

# *Research on the Application of Word-level and Text-level Reading Strategies in Teaching Young Learners under the Background of Core Competencies*

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**Abstract:** Reading has been playing an important role in learning English. In April of 2022, the new English Curriculum Standard has also stated the significance and value of early reading. It means we have stepped into a new era of core competences, developing core competencies based on extensive reading activities. Reading can develop ESL students' linguistic abilities, cultivate their culture consciousness advance their thinking quality and improve their learning ability. And these abilities are the key dimension of cultivating students' core competences. Strategies in teaching reading have become a major concern for English teachers. On one hand teachers focus on the various reading strategies, on the other hand, they are more eager to know how to teach strategies in a proper way. First of all, strategies are the process of applying the skills effectively in reading. But it's difficult to explain how the readers use the strategies, because excellent readers make good use of the strategies automatically and internally without even realizing it themselves.

## 1. Introduction

In order to help most ESL kids automatically develop and use the strategies ,teachers have to take it to the surface and make it easy to see and operate –to make it become more specific, they could make the children talk about what they think before reading , while reading and after reading . This kind of clear demonstration and modelling is so critical to effectively teaching reading strategies in a wide range. However, what matters is the meaning that teaching strategies generates at the end. No matter focusing on the words, phrases or analyzing the whole passage, children should have a reading purpose ---they have to get a desire to learn and comprehend the reading contents .That is one of the teachers' responsibilities to cultivate and help form children's desire of reading and then concentrate themselves while they are learning the strategies. Thinking about reading and constructing the meanings in mind are the procedures of cultivating students' meta-cognition ability, and it is also the core of the strategic teaching. To use the reading strategies, students have to apply different reading strategies in different reading context.

## **2. Make real reading happen –how to instruct reading strategies?**

### **2.1. Modelling**

Teachers need to combine the direct instruction with the students' real cases, discussion and as well as their illustrations. To be better understood and copied, teachers could invite some of the students to read aloud and think aloud to present the reading strategies in a vivid way.

### **2.2. Scaffolding**

Based on the students' cognitive foundation, it is suggested to start the teaching in a right place where should be the just right level. The familiar information could be used as the scaffolding to set up the application of the new strategies.

### **2.3. Group Practice**

Right after the clear instructions, teachers could make the experiment right away –Let the students read corresponding text which matches their level the best . Teachers could observe if the students are using the new-learned strategies to practice it. The purpose of the operation is to improve students' ability to use the strategies independently.

### **2.4. Peer Teaching**

Teachers invite one or two students to be in a role of a little teacher. The little teacher then discuss with their classmates after their profound thinking.

### **2.5. Integration**

Teachers make the students realize that the strategies are their own learning tools through the formal reading guidance, informal contexts as well as the integration of the strategic conversations .

## **3. Make students highly engaged in reading --To select the proper reading strategies in class**

Normally, reading strategies could be divided into three categories.

### **3.1. Timing**

Some strategies, such as “Accessing”, it works better if it is used in before-reading period. Meanwhile, strategies like Synthesizing or Summarizing work better only in after- reading period.

### **3.2. Level**

To some specific readers at specific levers, Some strategies are far more suitable than other strategies. For example, emerging readers might first focus on the word-level strategies such as forming and tracking. But as the readers become more and more fluent, they should gradually have the higher order thinking skills and start to focus on the text-level strategies such as Analyzing or Monitoring. [1]

### **3.3. Text depth**

Strategy use varies according to the text depth, Some strategies would be better used in

concerning the word features. For example, Chunking and Sliding, these two strategies work fantastically on helping readers to decode difficult words while focus-in and visualizing are more suitable for the understanding of the text –level.

#### **4. Some suggestions on choosing different reading strategies**

##### **4.1. Select just a few strategies at a time to guide instruction.**

Selection depends on many factors. It includes individual development levels, text types and so on. Your choice could be always changed as the time moves. Because some students acquired the independent strategy use capacity step by step. So strategy use must adjust flexibly and respect the students' level and interest in a positive perspective.

##### **4.2. Continually analyse students' mistakes to determine what strategies they use when they encounter difficult text.**

Teachers could modify the strategy to match the students' requirement. And while they are meeting difficulties. It is super important to observe students for better planning the proper strategies

##### **4.3. Target those strategies that are the best fit for a particular group of young learners and their previous strategy instruction.**

When you are planning for the first graders ,we don't teach them strategies --Confirming and Monitoring, because it is so difficult for them to observe at their age while we think forming are fit the best for them. So it is better for us to start the strategic teaching from the ones are familiar to the kids, and then rapidly construct the word-level strategies -Chunking and Stretching. In this way, students' confidence are easily built.

##### **4.4. In order to be most effective, select the strategies that children need to make sense of the texts that they're reading at specific points in their development.**

Generally speaking, effective strategies should be starting from the modelling and scaffolding ---from the point where students have known and forward to constructing new skills and new concepts—provide students with active guidance and practice experience, lead them to be independent

#### **5. Make a summary of three basic skills for teaching reading strategies.**

##### **5.1. Modeling**

Think aloud is a key to teaching reading strategies. Please say what you thought when you present how to use a strategy to analyse a difficult word or phrase . You had better to start from one strategy, and add some other strategies as the students' preparations is increasing. You should use the correct and standard language while doing a modelling. It is also very important to take chance of an impromptu course which appears naturally. Teachers should integrate and model reading strategies in different kinds of cross curriculum text patterns and clearly demonstrate how to use the strategies in the texts. [2]

When the teachers start a new topic of a science unit, they are required to introduce an article about truth. Then they predict what will happen in that theme with their students. After reading, the

students need to summarize what they have learned.

## 5.2. Practice and Reviewing

Students need the opportunities to practice the strategies with their classmates and review the strategies they have learned or practiced. A large amount of practice and review can guarantee the automation of the strategic use and motivate the students to move from one familiar strategy to another. Pair work is one of the best methods to advance practice and review. After reading one article, teacher can lead the student to find a partner and ask them to reread it with the strategy they knew, let the students discuss the strategy with their partner, later share with their classmates. Finally, teacher could list all the strategies they have used in class in order to emphasize the improvement of the group.

## 5.3. Selecting texts

When we model the strategies, we had better use the complete and real text. Incoherent and discontinuous text is not suitable for figuring out the unknown words with series of clues. Decodable texts usually include confined and refined artificial sentences which is also not fit. Pictures books and graded books are comparatively easier to attract students' attention and interest. Normally they cover wider themes and questions. Teachers should also select the texts in a more balanced way because fiction and non-fiction could model different reading strategies.

The selection is different on Word-level and Text-level reading strategies. Teachers should use them gradually and synthetically.

How to help kids become a word crafter in order to encourage kids to get into the strategy circle and start their journey to shared reading.

## 6. Make Phonics a great starter in early literacy

As far as teaching reading is mentioned, phonic is always in the centre of the hot discussion. In the strategy-centred English class, is phonics a necessary part of it? Many evidence shows, phonics is definitely an important part of any of the early reading plans. However, it is just a part of it and it is not working for all the children. Some of the educators think children will access to a wonderful period and build up a good foundation if they have a very condensed training of emphasizing phonics. Whether to teach phonics is not the main question in the strategic-centred literacy teaching. What teachers need to do more is to integrate Word-level Reading Strategies in our teaching. Effective phonics instruction builds on a child's experiences with print, and should be integrated into a total literacy program –not taught separately. According to the children's different levels, teachers could choose different methods to instruct phonics.

### 6.1. Integration

Teachers integrate phonic rules into the themed unit teaching chronically. In this way, it may be lack of the systematization and direction because of the insufficient study and training. It could be used as a compensatory form of phonic learning.

### 6.2. Comprehensiveness

It is the most effective method of learning phonics. From the learning of the letter name, letter sound, letter combinations, spelling rules to the repeated practice, students' reading fluency and

rdecoding skills quickly grows . With connecting all the coherent periods , it continuously improves children’s reading consciousness and capacity.

### **6.3. Analysis**

Children first recognize a word as a whole, then start to learn the rules behind it. It requires the children to have a large amount of the vocabularies. Children can summarize the regulations through the analysis of the words’ sounds.

## **7. Make Sight words recognized at the first sight**

Crafting words don’t just mean that to use phonics to decode unfamiliar words with the matching of the letter names and sounds, recognizing the sight words within the limited time is also a must. Teachers and parents don’t attach much importance on this part at first, but now as the promotion of the graded books, parents start to notice the importance of them. The difficulties to the kids are these two aspects. First, they can’t understand the content well even with the support of the pictures. Second, many of them can’t match with the phonics rules which confuse them a lot. So increasing the repeated exposure of the sight words really works for little readers. It is more stressed that to train these words in the meaningful text rather than the isolated repeat.

### **7.1 Sight words activity -- Lightning and Star Words**

The employ of word-level strategy :cross-checking, rereading, tracking “Lightning or Star Words refers to the sight words that would be responded quickly. Teachers make it a form or a poster and stick it in the classroom for the children’s references.

During the reading class, students are asked to do Tracking (or Pointing )to Read-aloud. Teachers could use a Magic Wand to attract students’ attention .Students have many ways to repeat these new words. Multiple exercises, rereading for whole class, for small groups or for pairs, can enhance their accuracy, fluency, and reading confidence. Next teachers could lead the children to observe if the Lightning or Star words repeat in the text. After their observations, children could Circle or Trace these words .That is the word level strategy --- Cross-checking

### **7.2 Sight words activity- Word Hunt**

The employ of strategies:confirming, cross-checking

### **7.3 Sight words activity- Fishing**

The employ of strategies:building fluency

## **8. Make Rhymes accelerate young learners’ reading comprehension**

Rhymes should be the materials which are widely used in early literacy. Students could use their experience and knowledge to read and then add some rhythm and rhyming words. Every students would love it. It could reinforce the Word-level strategies with designing the rhyming activities, such as chunking, sliding, and stretching.

### **8.1 Rhymes activity --Rhymes in Context**

The employ of word-level strategy: chunking, sliding

Teachers first choose the stories or create some stories with the rhyming words. And teachers lead the students to pay much attention on the rhyming words. If the stories are long, teachers could choose a small part of it and find out the rhyming words together.

Teachers also could make the students to divide these the rhyming words into several groups and model them “Slide to the end of the word or identify chunks to decode new words.

## 8.2 Rhymes activity—Rhyme Time

The employ of word-level strategy: confirming, cross-checking

## 9. Make fluency a critical gateway to comprehension

Almost all the parents and teachers concern about “Fluency” in English learning process. Not only in the early literacy periods, but also in the advanced literacy periods. Here are some questions which are frequently asked. Is fluency reading fast? Do they have to read aloud? How to instruct them and how to evaluate?

### 9.1. Why is Fluency Important?

We plan to bring up proficient readers who should read quickly, effortlessly and can decode most words automatically. No matter they read aloud or read silently, they can read with expression and notice appropriate phrasing, intonation, insertion of pauses.

As long as the children have mastered the skill of fluency, they could use their cognitive ability to acquire the meaning in their reading and then have the possibility to read for fun or read to learn .So fluency is the foundation of comprehension .The fluency training process is not a single –dimension standard, but an integration of the all-round aims.

### 9.2. What Can Be Done to Improve Fluency?

Students can use choral reading, echo reading, shared reading, and repetitive reading to learn and practice. [3]

Students could get trained in decoding Strategies.

Students learn to picture clues.

Students learn to look for chunks.

Students learn to sound it out.

Get a running start and get my mouth ready. Focus on initial sound and what would make sense.

Skip it. Read to the end of the sentence and then come back to it.

Teachers could elicit games such as Fluency Cube, Spinner Memory, Traffic Light Reading and Zap;

Teachers can use activities such as joke books, poetry, rhythm, rap, rhythmic walks, reader theater techniques, etc. to practice fluency, and lower scoring stages are suitable for beginners.





Teachers could use Self-assessment checklist and rubrics to cultivate the children’s self-consciousness and habits, seeing in Figure 1.

\_\_\_\_\_ 'S FLUENCY REFLECTION

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Listen to your recording and grade your fluency using this rubric.





**1<sup>st</sup> Reading** How long did it take you? \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I read with EXPRESSION (Not like a robot.)		✓	😊	☆
I read in PHRASES (Pausing at punctuation marks.)		✓	😊	☆
My RATE was just right: (Not too Fast, not too slow.)		✓	😊	☆
I read the words ACCURATELY.		✓	😊	☆

I will work on \_\_\_\_\_

Listen to your recording and grade your fluency using this rubric.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading** How long did it take you? \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I read with EXPRESSION (Not like a robot.)		✓	😊	☆
I read in PHRASES (Pausing at punctuation marks.)		✓	😊	☆
My RATE was just right: (Not too Fast, not too slow.)		✓	😊	☆
I read the words ACCURATELY.		✓	😊	☆

I will work on \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 1: Self-assessment checklist and rubrics

To help the students become a fluent reader, they need various forms of practice and creating the performing opportunities and experience the benefits of fluency. Fluency is more like a bridge as a strategy ranking the top among all the strategies. [4] While students are starting to recognize, decode and read words, their decoding speed and accuracy are increasing rapidly through the enormous training. And they can even notice some reading skills like phrasing, intonation, expression and the ability of self-correction. All what they prepare is for comprehension

Text-level Strategies are ways to help students analyse the text logically through the technics.

## 10. Make visualizing a critical reading strategy and help students become better readers

### 10.1. What is visualizing?

Visualizing is a critical reading strategy. Readers make a picture or create a movie in their mind to help themselves better understand the text.

Students combine their own Background Knowledge, Text Evidence and Creativity through picturing a story or a photo. That could help the students memorize the important details, understand the characters and backgrounds, or recall the sequence of the events, so they could deeply analyse the contents that they have learnt.

### 10.2. How do Visualize Strategies help students become better readers?

This strategy is very attractive to all the students. The interaction could help the readers of different levels. Students can make connections with the text, included some struggling readers. Teachers could ask the students to close the eyes to recall and imagine the whole story. They can even make the students to draw the scene and character on the pictures. Especially when some children have read some books of a movie version, it becomes clearer depending on how much they use the strategy visualizing. Students who are good at visualizing usually feel disappointed to the actors and editions in the movie while some other students who have not a strong visualizing ability feel surprised that they like films rather than books

When the children use the Visualizing strategies:

- (1) Become an active and alert reader, making predictions as they read. [5]
- (2) Notice details and specific language in the text.
- (3) Better understand key story elements.
- (4) Understand character emotions, and make connections with them.
- (5) Recall and summarize the text easily and effectively.
- (6) Self-monitor their own comprehension.
- (7) Make inferences as they read.

(8)Get into the world of the book.

Early literacy reading usually have delicate pictures to match with the page. But as the improvement the students' reading level ,they start to read more complicated books, in those books , pictures are far more important than words . As the reduction of the pictures in the book, the students must be able to see what happened in the story. So teaching them visualizing at their early age could set up a firm foundation in their reading.

### 10.3. How to teach Visualizing?

Ask questions while reading –It could help the students develop visualizing strategy.

(1) When you close your eyes and listen to the story, what do you see?

(2) What do you think the author wants you to visualize while you read?

(3) Can you list some of the descriptive details that were included that helped you visualize the text?

(4)What do you think the setting looks like?

(5)What do you think it smells like?

(6) Can you picture a character in your mind?

What are they doing?

(7) Do you see any specific colours while reading?

Besides, the training methods for visualization that I usually use are: First, the teachers need to introduce the requirements for visualization strategies:

Ask the children to close their eyes and just listen to the story told by the teacher, and the teacher will make the scene enriched through changing the voice, tones and expressive emotions. Besides, the teacher will also model the things which are seen in their mind, and teach them the techniques of using five senses to imagine and using some sentences to express. Such as (1). I am picturing (2) I can imagine .... (3) I visualize that (4) In my mind, I see /hear/smell/taste/touch...

After that, teachers could read a story for them, rather than show them some pictures. And with telling the students, they will not be shown the pictures on the page, what they need to do is to draw that picture and pay much attention to the words and details on that page.

At last, the students will share what they have seen in their mind with the group members or the whole class. The pictures in everyone's mind are so alike but still different in some way. That is an interesting phenomenon for everyone to see.

Of course, if you can apply some of the graphic organizers into the visualizing training, it will be much more obvious to see the effect, seeing in Figure 2.

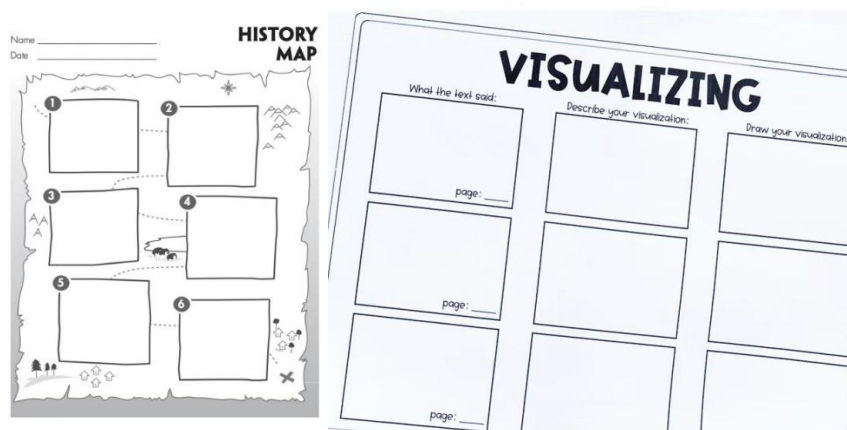


Figure 2: The example for the visualizing training



## 10.4. How to assess your students on visualizing?

The teachers need to observe the overall students' performance in using the visualizing strategy. All the questions below would be of assistance in observing.

(1) How detailed are their descriptions?

(2) Do they use all 5 senses?

(3) Do the details they describe accurately portray what the text says?

(4) Do they visualize the most important parts of the story, or are their mental images not relevant?

(5) Do they need you to prompt them to use the strategy, or are they using it without assistance?

For your reference, here is a visualizing Rubric which could be used to evaluate and instruct in using visualizing strategy, seeing in Table 1.

Table 1: A visualizing rubric (1)

Minimal	Beginning	Approaching	Proficient	Mastery
1	2	3	4	5
No images or images bear no relationships to text.	Illustrations are limited to simple objects mentioned in texts that may only be nonessential details.	Images illustrate one or two items directly mentioned in the text. Images demonstrate some inferences but key ideas and /or main concepts are only partially included	Images illustrate elements of character, setting and events in text. Images reflect understanding of information and vocabulary presented in text.	Images illustrate key elements of character, setting and events in text. Images reflect understanding of significant information and vocabulary presented in text. Images are detailed. Images extend or enhance the text with students' own interpretations, experiences and emotions

And you can also guide your students to use the self-visualizing rubrics to do the evaluations and assessments, seeing in Table 2.

Table 2: A visualizing rubric (2)

1	2	3	4
Word Reading Only Eyes Closed	Visualizing some details : One eye open	Visualizing all details : two eyes open	Visualizing all details and using other senses : Two eyes open with sunglasses
I am very confused about how to visualize. I think I mostly just need words on the page and don't picture the characters, setting or what is happening in my mind.	I can visualize what I am reading in my mind, but I may not picture all the characters, setting and what is happening very clearly on every page. Sometimes I forget to visualize and just read the words.	I can visualize what I am reading in my mind. I can imagine the characters, the setting, and what is happening very clearly.	I can visualize what I am reading in my mind. I can imagine the characters, the setting and what is happening very clearly. I can also use my other senses (sound, smell, touch, taste )and I can teach someone how to do this when they read .

## 11. Conclusion

With the large amount research method, the current situation of the application of the word-level and text level strategies was investigated but still under further exploration. Most of the Primary School English teachers agree on the importance of the proper reading strategy use in English reading classes and also guarantee the high match and consistency with the new English curriculum standard. The development of students' core competence will be highly manifested in lots of the reading classes. And the appropriate and accurate use of the strategies will continuously bring the sense of achievements in teaching young learners, and gradually the systematic knowledge and adequate training on this aspect will be set up. Although the research on the application of word-level and text-level reading strategies in teaching young learners has an actual meaning in current English reading classes, limitation and restriction are still there and constant improvement is also needed .My research can be regarded as something that could lay the foundation to advance the study so that more comprehensive and professional research on this issue will be carried out.

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