

**“MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION IN INDIA:
TEACHER-TRAINING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT”**

The final dissemination workshop of the British Academy project

**SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL
CHILDREN’S READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS: A
SCAFFOLDING-BASED INTERVENTION**

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**Strategies for Developing Reading Comprehension
through Translanguaging**

This document has been developed as support material for teachers as part of the project titled ‘Supporting The Development Of Indian Primary School Children’s Reading Comprehension Skills: A Scaffolding-Based Intervention’. It aims to educate primary school teachers in using a translanguaging pedagogy in the classroom to develop the learners’ reading comprehension.

Reading is an essential skill in language learning that helps develop the critical thinking skills of the learners and therefore, plays an important role in education. Reading is a process of comprehension which

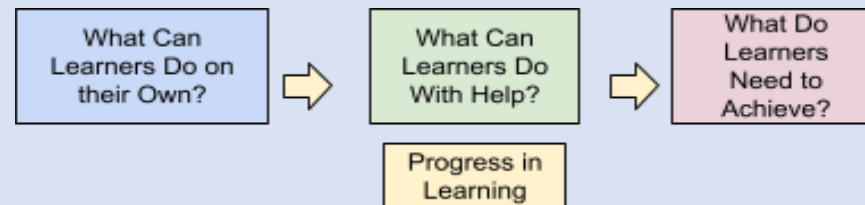
happens “when the reader extracts and integrates various information from the text and combines it with what is already known”.

Learners use linguistic resources from their home language (L1) to acquire skills in learning a second language (L2) . L1 readers bring all of their socio-cultural and linguistic experiences, and skills in L1 reading to their L2 reading efforts. For both L1 and L2, the variables predicting reading comprehension, the underlying cognitive resources, and the background knowledge resources are the same. Therefore, using learners’ rich L1 resources while teaching L2 reading would certainly be helpful.

This is where translanguaging pedagogy plays a significant role. Translanguaging helps to access learners’ available language resources and encourages their use in the classroom to develop learners’ comprehension abilities.

How to Develop Reading Comprehension in Our Learners?

In order to address our learners’ needs, we need to map their abilities and intended learning outcomes. We need to be mindful of the following:



The sections discussed below provide an outline of some of the ways in which reading skills of the learners can be developed using a translanguaging pedagogy.

1. Text Selection

We need to decide the purpose of reading in terms of the level of difficulty, newness of content, text-structure, and text type along with the number of words that the learners know in a text. These are major determiners of how well the learners can comprehend a text. Hence, the selection of a text, according to these criteria, helps us support learners with appropriate tasks and activities, during the pre-, while- and post reading stages of teaching reading.

2. Text Decoding

Decoding means verbally breaking down written words into various sounds while being aware of the letter-sound relationships. When the learners are unable to decode and identify words, the process of reading becomes overwhelming for them and affects their comprehension. Thus, supporting them in decoding texts will help the development of their reading skills along with their oral fluency.

What learners can do independently	What learners can do with help	What learners need to achieve
Can identify letters, function words (like <i>is, but</i>), pronouns (you, them), commonly occurring words (like <i>happy, tree, etc.</i>) and/or read isolated sentences.	Can read content words that they have heard frequently; can relate words from L1 to English (through translanguaging)	Read and understand content words fluently across languages and subjects.

3. Reading and Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the sub-skills of reading that enables a learner to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words within sentential and discourse context. Good vocabulary knowledge leads to automatic word recognition and processing for meaning. Growth in vocabulary enables learners to use this knowledge to understand a variety of texts and several types of discourse.

Studies have proven that vocabulary and reading comprehension share a reciprocal relation. In the context of Indian learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, acquiring knowledge of L2 vocabulary is challenging because their learning mostly depends on print exposure which is available only in school. However, once the *linguistic threshold* is achieved, vocabulary skills and reading skills can complement each other to help learners become skilled readers. Additionally learners’ L1 vocabulary knowledge can be used as a resource to strengthen English vocabulary learning.

3.1 Introducing new vocabulary to the learners

To increase the vocabulary knowledge of the learners, here is what we can do!

- a. Provide a direct meaning or translation of a word only when necessary, but the aim should always be to *help* the learners *to arrive at the meaning by themselves*. Our role is to be that of a facilitator to support learners by providing clues, guided questions and constructive feedback using a translanguaging pedagogy.
- b. Use the learners’ personal experiences and background knowledge to help them understand the meaning and link learning to their everyday experiences.
- c. Present vocabulary and its usage in a context such that the meaning is explained in a functional manner.

- d. Use the learners' home language to negotiate meaning and ask questions to guide them to figure out meaning and use of words and phrases.
- e. Use audio-visual materials for teaching vocabulary in both the languages.

3.2 Vocabulary enhancement

Learners' vocabulary knowledge does not only refer to the number of words they know but also the depth of their understanding of words and phrases. This works at multiple levels of grammar, meaning and usage.

1. Use learners' existing vocabulary knowledge related to the topic to teach new words and collocations. Gradually shift focus from the known aspects to newer aspects. Associate words with other topic-related vocabulary and help learners consolidate their learning.
2. Use examples from real-life experiences to help learners relate to the meaning for better understanding.
3. Use dictionaries effectively in the classroom.
4. Conduct translation games (a group activity).
5. Use polysemy tasks to consolidate multiple word or phrase meanings.
6. Use activities where learners work together to share their knowledge. It can be considered as an empowering tool in our classroom. It makes the class inclusive, lowers learners' anxiety and allows them to learn from each other.

What learners can do independently	What learners can do with help	What learners need to achieve
Listen and comprehend commonly occurring words/phrases/collocations/idioms.	Identify and comprehend words and collocations when given in a context, with the help of the learners' home languages.	Use the vocabulary in a sentence independently.

3.3 Vocabulary across the curriculum

The comprehension of other academic subjects can be developed by encouraging the learners to:

1. Understand the key words related to the content and to understand the main ideas of the text.

2. Identify words that mark evidence, reason, explanation, comparison, and arguments leading to the identification of ideas and the links between the different ideas across the text. This also helps to understand the text structure with ease which helps in comprehending the text.

4. Developing Reading Comprehension

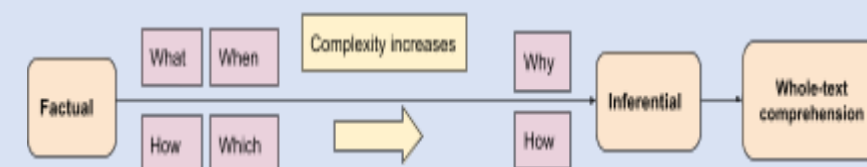
Inferencing is one of the cognitive mechanisms where we attempt to understand a text, a discourse, or a situation with the help of memory resources that activate our background knowledge (at all ages and in all contexts). Inferencing helps us to reach a conclusion. Hence, in a reading class we must help learners to be able to make inferences. For that they need to be able to identify ideas in a text, to find the links between them and establish meaning by creating a mental map of the text. It is easier for learners to understand factual information from the text, but for making inference learners need to establish links between the ideas, whether given in the text itself and/ or between the textual idea with their knowledge of the world.

To guide learners to establish links between the ideas for arriving at meaning, consider:

- i) *Pragmatic inferences* which are generated when a reader sources his world knowledge beyond the linguistic input of a text and applies it to create a mental map.
- ii) *Propositional inferences* which are formed when logical links between explicitly stated information can be drawn.

To guide the learners for arriving at inferences,

1. While reading the text, ask the learners cue questions based on the text to drive their attention to the links between ideas. This leads to nurturing learners' thinking ability, not only by drawing their attention to factual information but also to encouraging the process of propositional inference and creating mental maps of the text.
2. When asking text-based questions, we are trying direct learners to look at meaning at the surface level as well as at a deeper level. This distinction in comprehension is labelled as factual and inferential type of comprehension.
Wh- Questions in order of complexity (factual to inferential)



What learners can do	What learners can do with help	What learners need to achieve
Answer simple factual questions	Answer complex factual questions when rephrased in learners' home languages and given a few hints	Read and answer inferential questions, Produce whole text summary

5. Whole Text Comprehension

A reading text is comprehended when the learners are able to produce a mental map of the whole text. This whole text comprehension happens when they are able to:

- i. make inferences, by connecting the links between the ideas across the sentences and paragraphs,
- ii. monitor their comprehension by going back to the relevant ideas (independently or with the teachers' help)
- iii. understand the text structure while connecting the links across the texts.

The teacher can check this process of text map generation and their whole text comprehension by using summaries. This could be an oral recall summary towards the end of the class. The teacher may help the learners to arrive at the summary by eliciting key ideas using prompts or cue questions and driving their attention to the text structure. The teacher further can check the learners' whole text comprehension using cloze summaries based on the key ideas or a summary writing task.

6. Reading across the Curriculum

Reading is considered as a language skill in traditional classrooms, and taught only as a part of English classroom teaching. However, it has immense significance in learners' performance in other academic subjects like Science, Social Science and Mathematics. Good reading comprehension helps in understanding these subjects in a better way. By developing their ability to read and comprehend ideas, we are providing them a foundation to be independent readers. Proficiency in reading comprehension supports them to take learning outside the classroom where they actively explore their interests and work towards broadening their learning curve.