# Effective Strategies for Developing the Decoding Skill of the First Year Students at the Computer University, Taunggyi

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*Abstract* – **The purpose of this research paper is to develop the decoding skill in reading of first year students at the Computer University, Taunggyi. English is an international language and today is the age of technology. Therefore, students should have not only a good command of English but also computer knowledge. To catch up with the latest technology, students must be skillful in English language because most of websites, technical books and prescribed texts in every university are written in English. Reading is one of the most important things in learning English. The more the students read many books or passages, the more range of vocabulary they can get. The first stage in reading is phonetic decoding or word attack. This is an important part of early reading experience for many computer students.**

*Keywords* – **Decoding, Developing, Reading, Skill, Vocabulary**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is the most effective tool for developing the vocabulary skill. The more students read, the more vocabulary they can get. Students can get mental power by reading many books or the prescribed texts. Nevertheless, sometimes students may encounter many difficult words and phrases to read and translate in reading passages. Not knowing sentence structures, tenses, usages of word and idioms make students delay in their studying. To understand the whole passage in details, firstly the students must pay attention to their passage, find words meaning, idioms, and phrasal verbs and must know sentence structures, patterns, and so on. Vocabularies are the important part of decoding skill. As the meaning of a word can be changed depending on the sentence structure, students need to use the lexical items effectively in the sentences. There are some factors that can make students difficult to understand and translate in their reading.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Decoding skill plays an important role in the process of reading and understanding. Students will be unable to read many words. Thus, they have no reliable way to translate the written text into their familiar spoken form of language. Until their word recognition skill catches up to their language skill, they are unable to independently read the reading passages that match the sophistication of their spoken vocabularies, concepts, and knowledge.

Decoding is the ability to pronounce the words as the reader encounters them in the text. Many students are poor readers and have difficulty in decoding words from the text. Various terms have been used to describe the way students come to recognize printed words. Teachers begin with a discussion intended to sort out a set of easily confused terms: the code, decoding, word attack, word recognition, phonics, and sight words. To achieve fast and effortless word identification, a reader must understand how letter patterns map onto pronunciation and, for printed words that have not been previously encountered, must be able to produce an approximate pronunciation. If the approximate pronunciation can be mapped onto a known word, lexical and semantic information can then be retrieved. For many students the first step of learning associations between letter patterns and pronunciation is difficult and these students often do not develop adequate decoding skills.

Typically advancing readers are able to employ a variety of strategies to decode unknown words. The decoding skill is important because this early skill accurately predicts later skill in reading comprehension. There is strong and persuasive evidence that the students who get off to a slow start rarely become strong readers. To promote the ability of understanding the decoding skill in reading, the teachers as well as the students need the effective strategies and techniques. All the teachers hope their students to read easily without difficulty when they read the passage from the text. If the students are aware of the classification of the words, guessing meaning and context clues from the text, and ability of consideration on the author's opinion in the text depending on the facts from opinion, the text or reading book they learn will be easy to understand and translate for them.

### A. Encouraging Wide Reading

Poor readers often read less, because reading is difficult and frustrating for them. This means they don't read enough to improve their vocabulary. Thus, all teachers should encourage getting wide reading. Wide reading provides opportunities to grow in vocabulary, concepts, and knowledge of how text is written. Getting the students to read more may be the more valuable thing to improve their vocabulary. By reading avidly, students develop greater cognitive skills. Although direct instruction plays a crucial part in vocabulary growth; most of the words the students learn will be acquired through incidental learning, as they read on their own. Students should learn between 5 to 10 percent of previously unknown words from a single reading. And

wide reading extends the rapid recognition of word parts and words. This fluency allows the maturing reader to focus attention on actively constructing and responding to the meaning of the word.

To be truly beneficial, wide reading should include text with various level of difficulty. Students reading at or below their current level will not dramatically increase their vocabulary. When students read text that consists primarily of unknown words, they usually become frustrated. To help them get the most out of incidental learning, they should read some books for fun and other for challenge. Encouraging students to read a wide variety of books is probably the best education teachers can give them but sometimes it seems an uphill struggle. The teachers have put together a collection of tips and tricks to encourage reading.

The importance of wide reading in the growth of students' vocabulary is critical. Given the staggering number of new words the students must add to their vocabularies each year. Through wide independent reading, students come in contact with vocabulary that rarely occurs in spoken language but that is much more likely to be encountered in printed language.

As a wide reading is a key to success in reading skill, teachers need to persuade students to get a speed reading from a slow reading. By doing this, students can get a range of vocabulary, the pronunciation of the words, and read smoothly the reading passages or texts. Many researches confirm that students who read more do read, write and spell better, have larger vocabularies and better control of complex grammar rules. The best way to ensure students develop a strong command of written and spoken English is to encourage wide, self-selected reading.

*B.  Emphasizing Learning from Context*

One of the best ways that the students have to use is emphasizing learning from context in their reading passages. An important part of building the students' reading skills is also learning how to guess what unfamiliar words mean. A word that the students have never seen before will appear in a sentence. Therefore, students sometimes need to use context to help identify unknown word. When they encounter unknown words or unfamiliar words in their reading passages, they have to find the contextual words to translate or understand the whole passage depending on the topic they read. Although they come across such unfamiliar words in the passage, sometime sentences give clues that can help the students guess at definitions of unfamiliar words.

Context includes the surrounding text as well as picture clues. When the students see a picture clue in reading passage, they can guess conceptual meaning and know what the topic is about. If beginning readers who learn foreign language rely heavily on context as a word identification strategy, they experience considerable difficulty in developing their sight-word vocabularies. Even when they correctly identify a word using context, they will most likely not know the word the next time they encounter it in the reading texts- they have no way of holding onto if in memory because of letters and sounds within the words. Most of the words acquired through incidental reading are learned through context.

Students learn from context by making connection between the new words and the text in which it appears. They also learn words through repeated exposures, gaining more comprehension of a word's meanings and function by seeing it several times in different contexts.

The effectiveness of learning is that students should know how to use context clues. Identifying and using context clues is an effective technique for increasing vocabulary. Besides, learning words from context is an innate skill that all readers use.

To improve and make students awareness of the importance of context clues, the teacher needs to discuss unfamiliar words in the class. Encouraging a general awareness of words as fun and interesting in the context clues will help students pursue their own vocabulary development. Traditionally, vocabulary instruction has focused on having students look up word meanings and memorize them. This teaching approach, however, provides only superficial and short- term learning of words. Students who simply memorize word meanings frequently have trouble applying the information in definitions and often make mistakes about the meanings. Students must be aware that many words have several possible meanings.

To know a word, students need to see it in context and learn how its meaning relates to the words around it. When students are given several sentences that use a word in different ways, they begin to see how a word's meaning can change and shift depending on its context. They also need to see words in different contexts in order to learn them thoroughly.

*C.  Using Prefixes, Suffixes, and Roots*

The importance of building students' vocabulary is using word parts to figure out the meaning of words. It can be a particularly useful strategy in reading content-area text.  The majority of English words have been created through the combination of morphemic elements, that is, prefixes and suffixes with base words and words roots. If the students understand how this combinatorial process works, they possess one of the most powerful understandings necessary for vocabulary growth. Getting information from prefixes, suffixes, and roots can help students learn and remember words.

English vocabulary is enormous and grows steadily with technological and cultural assimilations. The vast majority of the new words introduced , and a great percentage of the words used to express abstract ideas , are complex words that are made up of simple word parts ( prefixes , roots ,and suffixes ) that have their own definitions and , when familiar to the student of English , can be understood in context with an exact definition. This is the foundation of the system which teachers present to their students. By slowly and steadily studying the most prominent prefixes, roots and suffixes, students can acquire a vocabulary that is far greater than the sum of its parts. Adding affixes to existing words (the base or root) to form new words is common in academic English. Prefixes are added to the front of the base, whereas suffixes are added to the end of the base. Prefixes usually do not change the class of the base word, but suffixes usually do change the class of word. It is not always easy to figure out the exact meanings for words from prefixes,

suffixes, and roots. But knowing these word parts can help the students gain at least some idea of the meanings of many words without having to look them up in a dictionary.

Knowing which words are prefixes or suffixes or roots in reading passage, students can determine or guess the words they have read in what definition it has. For example, the meaning of word is whether negative sense or positive sense. By adding prefix into the root, the meaning of word may change. Learning these factors can help and support students recognize the words in context and add to their comprehension of the words. The most crucial requirement in this learning word is a basic understanding of the most prominent prefixes, roots and suffixes in the English language. Hence, the teacher can begin to teach word-part strategy by telling students that words can be composed of prefixes and suffixes or roots. Learning to break words into affixes and roots will make some long words more manageable for students who may be intimidated by the length of words such as 'intercontinental'. To break words into parts, the teacher can teach them to cover prefix such as 'inter' in the words 'intercontinental' and see if they recognize the rest of the word. Then the teacher has them cover the suffix '-tal', leaving 'continent'. Further modeling and practice with adding and removing prefixes and suffixes such as un- , super- , anti- , mis- , –able,-tion, - ment and so on, will give students facility with breaking words down into parts. If the morphological knowledge develops, teachers can model how it may be applied to determining the meaning of unfamiliar words encountered in the reading passage.

### D. Word Attack Strategies

Reading is not just pronouncing words –it requires understanding. Most experienced readers use a variety of strategies to understand text. Research has shown that teachers can teach by using the effective strategies to beginning readers. In these strategies, one of the most proficient strategies is word attack. Word attack strategies can help students decode, pronounce, and understand unfamiliar words. They help students attack words piece by piece or from a different angle.

Word attack skill refer to the student's ability to look at an unknown word and decode it by using his or her knowledge of the basic components (or phonemes) and the context in which the word lines. The student needs to acquire the basic word attack skills or decoding skills in learning the foreign language. It is aimed at teaching multisyllabic words, increasing fluency, and helping the students read expository text or content-area textbooks. For instance, a lesson may begin with a review of word identification skills and learning vocabulary words to develop. Then, the student reads a passage. Students are required to respond to the question without using the book and without the help of the teacher. When errors are made, the teacher prompts the students to correct those errors and asks them comprehension questions that are located throughout the passage in the teacher's manual. When the students make correct responses to the question, the teacher provides verbal praise, and students are directed to locate the answer in the paragraph when they respond inaccurately. The goal is for the student to eventually read passage making zero errors. More advanced word attack skills involve using context, prefixes or suffixes or a dictionary to determine what a word means.

As word attack strategies allow the students to understand 'new words' in better way, this strategy focus on decoding and pronunciation. If a student has trouble with word comprehension, this strategy would be very useful in a classroom. It is focused on the students looking at the word from a different perspective, and attacking the words from the passage piece-by-piece. By breaking or classifying the words into smaller pieces, the student will be able to focus on smaller (more specific) portion of the text. Thus, teachers can use the word attack strategy for developing students' decoding skill.

To promote students' abilities, teachers can also use picture clues that familiar with them. By using it, students may be provided with a version of what the sentence may be about. As it is also important to start by sounding out each individual letter in the text, teacher asks students to read each letter sound out aloud. Next, students blend the sounds together and try to say the word that makes sense in the sentence. Looking for familiar letter chunks such as sound, symbols, prefixes, suffixes, ending, the whole words or base words is one of the most prominent techniques in word attack skill. Students need to connect to a word they know when they encounter an unfamiliar word in their reading passage. After that, they should compare the familiar word to the unfamiliar word and decide which one is suitable for the meaning of it. If students get sense, they will need to use the known word in the sentence. By doing so, the meanings of the two words are close enough for understanding.

When students read the text, they should read the sentence more than once. Then, they need to think about what word might make the sentence understandable and try the word and see if the sentence makes sense. Rereading the sentence and thinking about the concept of a sentence make students remember words. Thus, students should keep reading till they encounter unknown words in a sentence. They think of the unfamiliar word that they read at past and look for clues. If the word appears again, compare the second sentence to the first. To be skillful in word attack skill, students need to have pre- existing knowledge. Having prior knowledge for a student is easy to learn the new language that he or she is interested in. Students always keep thinking about what they know about the subject of the book, paragraphs or sentences. They need to use their previous knowledge and the concept that they explored for understanding and translating when they are reading unfamiliar sentences or passages. By doing so, they can improve their reading skill.

### E. Compare and Contrast Ideas

Students' awareness is focused on when the author connect ideas about the topic that students may not know, with concepts they may already know in this strategy. This allows students to retrieve prior knowledge to try and figure out what the author is trying to state. Compare and contrast instruction includes identifying author's use of comparisons and reader's ability to make comparisons. It focuses on using similes, metaphors, and analogies.

This strategy is one of the effective tools for improving students' reading abilities. It allows students to think about the entire passage they have learnt. The teacher can introduce the general concept of compare / contrast, and then read a text or a passage to the class aloud, that the class has previously read. It is a better way to retrieve the information from the students that has previously been obtained in the class. Next, the teacher has to introduce and read a new text or passage to the class that has a similar subject as the previous text. By asking students to read the two texts on similar topic, students can note points of similarity or difference of content. If students know the text or passage they have read is a simple or a metaphorical article, they can discuss how the sentences are related to the topic and will respond, or write down an answer in their note book.

Discussion about the topic that the students have already learned makes them remember facts in their memory. In this section, the teacher needs to ask many questions that help students compare and contrast ideas. Students also think step by step to retrieve their information for an answer. This technique plays as an important role among the reading strategies for developing students' abilities. Students have to distinguish facts and the author's opinion when they are reading. When they face with difficulties concerned with the topic, understanding compare and contrast ideas that the author expressed in a text can also handle their problems and reach their goals depending on their effort.

*F.  Sequence Events*

It is important to know the order or sequence that events take place in the text. It helps students understand what they read. This strategy will allow the students to be able to put into context what the text is presenting, and why each of these events is substantial for the text as a whole. This is an important strategy for students to learn because it overflows into the subjects that will be taught in the academic setting (steps for cooking, scientific processes, etc.). Sequencing seems like an easy skill to teach and learn that some may not spend as much time on it as they should. However, it is a skill that crosses over into other curriculum area and should be a skill that is mastered. Understanding what sequencing is, the key words used with sequencing, and why it is so important will not only help students academically, but also in their everyday life as well. Sequencing puts events in order from first to last. It allows the reader to chronologically visualise what is happening in an event.

Knowing the right words to convey sequential, chronological or time order makes students better comprehension in their reading passage or an event. Words that indicate sequence are first, then, finally, last, while, during, and after meanwhile, in a while, as soon as, second, in addition, furthermore, final. Students need to get teachers' guidance for their comprehension about the sequence of the topic. It can help students to organise and comprehend key information. They can sequence events in short, decodable passage in order they occur by practising and using the sequence format. When teaching sequencing, it is important to ask sequencing types of questions. These questions make the students have to think about the order of the event to be able to answer.

They need to understand where to look or think when the question is asking about before, or during, or in addition to. With the help of time order words and their visualisation of the event, students should be able to answer these questions.

Sequencing is such a fun skill to teach. For students to be successful there are so many ways for them to practise this skill. Sometime students encounter difficulty identifying the sequence of events, in this situation they have to read each sentence from the beginning following along with their finger. Then, as they read each highlighted sentence, they can identify the appropriate number correctly. According to Carnine, D.W.,Silbert,J., & Kame´enui, E.J.(1997) , following the partner activity can bring students back together and review each sentence that was marked and the order events occurred. Therefore, teachers can also get opportunities for promoting their students' reading skill by using the mentioned strategies and techniques.

*G.  Carousel Brainstorm*

Carousel brainstorming is a kind of group discussion. Students can share their previous knowledge or a topic they have learned in groups. Discussion with group is more effective than reading only one to retrieve information about the topic. Carousel brainstorming allows students to activate prior knowledge while working in groups and moving around the room. As it is a student-centered method for generating and sharing large amounts of data, students are motivated to participate. Students should be active participants. Thus, teachers need to encourage them to promote active learning within the classroom. Teachers may also generally evaluate a student's level of participation when they collaborate with group.

Carousel brainstorming is an excellent way to engage students who learn English language because it activates their background knowledge. By using this strategy, students can get opportunities to make connections to the new content learning, and they can prepare and be aware of how to overcome for their difficulties. Providing a personal connection for the students to new content learning will help to build students' interest. This strategy can be used for creating subtopics for a main topic. It can be a way of organising information, which can help for deeper understanding of the content learning. It can also facilitate the development of group skills (brainstorming, discussion, communicating information). Another benefit for the students is integrating group work and movement into this brainstorming activity.

Discussions are also important when they are doing their lessons as a team. These ensure coordination of knowledge between all team members. This activity will allow students to be able to see relations between subtopics and the main idea of a topic. Furthermore, carousel brainstorming allows students to think more critically and in depth about topics.

## III. DATA ANALYSIS

In order to develop the decoding skill of the first year Computer students, by questioning their needs and weaknesses, the language teachers respond that a small number of students feel the effectiveness of learning

English in current education. Students are interested in developing their decoding skill. Although they seem eager to learn the target language, they do not have much time to study it because of their specialised subjects. Thus, teachers should train their students to become the proficient readers within the time allotted. It is a chance to train students by being aware of their weaknesses.

## IV. FINDINGS

According to the students' answers to the questionnaires, students accept that not only reading skill but also the enrichment of vocabulary are very important in their learning. Although they have been learning this skill from primary to university, they cannot tackle reading tasks efficiently. Not knowing the usages of idiom and phrasal verb and lacking the pre-existing knowledge make them hinder their reading improvement as they are weak in vocabulary enrichment. Thus, they need to pratise more. The teachers also guide them to improve not only their reading skill but also vocabulary enrichment in their study time.

## V. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It seems that the minority of students generally have a positive outlook regarding learning the content in prescribed course book and IELTS text book. Although they have positive ideas towards the target language, they pay less attention to reading skill. When the students read a passage, they encounter many difficulties in learning scientific terms, medical terms and unfamiliar words. Moreover, they cannot guess the concept of meaning, if they encounter unknown words in reading passage. The teachers also respond that if they do not translate the reading passage, students cannot answer comprehension questions and they lose students' interest. Therefore, the teachers explain to understand the reading passage so that students can answer the questions independently. This facts show that without any assistance, students cannot understand the text fully. Thus, teachers need to explain and teach how to tackle the meaning of a word and the way to develop their reading skill.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This research paper is intended to develop the decoding skill for the first year computer students. It is also useful for the language teachers who are responsible for conducting the course. As a result, students will become to know how to decode unfamiliar words in their reading. The more they pratise by using these techniques or strategies, the more power of self-expression and confidence they can get.

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