

THE EFFECTS OF EXPLICIT INSTRUCTIONS OF READING STRATEGIES ON READING COMPREHENSION AT SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies effects of explicit instructions of reading strategies on reading comprehension at School of Foreign Languages, Thainguyn University and the attitude of students toward this technique in reading classes. To achieve desired aims of the current study, the researcher combined both qualitative and quantitative methods, including pre-test, post-test, and questionnaire. After 10 weeks of implementing the treatment, the results of reading comprehension tests and the questionnaire showed that explicit instructions of reading strategies helps the students to increase their reading comprehension. The results also showed that explicit instructions helped students to have more confident towards learning reading skills.

Keywords: *reading; explicit instructions; students; reading comprehension; skills.*

Received: 10/01/2019; Revised: 18/3/2019; Approved: 07/5/2019

ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA LỜI DẪN TƯỜNG MINH CHO CÁC CHIẾN LƯỢC ĐỌC ĐẾN KỸ NĂNG ĐỌC HIỂU TẠI KHOA NGOẠI NGỮ, ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

Diêm Thị Thu Thủy

Khoa Ngoại ngữ - ĐH Thái Nguyên

TÓM TẮT

Bài viết nghiên cứu về ảnh hưởng của lời dẫn tường minh cho các chiến lược đọc hiểu đến kỹ năng đọc hiểu tại Khoa Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Thái Nguyên và thái độ của sinh viên đối với kỹ thuật này trong tiết học đọc. Để đạt được mục tiêu nghiên cứu, tác giả đã sử dụng phương pháp phân tích định tính và định lượng, với các công cụ: bài kiểm tra trước và sau, và bảng câu hỏi khảo sát. Sau 10 tuần tiến hành thử nghiệm, kết quả của các bài kiểm tra đọc hiểu và bảng hỏi đã thể hiện rằng lời dẫn tường minh về các chiến lược đọc hiểu giúp sinh viên tăng cường kỹ năng đọc hiểu. Kết quả còn cho thấy lời dẫn tường minh đồng thời giúp sinh viên dường như tự tin hơn với việc học kỹ năng đọc.

Từ khoá: *kỹ năng đọc; lời dẫn tường minh; sinh viên; đọc hiểu; kỹ năng.*

Ngày nhận bài: 10/01/2019; Ngày hoàn thiện: 18/3/2019; Ngày duyệt đăng: 07/5/2019

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34238/tnu-jst.2019.06.003>

1. Introduction

Reading is a powerful tool for academic success because it provides students with access to information and is regularly depicted as an essential element to the academic success of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Therefore, it should be given an important position in school and society if development is to be achieved and sustained. Furthermore, the role of teachers should be teaching guides who give clear and strategic instructions to students to enable them not only to deal with tasks in class but also to work independently with various tasks.

Researchers have long documented the prominent role in which reading strategies perform in assisting reading comprehension [1], [2], [3], [4], [5]. Some of these research also asserted that second language reading comprehension was not simple for numerous language learners; therefore, the majority of learners required more time to improve their reading comprehension performance in the target language. As a result, the lack of explicit instruction of reading strategies may lead L2 (second language) readers to have difficulty in improving their reading comprehension.

From my own experience as a lecturer at SFL (School of Foreign Languages) and my observation of other English lecturers' lessons, I realized that the majority of the students seem to struggle with reading when spending most of the time looking up new words in dictionary, showing not much positive attitude in reading lessons. It is surprising to note that the feedback and comments indicating what and how to correct their mistakes seem not work as some students still repeat the same mistakes in their corrections or subsequent work. This is mainly due to the fact that they do not understand the comments. In addition, some

students fail a test or an examination not because they do not study, but because they do not use effective methods or strategies to learn. Based on the problem, the aim of this study is to examine the effects of explicit instructions of reading comprehension strategies on second year non English major students at School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University.

2. Literature review

2.1. Reading comprehension strategies

Cognitive strategies (CSs)

According to BBC, cognitive strategies are one type of learning strategies used to learn more successfully, which include repetition, organising new language, summarising meaning, guessing meaning from context, using imagery for memorisation. A cognitive strategy could be to underline some sections of a text, reread portions of or an entire text to increase understanding, or reduce reading speed when comprehension is threatened.

Meta-cognitive strategies (MSs)

MSs have generally been seen as consisting of planning, monitoring and evaluating the learning or reading process. However, when identifying activities that constitute MSs in reading, there seems to be different in researchers' opinion. For example, Sheorey & Mokhtari [6, p.431] conceptualized MSs as 'advanced planning and comprehension monitoring techniques'. Meanwhile, activities like using text features, context clues typographical aids (e.g. italics), and predicting or guessing text meaning, are classified as CSs in [7]. Phakiti [7] conceptualized MSs as involving planning, monitoring and evaluating of the learning process or in tackling a given cognitive task. In Phakiti's model, planning, described as the previewing and overviewing of the organization of a task consists of advanced preparation, problem identification, goal

setting or selective attention, self-management, and goal prioritization.

As a result, I conceived meta-cognitive reading strategies as skimming (identifying main ideas for specific), making notes and making inferences in this paper.

2.2. Selected reading strategies

The core strategies used in this paper, namely, skimming, scanning, making inferences, guessing new words from context.

Skimming vs. scanning

Skimming requires greater fluency and more practice [8]. It is used as reading a text or a passage quickly to get a general idea. Learners do not need to read every word when skimming, so teachers set this as a timed task and to encourage speed. Scanning is to cover a great deal of material rapidly to locate a specific facet or piece of information. It is useful to find specific name, date, statistic, or fact without reading the whole text.

Making inferences

Inference is considered as “information that is activated during reading yet not explicitly stated in the text” [9, p. 556]. Since it is a metacognitive strategy, it involves readers’ prior knowledge from prior learning and readers’ personal experiences. Fortunately, many scholars proved that young children and beginning readers may benefit from strategies that enhance inferences.

Guessing new words from context

Guessing from context refers to the ability to infer the meaning of an expression using contextual clues. This strategy is a key vocabulary learning skill for dealing with low-frequency vocabulary, particularly in reading authentic texts [10, p.290].

2.3. Explicit strategy instruction

Crucial to this study is the term ‘explicit strategy instruction’. Archer and Hughes [11, p.1] define explicit instruction as a “systematic, direct, engaging, and success

oriented method of teaching which has been shown to enhance students learning. It is an instructional practice that builds interactions between students and their teachers. Teachers clearly state a teaching objective and follow a definite instructional sequence.

3. Research design

3.1. Participants

The research was conducted on the non-major English second year students at SFL. The participants of this research are 25 second year students aged from 19 to 21 who studied their second term of English with the course book titled “English Written Proficiency Intermediate 2”.

Being aware of the difficulties to implement the treatment outside of their school timetable, thus, the participants was taught by the researcher through 10 weeks of the first term. During the period of time, the students received the eight reading strategies: Activating background knowledge, skimming, scanning, guessing new words, making notes, making predictions, making inferences and predicting what happen next through the teacher’s explicit direct instruction.

3.2. Data collection instrument

Questionnaire

Because there are some factors that influence participant response, the questionnaire should be carried out in a proper way to enhance its reliability and accuracy. The teacher did not directly hand out and collect their questionnaire but train the monitor to substitute my role. Moreover, the questionnaire was piloted to another class to see if there are any inappropriate questions and modified if necessary. The same questionnaire was given out after the treatment in order to examine the change (If have) of students’ awareness of using reading strategies. After being asked for some comments by a few English teachers, translated into Vietnamese and piloted, the

questionnaire was administered to the subject to gather data regarding students' using these reading strategies.

Pre-test and post-test

In this study, I used two reading tests before and after the treatment. Because the students studied English at intermediate level in this term according to the curriculum, the two tests were designed at this level. To obtain the reliability and validity of the tests, I adopted tests from the question bank of English Department of the University and piloted tests had been applied with a group of 10 students of a different class to make sure the difficulty and discrimination at the right percentage. The two tests (pre-test and post-test) were designed with the same level: intermediate. Each test includes five reading texts with 25 multiple choice questions in total to check if there is any progress that the students have made during the 10 weeks. The tests focused on checking the students' reading performance through the questions related to only four reading strategies namely skimming, scanning, guessing new words, and making inferences. .

3.3. Data collection procedure

Before the instruments were administered, the students had been informed about the purpose of the study. This is in line with research ethical principles [12], to ensure that 25 students' rights are not infringed. I personally administered the instruments to the students during the class to establish a rapport with the respondents and give clarifications on unclear items.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Student's reading comprehension

The reading performance of the students in the pre-test and post-test

As it can be seen from the statistics, there is a light increase in the students' reading comprehension performance. Specifically, the average score they gained from the two tests

risks from 6.0 to 6.5 out of 10. The change is seen not only at the average score but also at the sub-groups of score. According to the results, the students in the class were divided into 5 groups: Excellent (8.5-10), Good (7-8.4), Fair to good (5.5-6.9), Fair (4.0-5.4), Very poor and inadequate (1-4), which based on marking scheme at university in national policy. Specifically, while the number of students with good scores seems to be unchanged, there were more students with fair to good score (16 compared to 12) and much less students with fair scores (4 compared to 8).

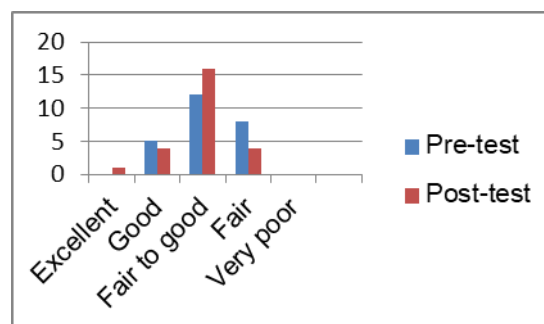


Figure 1. The reading performance of the students in the pre - test and post -test (per test)

The results from the pre-test and post-test demonstrated an improvement in the quality of the participant's reading comprehension. It is possibly indicated that EIRS improved the student's reading performance considerably.

Students' performance at the questions related to four strategies: Guessing new words from context, scanning, skimming, and making inferences.

4.2. Students' performance in the pre-test

Figure 2 and 3 present the students' reading comprehension performance at the questions related to the four strategies achieved in the pretest, before the treatment.

As it can be seen from the two figures, the students got more correct answers at the questions testing the 2 cognitive strategies namely guessing new words from context and scanning than that of the metacognitive strategies. The percentages of correct answers

of the two cognitive strategies are above 60% while that of skimming and making inferences are around 50%. While scanning gains the highest percentage with 69% at the pre-test, making inferences accounts for the lowest percentage with only 51%. This could be drawn that the students were better at questions related to cognitive strategies than that of meta-cognitive ones.

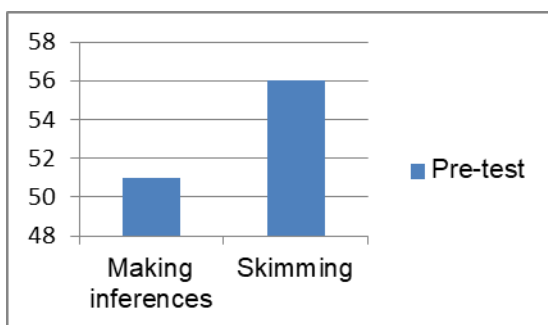


Figure 2. Students' performance at questions related to meta-cognitive strategies in pre-test (%)

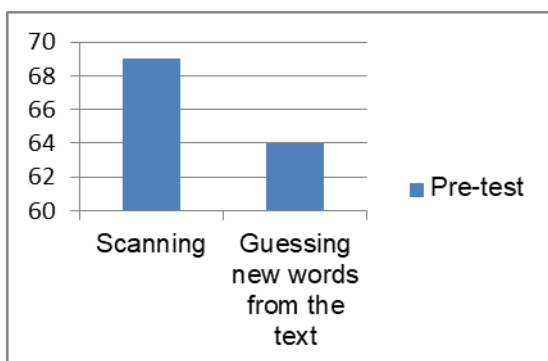


Figure 3. Students' performance at questions related to cognitive strategies in pre-test (%)

4.3. Students' performance in the post-test compared to the pre-test

It can be said that there is much difference in the results the students got with the questions of meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies, which can be seen much clearer from figure 4 and 5.

This might be blamed for the complexity of the two kinds of questions. In addition, the signs helping students identify the main ideas such as sub-headings or pictures are limited in the tests, which is dissimilar to the reading texts extracted from newspapers and

magazines with a lot of colorful pictures they study in the text. To conclude, making inferences or reading between the lines is really a challenging strategy which requires a lot of mental practice and flexibility to think appropriately with diverse genre of reading texts. It can be said that, being aware of using the a few appropriate strategies at the same time, the students might understand the text better, which enables them to go in the right track as reading and avoid getting lost in the text. Therefore, with the more confidence in their thinking, they might determine where to get the information for the questions.

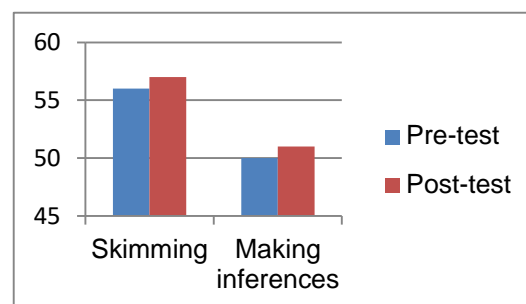


Figure 4. Comparison of students' performance at questions related to meta-cognitive strategies (%)

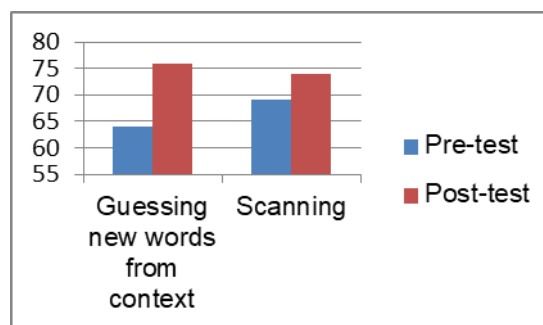


Figure 5. Comparison of students' performance at questions related to cognitive strategies (%)

5. Discussions

The results of the study proved that it is possible to accept the alternative hypothesis which states that the explicit helps students to increase their reading comprehension. The justifications are as follows. Firstly, the comparison of the pre-test and post-test result of the students who had received the course with explicit instructions of strategies

revealed that there was a little improvement in reading comprehension. The reason might be that the clear instructions of how to apply these strategies and reading activities provided in the course was useful because it provides students not only the proper ways to deal with the questions from the texts in their course but also the suitable tactics to answer questions in the different texts of the post- test when the teacher was not there to assist them. In addition, the immediate practice with specific texts after the teacher 'guidance enabled them to clarify the strategies and then easily remember and apply them next time. As a result, when the students understood thoroughly and fully, they wanted to use them with enjoyment, therefore, they can acquire the knowledge through reading texts.

6. Conclusion

In summary, on the basis of the results of the current study, the researcher comes to the conclusion that, explicit instruction of reading strategies has positive effects on the students' reading comprehension. In addition, the students also highly appreciate the effects of teaching reading strategies explicitly because of its advantages and want to continue using the strategies in the future. It is recommended that the implementation of the program should be added in the curriculum with the approval of school's board because explicit instruction of reading strategies benefits students' improvement in language development.

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