

METHODS TO IMPROVE PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION OF PIRLS TEXTS

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Annotation: This article analyzes methods for improving the reading comprehension level of primary school students in PIRLS texts. The research results help identify effective teaching strategies.

Keywords: reading comprehension, PIRLS, vocabulary, normative speed, reading, informational text, scientific text, literary text.

Introduction

One of the essential skills that primary school students must acquire is, undoubtedly, the ability to read texts. First-grade students gradually learn letters during the literacy period. After a certain period, they can read any word. However, an even more important and complex skill than reading itself is understanding what they read.

Reading comprehension is the ability to process a text, grasp its meaning, and connect it with prior knowledge. [1]

Materials and Methods

This study utilized the following methods:

Theoretical analysis – studying PIRLS criteria and advanced pedagogical practices.

Experimental method – testing various reading methods in the classroom.

Surveys and interviews – conducting discussions with teachers and students.

People read written information to obtain the necessary knowledge and apply it in practical activities. Unfortunately, only 42.9% of fourth-grade students in our country can fully comprehend what they read. [4] This means that more than half of fourth-grade students do not fully understand the content of the texts they read. Several factors may contribute to this issue:

- Limited vocabulary;
- Inability to read fluently;
- Lack of understanding of the relationship between words in a sentence;
- Insufficient reading habits, etc.

According to the 2021 PIRLS study on primary school students' reading comprehension levels, parents' attitudes toward reading also influence students' performance. In Uzbekistan:

Children of parents who "love reading" scored an average of 449 points;

Children of parents who "occasionally read" scored 431 points;

Children of parents who "dislike reading" scored 401 points. [5]

Thus, improving students' reading comprehension requires collaboration with parents. Hearing their parents explain the text helps children visualize it better and retain new information more effectively. Since children grow up in this conversational environment, parents' simple explanations can be more effective than a teacher's complex scientific definition. Therefore,

teachers should assign additional tasks for students to complete with their parents. Instead of asking students about their completion, teachers should check with parents. This collaboration with parents can significantly enhance students' reading comprehension skills.

Results and Discussion

Another key aspect of reading and comprehension is reading at an appropriate speed, where reading fluency aligns with comprehension. Reading too fast or too slow can hinder a full understanding of the text. [3]

To achieve optimal reading speed, students should be stopped several times during reading to check their understanding. This practice encourages them to pay more attention the next time. If the text consists of multiple sections, students can be asked to assign small subheadings based on the content. This helps them differentiate between sections and understand their connections. Such exercises enable students to grasp the text's overall meaning more effectively.

The most important lesson to instill in students is that understanding is more important than merely reading a lot.

One of the reasons why students struggle to understand what they read is their inability to grasp the relationships between words in a sentence. To address this issue, students should be taught that each word in a sentence is connected to other words. To determine whether a student understands the meaning of a word, they can be asked what other words could replace it. Alternatively, selecting specific words and replacing them with their opposites can help students see how the overall meaning of the sentence changes. This approach makes it easier to understand word relationships within a sentence.

Additionally, the following methods can improve students' reading comprehension:

1. Preparation for Reading

This step involves activating students' prior knowledge. For example, a discussion on the topic of the text can be held with questions like: "What do you know about this topic?" or "Have you heard about this before?" Then, based on the title or key words, students can make predictions: "What do you think this text will be about?" Next, key words should be explained and used in sentences.

For better comprehension, the text should be read expressively and calmly. To deepen understanding and analysis, students must learn to distinguish important points. This involves teaching them to differentiate between the main idea and supporting details. Asking questions such as "Who? What? Where? When? Why?" and encouraging students to form their own questions is also effective. Additionally, discussing each section and summarizing its main idea after reading helps reinforce comprehension skills over time.

A comparison of reading skills shows that Uzbek students perform better in identifying explicit information and making interpretations, scoring 441 points in this area. However, for more advanced skills like interpretation, integration (combining information), and evaluation, their performance is lower, with an average score of 430 points. [2] This indicates the need to enhance students' ability to interpret, integrate, and evaluate information.

2. Developing Critical and Logical Thinking

To foster critical thinking, students can be asked to create an alternative ending for a text. After reading, they can brainstorm different conclusions. The teacher may ask, "What would you do if you were in the character's place?" This requires students to rely not only on the text but also on their personal experiences. Repeating this exercise regularly helps develop analytical skills. Over time, students will begin evaluating characters' decisions and expressing their opinions.

Additional questions can include: “What would have happened if the character had made a different choice?” or “What lesson did you learn from this text?”

3. Understanding Different Text Types

Reading comprehension varies based on the type of text. According to PIRLS, Uzbek students understand literary texts better than informational texts. The average score for literary texts was 438, while for informational texts, it was 434. [5]

Conclusion

To improve reading comprehension, students need structured support in vocabulary, sentence structure, and critical thinking. Engaging parents in the process and using diverse reading strategies can enhance students’ ability to interpret, analyze, and integrate information effectively.

In Uzbekistan, working with informational texts presents some challenges for primary school students. The reason is that such texts lack a narrative structure—unlike fiction, scientific texts do not have elements like an introduction, plot development, climax, and conclusion, which help students retain information.

The best way to improve comprehension of informational texts is to engage with them more frequently. The more students read age-appropriate scientific texts, the faster their ability to understand and retain information develops. Therefore, increasing the variety of texts presented to primary school students has a significant impact on improving their reading comprehension skills.

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