

Reading, Its Development and Models

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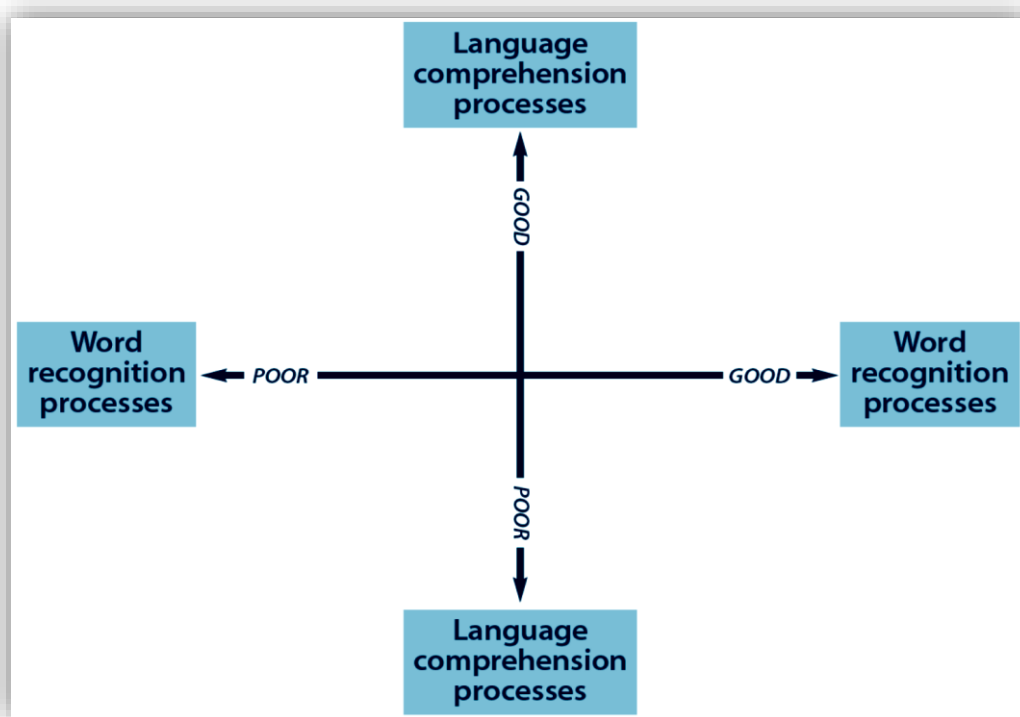
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Annotation: The article presents that reading fluency is the ability to read with sufficient ease and accuracy that one can focus attention on the meaning and message of the text. Reading fluency is most commonly assessed by listening to learners as they read aloud. When readers lack fluency, their oral reading sounds hesitant, lacking the accuracy, rhythm and flow that indicate confident understanding of the text.

Key Words: reading, models, reading comprehension, word recognition, simple view of reading, bottom-up models, word encoding, lexical access, interactive models, top-down models.

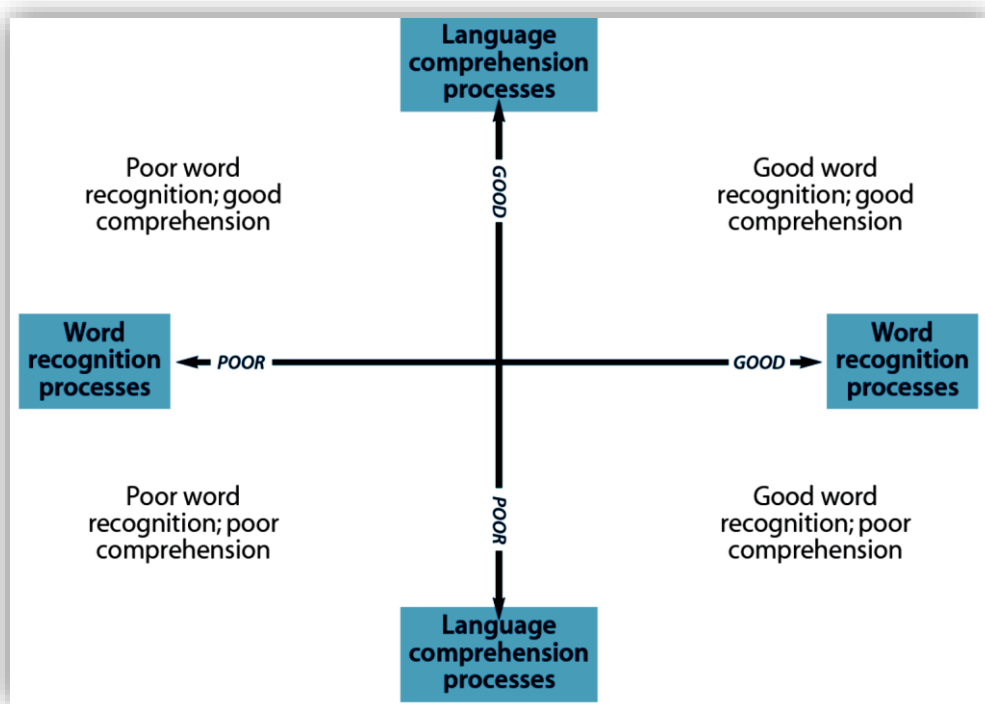
Reading comprehension is a highly interactive process that takes place between a reader and a text. Individual readers will bring variable levels of skills and experiences to these interactions. These include language skills, cognitive resources and world knowledge. Any act of reading occurs within a particular sociocultural and emotional context.

The idea that reading comprehension depends on oral language skill is captured in the 'simple view of reading' discussed in Appendix 1 of the final report: *Independent review of the teaching of early reading* (March 2006). The 'simple view of reading' is shown in Figure 1:



According to this view of reading, reading comprehension is the product of word recognition skills and listening comprehension skills. Recognizing (reading) the words on the page is vital to reading comprehension; if a child cannot read the words, then they will quite obviously be unable to extract meaning from the written word. Once written words are recognized they can be understood as long as they are in the child's oral vocabulary. Unfamiliar words that are not already in the child's oral vocabulary start to acquire aspects of their meaning from the context within which they have been read; that is, reading gradually becomes a major source of vocabulary development. Once the words are recognized, they can be input to the language comprehension system to understand what a writer conveys. It is well recognized that children vary in the ease with which they can decode. They also vary in their listening comprehension, and consequently in their reading comprehension. An effective reader has good word reading and good listening

comprehension skills, as shown in the upper right quadrant of the figure below. Poor reading comprehension can occur with or without poor word reading, as shown in both lower quadrants of the figure 2:



From an educational viewpoint this means that practitioners and teachers must encourage the development of oral language skills in order to safeguard children's reading comprehension. They also need to encourage the development of specific strategies for reading comprehension and, importantly, they need to encourage children to practice their developing reading skills. Children need frequent opportunities to read during shared, guided and independent reading sessions.

Reading comprehension research has a long and rich history. There is much that we can say about both the nature of reading comprehension as a process and about effective reading comprehension instruction. Most of what we know has been learned since 1975. Why have we been able to make so much progress so fast? We believe that part of the reason behind this steep learning curve has been the lack of controversy about teaching comprehension. Unlike decoding, oral reading, and reading readiness, those who study reading comprehension instruction have avoided much of the acrimony characteristic of work in other aspects of reading. [1]

A fully-fledged theoretical model of reading does not exist yet. Nevertheless, in the last four decades, tremendous progress has been made in the development of reading theory. Theory has moved from quite simple views of reading to more elaborate frameworks that involve cognitive, metacognitive and motivational aspects. While some researchers focused on the identification of sub-skills, others have developed models to explain the reading process. In these models, a distinction is made between cognitive processes of lower order (word level processes) and processes of higher order (text level processes). On the word level, two processes are involved: encoding the visual pattern of a printed word (word encoding) and accessing its meaning in a mental dictionary or lexicon (lexical access). Text-level processes are higher level comprehension and integration processes at sentence and text level. Text level processes compute semantic, syntactic, and referential relations between words, phrases, and sentences in a text.

There is now considerable agreement that both word recognition processes and higher-level comprehension processes contribute to individual differences in reading performance. However, there are fewer consensuses concerning their relative contributions. Moreover, no consensus exists on the amount of variables that contribute to reading development. Reading comprehension depends on three major factors: language, cognition, and reading skills. Hoover and Gough proposed that: "reading consists of only two parts, decoding and linguistic comprehension, both necessary for reading success, and neither sufficient by

itself".[2] In their view, skill in reading can be simply characterized as the product of these two factors. Accordingly, they called their theory the *simple view of reading*.

Carver, however, argued that empirical support for the *product* aspect of the simple view of reading is "scanty at best" and proposed that reading ability can be predicted by simply averaging students' levels of word recognition and their level of language comprehension, rather than taking the product of the two factors. [3]. Bast and Reitsma, on the basis of evidence that there may be more factors involved in reading development than just word recognition and linguistic comprehension, have argued that the simple view theory is just *too* simple.

In *bottom-up models*, the development of reading skills is said to be a linear, accumulative process; the mastering of lower processes is seen as conditional to the mastering of higher processes. The serial stage model of Gough is a typical example of a bottom-up model. [4]

The lower cognitive processes *word encoding* and *lexical access* play a central role in this model. First, students learn sound-symbol correspondence, then they learn the principles of decoding, and only after that they learn to interpret sentences and texts. In reading instruction, this focus on word recognition sometimes led to an overemphasis on elementary skills, practice with decontextualized language and isolated component skills. Several researchers have challenged this reductionistic and additive model of learning. [5] On the other hand, there is general consensus that automatic decoding is an important skill because comprehension can be seriously impeded when readers have to struggle too much with decoding.

Conversely, in *top-down models*, the reading process is said to be driven by higher cognitive processes, such as the use of context clues and prior knowledge. The reader is continually engaged in interpreting and guessing while reading. In the top down view, the higher-order processes support and control the reading process; the decisions made at higher levels are used to guide choices at lower levels. The more a reader is able to make correct predictions, the less confirmation via the text he or she needs. Reading is seen as a "psycholinguistic guessing game"; the reader need not use all textual clues. However, other researchers have shown good readers do not use more context clues than poor readers. There is evidence that at the level of word recognition, poor readers make more use of contextual clues than good readers, in order to compensate for their slow word encoding. [6]

In addition, good readers do not appear to guess much during reading, indicating that it is not only higher processes that control the reading process.

In *interactive models*, the view is taken that during reading both lower and higher processes are used at the same time and in interaction with each other. In an early interactive model of reading, proposed that the processing of text involves a flexible interaction between higher- and lower-level processes, such as the use of general and semantic context, syntactic environment, and surrounding letters. [7]

The process runs from lower to higher levels and vice versa. Dependent on the ability of the reader, alternately lower or higher processes are brought into action. Processes are assumed to influence each other. Moreover, one process can start before another has been completed.

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