The ability to read with understanding is an essential skill in modern society. However, many people may never manage to read well. Many people face some daily reading tasks lacking confidence in their own ability. Reading in English as a foreign language can be considered the most necessary skill in Brazil. It is used in many ways as general and specific purposes. Brazilian National curriculum emphasises reading as the main skill to be developed by our students from year 5 to year 8 and in the secondary schools.

One of the most significant problems educators face today is reading deficiency. A great number of students could well be accounted for as disabled judging by their reading difficulties, a problem which may reflect in poor performance in other educational activities. Reading can be considered one of the basic ways of acquiring information in our society and in academic settings in particular. It may be assumed that the person who is not able to read well will face serious trouble, especially in what regards to educational and, subsequently, job opportunities, not to mention their own rights as citizens.

The development of comprehension skills can be considered a long-term developmental process, which depends not only on world knowledge, language, and text experiences from early in life but also on learning how to decode fluently, the meanings of vocabulary words encountered in texts as well as learning how to abstract meaning from text using the comprehension processes and the strategies used by skilled readers.

There are many factors which influence reading comprehension. These factors underlie Metacognitive reading strategies which have to do with deliberate conscious control of one’s own cognitive actions. These factors have to do with awareness, purpose and appropriate use of knowledge which are the distinguishing features between metacognition and the understanding of knowledge. Metacognitive reading strategies rule the reflection about the theme, the purposes and the reader’s own competence and capacity of accepting or refusing the subject and the text.

“The most important resource that any potential reader possesses, whether reading in a first or any other language, is an awareness of the way in which we use language. For reading is above all to do with language. There are two things which we all know about language: first, that we use it for a

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Therefore reading can be considered as an information-processing skill, which is composed of a number of cognitive sub-skills. It is a complex skill that presents a great variety of interpretations. However, it is assumed that most readers read without a conscious awareness of what they are doing. True reading is only possible if the whole complex of sub-processes is functioning easily and in proper coordination. None of the processes can be absent or require undue attention otherwise comprehension might suffer.

Thus considering these processes it is taken for granted that for describing a very simple model of reading and understanding, it is necessary to observe the sequence of events from letter perception, through word recognition, word integration and construction of a mental model of the ideas in the text that lead to text understanding. However words can also be identified individually.

Referring to word recognition it is possible to state that some words are more difficult to process than others, therefore, for every word that a reader recognises, she/he is supposed to have a memory of it.

“This word-memory becomes activated whenever a printed sequence of letters is inspected. When readers recognise a word they can be said to have achieved lexical access, and the word becomes available for further processing such as pronunciation, accessing the meaning, or integration with other words in order to comprehend a sentence” Underwood and Batt (1998 p.38).

The ability to acquire information from print can be considered as an authentic seal of literacy. People often take for granted their ability to understand the meaning of a text. However it is important to realise that understanding involves setting up coherent mental depictions of information. This means processing the meaning of words and phrases in the text as well as establishing how these words and phrases are related to one another. It is assumed that the meaning emerges from the relationship between the text and the reader’s previous knowledge, therefore the reader relies on both text-driven and knowledge-driven processes.

Thus comprehension is dependent on a multiplicity of perceptual, linguistic and cognitive processes whilst reading difficulties indicate the insufficient development of one or more of these processes. It is supposed that skilled reading can be considered a result of merging both analytic and synthetic, or bottom-up and top-down activities. On the other hand, reading
difficulties also arise from lack of linguistic knowledge as vocabulary, language use and deficient knowledge of syntactic and semantic processes.

“For the skilled reader, the processes involved in reading are so well learned and integrated that written information can flow almost automatically from sensation to meaning. As the letters of the text are identified, they simultaneously prime or set up expectations about the identities of the words to which they belong. Therefore since the words are identified, they prime the most probable syntactic and semantic structures” Adams (1980 p.12).

It is known that although single word reading and text comprehension are connected, word reading skill, in a general view, is developed more than text comprehension. Comprehension depends on automatic word recognition and difficulties in word recognition can result in comprehension problems. Single word reading skills and the ability to build integrated text models make independent contributions to overall reading ability. In comparing groups on specific experimental tasks it was detected that these groups differ in their ability to make inferences, integrate information in text, understand story structure and monitor understanding.

Good and poor readers can have different tendency to make inferences from text: the latter are worse than the former on both types of inference questions. However, their ability is the same in answering literal questions. Despite the differences between good and poor readers, the former build better-integrated and more informational richer text representations than the latter ones. They also can differ in getting the structure and main point of a story. Poor readers are worse at comprehension monitoring. It is supposed by Oakhill, Cain & Bryant, (1997) that comprehension skill can be predicted by many skills: text integration, story structure understanding, metacognitive monitoring, amount of time spent reading at home, and working memory.

Thus the reading processes depend as much on the information in the reader’s mind as on the information in the written text. If the reader presents any blank gaps or some lack of knowledge, the information can not be properly understood. It is crucial to find ways to resolve this problem through some top-down processes such as inferring, or predicting from context or even looking for other resources, i.e. glossaries, dictionaries etc.

However, readers cannot rely solely on top-down processes because sometimes the information contained in the text is of a complexity beyond the knowledge the reader brings to the text. Thus, text comprehension can not be satisfactory. The skilled reader, despite the difficulties with word meaning, generally finds ways of overcoming the problem through context
analysis. Someone with reading difficulties, however, will have much more of a challenge in order to arrive at the correct comprehension of a complex text.

REFERENCES


