

Importance of Study Skills and Reference Skills for English Language Students

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of teaching English language is to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills among the learners. Each skill is important for a language learner. Listening and reading are considered 'passive skills', whereas speaking and writing are considered 'active skills'. The two important skills to develop writing skills are study skills and reference skills. A language teacher should provide opportunities for her students to develop their study skills and reference skills. This article discusses the importance of these skills for the language learner.

Key words: Study skills; Reference skills.

Introduction

The main objective of teaching English language is to develop the different skills among the language learners. Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills could be enhanced using different techniques by a language teacher in her classroom. Along with these major skills, other skills which are supplementary skills should also be developed. They are study skills and reference skills which the learner has to develop consistently. The study skills help the learner to study more effectively. They also enable him/her to gain knowledge of the subject matter and learn other subjects independently.

Study skills

Linguistic skills help learners to

communicate while study skills enable them to study effectively. This process involves:

- 1) Perception
- 2) Comprehension
- 3) Retention and
- 4) Retrieval

It is required that the teacher selects the material according to the learners' needs.

One cannot read every word in a book. After selecting a text, the reader must focus on understanding it. All learning is for understanding. Everything which is understood may not be kept in memory; some things may be forgotten. For retention, one has to make specific efforts. Inefficient learners memorize blindly; efficient learners

learn with understanding, make short notes, which could be used later on. Another stage in the learning process involves the retrieval of what has been learned, when required. For example, in the examination hall, the learner should be able to retrieve all that he/she has learnt throughout the year.

‘Study skills’ is the area that integrates the skills of reading and writing. A learner has to learn to condense the information into brief notes so that he is able to recall it whenever he needs them. He needs to scan the text for specific information. He also transfers the information into diagrams and other graphic modes of representation. Study skills include summarizing, note making and note taking.

Three major types of **study skills** are:

- a) Gathering skills
- b) Storing skills
- c) Retrieval skills

a) Gathering skills

These are known as reference skills and enable a learner to gather information as quickly as possible. This requires two subskills: locating and comprehending information. For this, knowledge of sources available, e.g. books, journals, is a must. After identifying the sources, the learner should make effective use of them. A major source of information is the dictionary. It is deplorable that most of the students do not know even how to use a dictionary. Reference skills should be developed in the learners with the help of a dictionary.

b) Storage skills

It means what is learnt should be retained. The students should be able to make brief and precise notes, ready for quick reference. Storing skills are of two types.

1) Note-taking: It is a part of listening skill. It involves listening to lectures and taking down notes. This is a skill which would help the students to jot down key points during a lecture. The content of an entire lecture session could be reduced to a paragraph with this skill. Students should be trained in this technique as they grow up, so that they could bring out the gist of any lecture.

2) Note-making: This involves reading books, magazines, newsletters and then combine them together to form excellent notes relating to the subject. After taking down the main points, students need to summarize with the help of the points.

Both these skills may be divided into the following **sub skills**:

- 1) Comprehension of the text/lecture
- 2) Identification of the main points
- 3) Distinguishing main points from the subordinate points
- 4) Deciding on the order of priority among the various points
- 5) Identifying the organization of points
- 6) Organizing the points into a visual display like concept maps, family trees, and flowcharts.

c) Retrieval skills

After gathering and summarizing information, students are required to express or summarize their ideas in a lucid and simple manner that is easily understood by all.

Reference skills

A **dictionary** is a reference book that focuses on defining words and phrases including multiple meanings. Whenever a language teacher or a student is in doubt about the meaning of a word or its right use, a dictionary comes to the aid. The importance of a dictionary for the language learners cannot be overlooked. It helps in knowing the meanings, pronunciation, grammar, etymology, derivations, etc. of the words. In addition, a student must know how to consult a catalogue, the contents page and the index at the end of a book.

Importance of a dictionary

- ✎ It helps to develop the vocabulary of the language students.
- ✎ It would help them to get the meanings of words in a prose/poetry selection.
- ✎ It would also provide grammatical derivations from one word.
- ✎ It enables a student to develop confidence while reading/speaking the language.
- ✎ The parts of speech of a word with reference to noun, adverbs, adjectives, etc. can be noted from a dictionary.

- ✎ There are homophones and homographs used in the English language. Students could refer to check the spelling and pronunciation of such words.

Thesaurus

The word 'thesaurus' means "a treasure house" in Latin. A thesaurus is not a substitute for a dictionary; it is a word finder. It gives us alternative ways of writing when we want to express ourselves more elegantly and more effectively. The thesaurus helps in getting many words for a single idea. The language students refer to this to get the different synonyms for the same word. It helps them to increase their vocabulary, too.

Encyclopedia

It is a book or a set of books giving information on many subjects. It explores topics in depth and often includes illustration, maps and photographs. For English, students could be given assignments on a topic and asked to prepare a report with the help of information gathered from an encyclopedia.

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