learning, which is pivotal in enhancing overall linguistic competence. Proficient reading comprehension not only fosters a deeper understanding of the language's nuances but also facilitates improved communication skills. It enables learners to comprehend written texts with ease, thereby expanding their vocabulary, grammar, and cultural awareness (Kecskes, 2021). Recent studies, such as those conducted byTezera and Bekele, (2021) emphasize the positive correlation between reading comprehension skills and overall language proficiency. Additionally, the work of Abacioglu, Fischer,and Volman,(2022) highlights that a strong foundation in reading comprehension contributes significantly to academic success and cognitive development. In an era of global communication and interconnectedness, the ability to understand and interpret written content is crucial for effective participation in various professional and social contexts. Therefore, educators and language learners alike should prioritize the cultivation of reading comprehension skills as an integral part of language acquisition.

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on utilizing diaspora literature as a powerful tool to enhance reading comprehension proficiency in language learning. Diaspora literature, which explores the experiences of communities living outside their ancestral homelands, provides a unique and culturally rich context for language learners. Scholars like Siaj, and Farrah, (2018). have noted that engaging with diaspora literature not only improves language skills but also deepens cultural understanding and empathy. The narratives, often reflecting diverse perspectives and linguistic nuances, offer learners a broader exposure to the language's complexities. Furthermore, works by authors from various diasporic communities, such as Adichie and Lahiri, have been incorporated into language curricula to provide authentic and relatable content for learners. By integrating diaspora literature into language education, educators can create a dynamic and immersive learning environment that enhances reading comprehension skills while fostering a more profound appreciation for the cultural diversity embedded in the language (Rass, 2020). This approach aligns with the contemporary trend of incorporating diverse voices into educational practices to create a more inclusive and globalized learning experience.

Reading Comprehension Proficiency

Reading comprehension proficiency is the ability to understand and interpret written texts accurately and effectively. It involves not only decoding words but also extracting meaning, making inferences, and connecting information within and across texts. Recent research has highlighted the importance of reading comprehension proficiency as a predictor of academic achievement and success in various domains. For example, a study by Babashamsi, Noordin, and Kotamjani, (2022) found that higher levels of reading comprehension proficiency were associated with better performance in mathematics, science, and social studies among Iranian high school students.

Furthermore, the development of reading comprehension proficiency is influenced by a multitude of factors, including vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, and cognitive skills such as inference-making and critical thinking. Recent studies have emphasized the role of vocabulary development in enhancing reading comprehension—for instance, research by Banditvilai. (2020) demonstrated a positive relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension among elementary school students, highlighting the importance of vocabulary instruction in improving overall reading proficiency.

Instructional approaches aimed at promoting reading comprehension proficiency have also been a focus of recent research. Evidence-based strategies such as reciprocal teaching, where students engage in dialogic interactions to actively construct meaning from text, are effective in improving comprehension skills (Odom, 2020). Additionally, explicit instruction in comprehension strategies such as summarization, questioning, and predicting has been found to enhance reading comprehension outcomes across grade levels (Iwai, 2019).

In the digital age, the landscape of reading

comprehension is evolving, with new challenges and opportunities emerging from the use of digital texts and online resources. Recent studies have explored the impact of digital literacy skills on reading comprehension proficiency. For example, research by Babashamsi, Noordin, and Kotamjani,(2022)investigated how students' digital reading strategies, such as online searching and evaluating sources, influenced their comprehension of digital texts. As digital technologies continue to shape the way we access and interact with information, fostering both traditional and digital literacy skills is essential for promoting reading comprehension proficiency in the 21st century.

Extensive Reading

Extensive reading, as described by Rass (2020), entails reading copiously to grasp the general essence of texts rather than delving into specifics. The focus lies not on deciphering individual words or sentences, but on comprehending the overall meaning of the text, primarily to enhance students' literary comprehension. Typically conducted outside the classroom, as Odom (2020) noted, this form of reading is superficial and does not demand intense concentration, making it feasible in various settings like travel or while awaiting transportation. Rajendram, (2021)suggests that such reading should be carefully planned to avoid pressure from teachers and to foster self-motivation. Chan(2020) acknowledges the possibility of conducting extensive reading within the classroom but stresses the importance of aligning it with program objectives. The authors propose transitioning the responsibility for such reading to students once they have developed the requisite skills. Rajendram,(2020). underscores students' need to attain a certain proficiency level to derive maximal benefit from extensive reading endeavors.

Extensive reading is characterized by the diversity of topics and the pleasure it brings, as individuals engage with various texts daily. This practice entails selecting readings from multiple fields and difficulty levels to cater to diverse interests and preferences. Ensuring access to a plethora of reading materials within the educational institution is paramount to the

success of such programs. Furthermore, empowering students to choose their reading materials, as Rintaningrum (2019) advocates, is fundamental. The emphasis is placed on students' interests, granting them the autonomy to discontinue any text that fails to captivate them. This approach underscores the student's agency in determining not only what to read but also the extent of their engagement, thus discouraging coercion and fostering a genuine passion for reading. Ultimately, it is crucial to respect and support students' autonomy in their reading pursuits, allowing them to navigate their literary journeys according to their individual preferences and curiosities. Reading material holds significance for students only when it aligns with their expectations of enjoyment, learning, and comprehension. If a student fails to derive pleasure, knowledge, or understanding from a text, its value diminishes considerably. Thus, the pivotal factors determining the suitability of reading material revolve around the student's level of interest, existing knowledge, and language comprehension (Mandarani, Retnaningdyah, & Mustofa, 2024). Typically, comprehensive reading activities unfold in solitude, granting students autonomy over their reading environment, timing, and pace, predominantly outside the school setting (Oyinloye, 2023). More digestible texts facilitate quicker reading, enabling students to receive more comprehensible input. While teachers guide students toward their objectives, their influence should be subtly wielded, focusing on explanation, monitoring students' reading choices, and offering guidance to maximize benefits.

Strategies of Reading

Reading strategies are purposeful means of comprehending the author's message. They are believed to influence readers to adjust their reading behaviours to work on text difficulty, task demands, and other contextual variables (Banditvilai,2020). Rintaningrum, (2019) and Grabe and Stroller (2019) identified the types of reading strategies as follows:

Skimming

Skimming is a reading technique for speed

reading. Skimming aims to get an overview of the organization of the text and its main idea from a passage in a book. To skim a passage, the readers read through the passage quickly and skip the details. They read the first sentence of each paragraph. Each paragraph usually contains a topic sentence that states the main idea. Tezera and Bekele (2021) suggest a topic sentence can appear differently within a section. The most common location of a topic sentence appears in the first sentence of the first paragraph. The second most likely place for a topic sentence is the first sentence of the last section.

Scanning

Scanning is a reading skill that allows the reader to locate specific information quickly. With scanning, you already know what sort of information you are searching for before you begin. The purpose of scanning is to get specific information. Scanning is especially important for improving your reading. Many students try to read every word when they read, so they read very slowly. Scanning can help students learn to read and understand faster.

Making Predictions

Rajendram, (2020) defines prediction as "Using an existing knowledge of a pattern or system to anticipate what is likely in a novel situation". Most research has shown that good readers use their experiences and background knowledge to make predictions and formulate ideas as they read. This strategy also allows students to interact, increasing their interests and improving their understanding of the text (Diem., & Abdullah, 2020). Making predictions is a strategy in which readers use information from the picture, and title, to make predictions about the story. The title of a text can operate memories of texts, permitting them to guess the content of a new text. During reading, successful readers can make predictions about what will occur next, or what opinions the writer will offer to support a discussion

Questioning

Questioning helps students monitor their comprehension and stay engaged and interested in their reading. Readers can use the questioning before, during, and after reading. The questioning process requires readers to ask questions of themselves to construct meaning, enhance understanding, find answers, solve problems, find information, and discover new information (Banditvilai, 2020). In this strategy, the students return to the text throughout the reading process to find the answers to the questions. Questioning helps students to clarify and comprehend what they are reading. In this strategy, asking appropriate questions permits successful readers to concentrate on the most important information in a text (Anindita, 2020). Asking questions while involved in the reading process allows students to think about what they are reading, be active and independent readers, and appropriately reflect on their reading.

Diaspora Literature as a Tool for Enhancement of Extensive Reading

Diaspora literature serves as an effective tool for enhancing extensive reading, particularly within multicultural and multilingual educational settings. Extensive reading, characterized by engaging students with large amounts of material at their level of comprehension, benefits significantly from the diverse narratives found in diaspora literature. These narratives often include themes of identity, displacement, and cultural hybridity, which resonate with students from varied backgrounds and can stimulate greater interest and engagement in reading. For instance, a study on the use of extensive reading programs in rural Sarawak, Malaysia, found that incorporating culturally relevant materials, such as diaspora literature, improved students' reading interest and proficiency by making the content more relatable and engaging (Ramiah & Maniam, 2024).

Moreover, diaspora literature's role in extensive reading extends beyond mere language acquisition. It fosters critical thinking and empathy by exposing students to different perspectives and life experiences. This is particularly important in multilingual classrooms where students may struggle to find texts that reflect their own experiences and cultural backgrounds. By incorporating diaspora literature, educators can create a more inclusive learning environment that acknowledges and values the diverse identities of all students. This

approach aligns with the multiliteracies pedagogy, which advocates for the use of diverse literary texts to develop students' literacy skills in a way that is culturally responsive and relevant (Diem & Abdullah, 2020).

Furthermore, extensive reading programs that utilize diaspora literature can significantly enhance students' comprehension skills. Diaspora narratives often include complex themes and varied linguistic styles, which can challenge students to think deeply and critically about the texts. This kind of engagement promotes a higher level of cognitive processing, which is essential for developing advanced reading comprehension skills. Research has shown that when students are exposed to a wide range of texts, including those that reflect their own cultural experiences, they are more likely to develop a love for reading and improve their overall literacy skills (Ramiah & Maniam, 2024).

In addition to improving literacy skills, the use of diaspora literature in extensive reading can also support the development of student's social and emotional skills. Through the exploration of themes such as migration, identity, and belonging, students gain a better understanding of the complexities of the human experience. This can lead to increased empathy and cultural awareness, which are crucial skills in today's globalized world. Incorporating diaspora literature into extensive reading programs not only enhances students' academic abilities but also prepares them to be more thoughtful and empathetic global citizens (Mussa & Fente, 2020).

Benefits of Extensive Reading

Extensive reading is believed to offer significant benefits for learners in terms of both learning gains and motivation, and it appears to be growing in popularity within the ELT (English Language Teaching) community (Wang & Ho (2019). It has been heralded as the single most effective way to improve language proficiency. Extensive reading results in substantial learning improvements across reading, writing, vocabulary, and overall language proficiency, while also boosting learner motivation (Rass, 2020). A considerable body of research supports these claims thus:

One significant advantage is the development of a global perspective. Through engaging with the narratives of various diasporic communities, readers gain insight into the diverse experiences of migration, displacement, and cultural integration. This broader understanding fosters a more inclusive worldview, encouraging readers to appreciate the complexities of global interconnections and the varied human experiences that shape them (Kecskes, 2021).

Another crucial benefit of extensive reading in diasporic literature is the enhancement of cultural empathy. Diasporic texts often delve into the emotional landscapes of characters navigating between multiple cultural identities. By immersing themselves in these stories, readers can develop a more profound sense of empathy towards individuals from different backgrounds. This empathy extends beyond the pages of the books, influencing how readers interact with real-world diverse communities. Studies have shown that literature can play a pivotal role in increasing empathy and reducing prejudice, making extensive reading a powerful tool for fostering social harmony (Siaj & Farrah, 2018)

Furthermore, extensive reading in this genre enriches one's understanding of identity and self. Diasporic literature often grapples with identity formation, belonging, and self-discovery themes. Readers can reflect on their identities and consider how cultural, historical, and social forces might shape them. This reflective process is particularly beneficial for individuals within diasporic communities, as it mirrors their experiences and challenges, validating their journeys and potentially aiding in their self-acceptance and personal growth (Harvey, Tordzro & Bradley, 2022).

Finally, extensive reading of diasporic literature can improve linguistic and cognitive skills. Engaging with diverse literary styles, vocabularies, and narrative structures enhances language proficiency and cognitive flexibility. For students and scholars, in particular, this broad exposure is invaluable for academic development and critical thinking. The complexity of diasporic narratives often requires readers to navigate non-linear plots and multi-layered character development, which can sharpen analytical and interpretive skills (Rass, 2020). Thus, the practice of extensive reading in this genre not only cultivates a richer cultural and emotional

intelligence but also fosters intellectual growth.

Conclusion

Enhancing reading comprehension proficiency through diaspora literature by emphasizing extensive reading strategies presents a multifaceted approach to secondary school education. This method not only improves linguistic abilities but also cultivates empathy, cultural awareness, and critical thinking skills. By engaging with diverse narratives, students gain a broader understanding of global perspectives and the complexities of identity. Implementing extensive reading of diaspora literature in secondary school curricula can thus foster both academic and personal growth, preparing learners to navigate an increasingly interconnected and multicultural world.

Recommendations

Here are some recommendations for enhancingreading comprehension proficiency through diaspora literature: Emphasizing extensive reading strategies for secondary school learners:

i. Schools should include a wide range of diaspora literature in their reading lists. This could encompass novels, short stories, memoirs, and poems from various cultures and communities. By doing so, students can explore different perspectives and experiences, enhancing their comprehension skills and cultural awareness. Teachers should select texts that are age-appropriate and relevant to the learners' interests and experiences to maximize engagement and understanding.

ii. Establish a structured extensive reading program that encourages students to read independently and regularly. Provide access to a diverse library of diaspora literature and set aside dedicated time during the school week for uninterrupted reading. This program should include goals and milestones to keep students motivated, as well as opportunities for them to share their thoughts and reflections on what they have read, either through discussions or written responses.

iii. Complement the reading of diaspora literature with activities that encourage deep engagement and reflection. For instance, students could participate in group discussions, write reflective essays, or create projects that connect the themes of the texts to their own lives. These activities not only reinforce comprehension but also allow students to process and internalize the diverse perspectives they encounter, thereby enriching their understanding and empathy.

iv. Leverage technology to enhance the extensive reading experience. Use digital platforms and e-readers to provide access to a wider range of diaspora literature. Incorporate multimedia resources such as audiobooks, author interviews, and documentaries related to the texts. These resources can provide additional context and background, making the literature more accessible and engaging for secondary school learners.

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