

## THE ROLE OF MULTIPLE CHOICE AND SHORT-ANSWER QUESTION FORMATS IN ASSESSING READING SKILLS

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### ABSTRACT

*Assessment is an integral part of language learning, and it is essential to determine the progress and proficiency of a learner. There are different types of assessment methods used in language education, including Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) and Short Answer Questions (SAQs). Both MCQs and SAQs are crucial in assessing language skills, and they serve different purposes in the evaluation process. Therefore, it is essential to use both MCQs and SAQs in language assessment to provide a comprehensive evaluation of a learner's language proficiency. The present article discusses their importance in terms of assessing reading skills.*

**Key words:** *reading comprehension, a receptive skill, evaluation, tests, multiple choice questions, short answer questions, a specific response, assessment, test items, reading proficiency, advantages, disadvantages.*

### INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is an essential skill that has international importance. It is the ability to understand, interpret, and analyze written text. Strong reading comprehension skills are crucial for success in academics, careers, and everyday life. In the academic world, reading comprehension is necessary for students to succeed. It is not only important for understanding textbook material but also for comprehending complex research papers and articles. Without strong reading skills, students may struggle to understand the material presented to them, leading to poor grades and academic performance. Reading comprehension is also crucial for career success. Many professions require employees to read and interpret large amounts of information. Lawyers, doctors, and engineers are just a few examples of careers where strong reading skills are essential. In addition, employees who can quickly and accurately understand written instructions, emails, and reports are highly valued in the workplace. Beyond academics and careers, reading comprehension is vital for everyday life. Reading is a fundamental skill that allows people to access information

about current events, technology, and culture. It enables individuals to make informed decisions about their health, finances, and personal lives. Moreover, reading can be a source of pleasure and relaxation, providing an escape from the stresses of daily life. The importance of reading comprehension is not limited to one country or culture. It is a skill that is essential for individuals in all parts of the world. In our globalized society, the ability to understand and analyze written text is crucial for communication and collaboration across borders. It is necessary for individuals to comprehend information from different cultures and perspectives, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of diversity.

### **METHODS USED**

The ability to process literature, understand its meaning, and integrate it with what the reader already knows is referred to as reading comprehension. Below there are some of the required essential skills in efficient reading comprehension:

- Grasp the meaning of a word in context, know the meaning of words
- Follow the structure of a passage and locate antecedents and references
- Draw inferences regarding the contents of a passage, identify the primary thought of a passage
- Respond to questions raised in a text
- Determine the tone of a piece by recognizing the literary techniques or propositional structures used
- Comprehend the situational mood (agents, objects, temporal and spatial reference points, casual and purposeful inflections, and so on) conveyed for claims, questioning, commanding, abstaining, and so on.

Vocabulary and reading comprehension are tightly related. The ability to decode, identify, and pronounce words is obvious, but knowing what the words mean has a significant and direct impact on knowing what any single paragraph implies while skimming through a reading material. It has been demonstrated that pupils with a lower vocabulary comprehend less of what they read than other students (Nielsen, 2013). It has been proposed that improving word groupings, complex vocabulary such as homonyms or words with multiple meanings, and those with figurative meanings such as idioms, similes, collocations, and metaphors are useful practices for boosting understanding (Tompkins, 2011).

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

“Reading is a receptive skill that entails extracting meaning from a text that someone sees in an efficient manner using some procedures. It is similar to obtaining

important information from a commercial” (Harmer, 2007; Grellet, 2007). The major issue with evaluating a receptive skill is that the conduct, unlike writing and speaking abilities, is not openly observable. Because of the receptiveness of reading ability, the act of reading cannot ever demonstrate its successful accomplishment. As a result, assignments to test reading ability should be designed in such a way that they provide evidence of learners' successful reading while minimizing interference with the act of reading. If the questions require too much writing and the candidates are weak in their writing skills, the candidates may fail to demonstrate their proper knowledge of reading. “Using multiple-choice questions (MCQs) is one possible answer to this problem” (Hughes, 1989). Although this type of question takes more time to design, multiple-choice questions (MCQs) are widely used to measure different sub-skills of reading such as skimming, scanning, making inferences, and guessing meanings from context because MCQs are simple to score and administer, and most importantly, they do not interfere with the act of reading. Although the use of MCQs in evaluating reading competence is an age-old practice, there is still much doubt because very few studies have been undertaken to explore the excellence of MCQs in evaluating each sub-skill of reading. This field necessitates substantial research to determine the relevance of employing MCQs in measuring reading skills, as this is an important component of many important tests such as IELTS, TOEFL, GRE, and other placement and diagnostic tests in language schools. Furthermore, crucial decisions are frequently made based on the results of these tests.

Despite the fact that a substantial amount of literature has been published to discover the method of designing quality MCQs, very few thorough investigations have been conducted to discover the excellence of MCQs in assessing reading proficiency, specifically the ability to scan, skim, make inferences, and understand vocabulary from context. Hughes (1989) suggests that the results of MCQ testing could be "a reliable and valid indicator of competence".

In testing reading subskills, MC items have both potential and limitations. The data from this study reveals that MC items can be effective in evaluating skimming and inference skills; but while measuring the capacity to identify specific information MCQs have some limits. This constraint is particularly noticeable in the evaluation of learners' vocabulary knowledge, in which they are expected to interpret the meanings of certain specific terms from context, as opposed to the test takers knowing the precise meanings of some isolated words. As a result, it is not recommended to employ MC items to complicate the assessment of test takers' vocabulary knowledge. Because there has been very little empirical study on the applicability of MCQs in assessing reading sub-skills, the current findings add to a growing body of literature

on the association between MCQs and reading ability. However, the generalizability of these findings is limited by several factors, including the small number of participants. Furthermore, the current study only looked at the strengths and shortcomings of MCQs in measuring reading ability; consequently, more research is needed to look into the limitations of MC items and how to overcome them.

The SAQ format is another type of comprehension testing. A set of questions frequently follows a reading text in this fashion. The questions demand students to compose a few words or paragraphs in response to a reading-related inquiry. While some claim that such assessments are biased since they emphasize on a student's writing abilities, the benefits greatly exceed any disadvantages. Such examinations require language production, reinforce writing skills, elicit responses to a variety of reading tactics, and so measure a variety of critical and higher order thinking skills, as well as give a more authentic assignment. It will take more effort to construct good questions, and teachers must ensure that the structure and wording of the question do not enable pupils to offer a right response without grasping the meaning of the text. Questions should assess higher-order cognitive abilities and provide opportunities for students to exercise analysis, assessment, and synthesis. Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Domains has been shown to be an effective framework for enhancing cognitive responses through language. Bloom identified six more sophisticated domains of thinking: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Readers may also be interested in the revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy. The taxonomy provides a useful structure for categorizing test questions and aids in analyzing reading learning outcomes. It also includes a useful guide for teachers to utilize when creating comprehension activities and questions that develop both critical thinking and critical reading skills. Critical thinking is an ongoing activity that all second language readers, regardless of language competence level, should engage in. Readers must apply information and knowledge in a variety of ways to seek alternatives, draw conclusions, pose questions, and solve issues. Exercises that encourage such critical thinking practice help readers improve their reading skills, allowing them to understand increasingly complicated texts.

These inquiries, known as 'comprehension' questions, are quite prevalent in English schools around the world. Most students have already answered these types of questions, and as a result, most students do pretty well with them. Despite this, there are some typical issues that cause pupils to make errors and lose marks. One benefit of these questions is that they prevent the potential of guessing, which is a concern with all sorts of selected-response tasks. SAQs are also regarded to delve deeper into the ability of the test-taker. SAQs are also less difficult to create than

selected-response task types, particularly multiple-choice questions. According to Bruce M. Lockhart, Ph.D., short answer questions ask the learner to provide a specific response to the passage. These usually take the form of "yes-no" or "wh" inquiries.

On the negative side, marking SAQs may be challenging because there are often multiple methods to represent the same notion. That is why, ideally, the answer key for SAQ tasks should include all possible response permutations. Even the most meticulous item writers, however, will not be able to predict all acceptable alternate answers. As a result, SAQs should always be properly tested to uncover acceptable but unexpected replies. Another issue with SAQs, like with all constructed-response tasks, is the introduction of construct-irrelevant variance. This is because SAQs demand written responses, and correctly answering depends, at least in part, on the test-takers' writing ability. Writing skill is irrelevant when SAQs are used to test, for example, listening or reading comprehension. There are number of ways recommended to avoid failing to do SAQs in tests:

- Make it clear in the instructions what the test-takers are expected to do: must they react with a number, a word, a phrase, or a whole sentence? "Respond with a word or a short phrase," for example.
- Always use an example. The example should provide a good representation of the expected responses.
- Limit the length of responses requested. It is recommended to use one or two words for lower competence levels and up to five words for higher competency levels.
- Create the questions in such a way that the number of acceptable responses is limited. The questions should be as specific and concise as possible.
- Close-ended (yes/no) questions should be avoided. The use of yes/no questions converts a SAQ into a True/False item.

Paying attention to these aspects students will be able to avoid problems with finding correct answer.

SAQ question type has number of advantages which are helpful to assess reading comprehension of students:

- Short Answer Questions are reasonably quick to mark and can be marked by several assessors as long as the questions are written in such a way that the assessors can evaluate all alternative solutions.
- Short Answer Questions are also extremely simple to create in comparison to other assessment methods.

• Because the structure of short answer questions is quite similar to examination questions, students are more comfortable with the practice and feel less concerned when using it as part of a formative and summative assessment.

• Unlike MCQs, no guessing is permitted; students must provide an answer.

However, as MCQs there are certain limitations and disadvantages it has:

• Short Answer Questions (SAQ) are only appropriate for inquiries that can be answered in a few sentences. While setting the questions, it is critical that the assessor is very clear on the type of answers expected. Because SAQ is an open-ended question, students are free to answer in whatever way they wish. Short-answer questions might lead to grading difficulties if the question is not written carefully.

• Short Answer Questions are often used simply to assess information; students may frequently memorize Short Answer Questions by rote learning. If assessors want to use Short Answer Questions to assess deeper learning, they must pay close attention (and practice) on appropriate questions.

• Handwriting/spelling skills may influence evaluation accuracy.

• There may be challenges with time management when answering SAQ questions.

Short answer questions are used in the same way as multiple-choice items are. "Does the writer believe the new policies have been particularly effective?" "What hurdles are there to executing the newest government directive?" and "What is the most serious challenge confronting the financial system?" are some examples. These questions ask the learner to sift through the text's information, identifying key points and distinguishing opposing viewpoints. The second and third sample questions, in particular, could be used in reading activities to assist pupils learn to recognize textual signals like "first," "second," "finally," "furthermore," and so on. The capacity to sort and arrange the major aspects of a text is an important reading skill (Bruce M. Lockhart, 1999).

## CONCLUSION

Multiple-choice questions (MCQs) and short-answer questions (SAQs) are the two most frequent exam forms used to measure second language reading skills. In the MCQ style, test takers are given comprehension questions with predefined answers, such as which answer should be chosen as the best. Rather than providing predetermined answers, the SAQ style encourages test takers to compose two to three sentences based on their understanding of the reading passage to answer comprehension questions. Reading skills are a crucial aspect of language learning that is sometimes overlooked in favor of an emphasis on spoken or translation abilities. The various sorts of questions described above—multiple choice, short

response provide a versatile way of assessing children' reading skills and are appropriate for different levels of language development. When used in the classroom, such inquiries encourage students to deal with the meaning of texts on multiple levels, going beyond words and structures. When used in assessment, they allow the instructor to evaluate students' abilities to interpret and analyze written English more efficiently and precisely. Teachers should also consider the advantages and disadvantages of each assessment method when designing assessments to ensure that they are appropriate for the learning objectives and the needs of the learners.

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