

Reading Strategy Training: The Use Of Silent Reading In Comprehending Expository Texts by Trainee Teachers

by

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ABSTRACT

The ability of readers extracting meaning is related to reading strategies. This study aims to explore the reading strategy employed by trainee teachers in a local teachers training college. This quasi experimental study focuses on trainee teachers with lower ability in reading. Three instruments are utilized for this study. A reading proficiency test is administered for the selection of respondents (for control and experimental groups). A reading questionnaire which measures reading strategy mode preference by Carrell is adopted. A reading comprehension passage is selected to test the respondents reading comprehension. The results show that trainee teachers who have undergone the reading strategy training performed better compared to the control group. Furthermore, the study has also shown that the combination of bottom up and top down strategies are utilized by the experimental group compared to the bottom up strategy adopted by the control group.

Introduction

Reading strategy is an important aspect in studying and comprehending texts. It can enhance our understanding on how people of a particular community construct their ideas and strategies to derive the meaning of a particular text. Some of the researches done on reading strategies are Block (1986), Carrel (1989) and Paris et al (1991). However, very little research has been conducted in this area with regard to non-native speakers.

It is important for individuals to acquire good and appropriate reading strategies. It appears that Malaysian students largely are facing the problem of comprehending English texts. These can be seen in the poor performance of the students reading comprehension examinations. Studies conducted on reading strategies (eg. Carrell, 1985; Palincsar & Brown, 1984), indicated that non-proficient L1 and L2 readers either do not possess knowledge about strategies or mainly engage in bottom-up strategies.

This study focuses on Carrell's silent reading strategy (1989), and the respondents are trainee teachers who are currently undergoing their B.Ed (TESL) foundation course in IPBA. A questionnaire will be given to the respondents to analyze types of reading strategies used by the respondents. Besides that, reading strategy training will also be carried out to identify if it has a positive effect on the respondents reading comprehension.

Research Background

How readers extract meaning from a text has long been a focus of attention because the process of extracting meaning gives one invaluable information about readers cognitive processes of reading. Reading is a process that involves recognizing letters, characters and words, analyzing the syntactic and semantic structure of clauses and sentences and generating inferences. All these processes must take place in an orchestrated manner (Just & Carpenter, 1987). Hence, describing and understanding reading comprehension in a second or foreign language is a complex process.

In the education field, reading is regarded as the most important of the four language skills (listening, speaking and writing). In addition to academic purposes, reading is also required to gain knowledge in various fields for instance, scientific and technological information. Thus, comprehension of English text is an important vehicle for receiving information on a variety of topics. Therefore, the ability of reading English well has become an important tool for academic, educational, professional and commercial success. As Krashen (1993) advocates, language learning requires a huge amount of comprehensible input. Thus, increasing reading proficiency is obviously a necessary learning objective in order to achieve comprehension. This leads to a heavy foundation of reading in the curriculum of English teaching in Malaysia.

At the International Languages Teacher Training College (IPBA), English is taught as an important subject since the trainee teachers are trained to be English teachers in the near future. Hence, reading is regarded as an important skill since they have to rely on reading a variety of English texts throughout their course. Comprehension of English text is therefore considered as an important vehicle for receiving information on a variety of topics. Thus, language learning requires a huge amount of comprehension input (Krashen, 1993). However, there are a number of trainee teachers who do not reach the goal of educators. They are found to have insufficient competence in reading. This occurs due to lack of mastering reading strategies. Kletzien (1991) states that reading strategies are important in the field of reading comprehension. Paris (1983), believes that strategic readers are aware of what strategies are and how or when to use them appropriately. Thus, reading proficiency is highly related to strategy use of the reader.

This study therefore aims to identify what readers do to comprehend expository texts and the possible effects of reading strategy training on reading. The findings may provide an insight on strengths and weaknesses of trainee teachers reading comprehension strategies. This will help in identifying both supports and obstacles in comprehending texts as well as allowing insights into improving reading strategy.

Statement of the Problem

This study is motivated by questions arising from educators on reasons for the poor comprehension of texts among trainee teachers in L2. Most trainee teachers show problems in comprehending English expository texts and the inability to employ effective comprehension strategies in reading tasks. Hence, trainee teachers approach texts

ineffectively, which results in poor comprehension. Furthermore, educators do not teach on strategy use. There are two problems identified among trainee teachers. They are;

- i. incompetent in comprehending English expository texts
- ii. unskilled in employing sufficient and effective comprehension strategies in reading tasks.

As a result, trainee teachers have no clear awareness about effective strategies that they should employ in the reading process. The unsystematic and inefficient way of approaching the text lead to low levels of text comprehension among trainee teachers.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore the reading strategy used by the trainee teachers in IPBA in comprehending English expository texts. Reading strategy is related to the ability to comprehend texts. Hence, the importance of using the right strategies need to be emphasized by educators. Educators need to acquire information on trainee teachers reading strategy uses. This will help them to develop suitable teaching approaches in assisting trainee teachers to overcome reading difficulty. Furthermore, the study will also look into the possibility of reading strategy training and its implication on types of reading strategies used.

Significance of the Study

This study makes a significant contribution to theory, research and practice in L2 academic reading. It is significant in that it empirically explores strategy use among ESL readers in college. Reading is considered as one of the important skills whereby, readers gain access to information. Reading comprehension therefore is crucial among trainee teachers. Thus the main purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between strategy uses and English reading proficiency of trainee teachers in IPBA in comprehending English expository texts. How to achieve better comprehension in English expository reading is a core objective in classroom instruction. In order to facilitate prospective teaching, it is a necessity for educators of English to acquire sufficient information about trainee teachers reading strategy uses. This may help educators develop better teaching approaches in assisting trainee teachers to cope with difficulty in reading English expository texts.

Specifically the focus of this study is to explore the reading strategies employed by readers of low reading levels and to identify what strategies produce better comprehension of text. The finding of this study will contribute to building a more comprehensive theory of reading in L2. The results of this study will also provide a significant tool in helping trainee teachers to be aware of their reading strategies when they read their expository texts. This will help them to analyze their own problems pertaining to reading comprehension and will be able to overcome their problems with suitable strategies on their own. By consciously discerning the efficacy of strategy uses, students may read more effectively and efficiently. Knowledge about strategy uses by trainee teachers will help

educators guide trainee teachers in their development of reading skills which should not be merely left to trainee teachers themselves.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Reading Strategy

Strategy is defined as a purposeful means of comprehending the author's message. Olshavsky (1976) characterized strategies as;

- i. essentially problem solving on macro or macro level
- ii. goal-oriented
- iii. purposeful
- iv. involve efficiency and selection
- v. consciously adopted
- vi. directly teachable

According to Paris, Lipson & Wixson (1983), 'strategic readers' are readers who are aware of what strategies are, how and when to use them appropriately. Schmitt (1990) also agrees by stating that good readers are able to sort out, choose and employ strategies. Hence, reading strategy is an essential tool used by readers to develop an understanding of what they read. Pritchard (1990) stresses that reading strategy is a 'deliberate action that readers take voluntarily' to understand a text. This is further clarified by Urquhart & Veir (1998) who agree that strategies are used as 'reader oriented', 'conscious decisions' and 'a responsive to solve a problem'. Hence, reading strategy is a medium for readers to comprehend and recall information where readers process strategies intentionally and consciously to cope with text difficulty (Paris, Wasik & Turner, 1991). Few researchers including Pearson, Rochler, Dole and Duffy (1992) conclude that good readers are able to alter reading strategy when encountered with a problem compared to poor readers who are unable to do so. Good readers can know how and when to apply strategies. Studies by Carrell (1989) and Devine (1988) have shown that second language readers have shown to be better strategy users. Thus, good readers are strategic readers. Hosenfeld (1977) who conducted reading strategy study among native English readers where categories of strategies used by successful and unsuccessful readers were identified. His study showed that successful readers use more effective strategies than unsuccessful readers. A similar study was conducted by Jimenez et. al (1996) using the think aloud protocol to examine reading strategy and they came up with the same conclusion. Carrell (1989) and Young (1993) go further by dividing strategies into two major categories that is local (bottom up) and global (top down).

Types of Reading Strategies: Local Strategy (Bottom-up)

The local strategy derived from the bottom up theory deals with a lower level of text information. It is a text based processing that decodes individual linguistic units and building textual meaning from the smallest to largest units. Among the categories are;

- i. Individual word focus (word recognition)
- ii. Restatement
- iii. Vocabulary knowledge

Vocabulary knowledge and word recognition are crucial in the process of reading. They decode the written word for comprehension of a text. It is a necessary aspect of reading proficiency (Stanovich, 1991). Word recognition refers to the process of matching the visual perception of a word to its semantic reference. Thus, a proficient reader is able to recognize words automatically. Although bottom-up processing is dominated by 'lower level' (Brown, 1998) activities such as letter and word recognition, it does imply on eventual progression toward sentence-level syntax and discourse-level analyses. To conclude, bottom-up models are text driven (Gascoigne, 2002).

Global Strategy (Top-down)

On the other hand global strategy is a top-down process where the reader uses prior linguistic knowledge, level of proficiency of the language and background knowledge when processing information from the text. It is reader-driven and focuses on what the readers bring to the text in terms of world knowledge (Lally, 1998). Barnett (1989) states that reader uses 'general knowledge of the world and of particular text components to make intelligent guesses about what might come next in the text only enough of the text to confirm or reject these guesses.' In brief, top-down strategy is related to the following aspects.

- i. Prediction
- ii. Confirmation
- iii. Inferences
- iv. Prior knowledge
- v. Text order
- vi. Question/assess/comment
- vii. Skim and scan
- viii. Reference
- ix. Visualize
- x. Summarizing

Overall one can conclude that strategies are deliberate actions used by readers to construct meaning from a text to facilitate their comprehension. Hence, when people read, varieties of strategies are used to comprehend the read texts. This becomes complex when reading involves describing and understanding reading comprehension in the second language especially in reading expository texts. This is due to the in-depth comprehension tasks involved where trainee teachers are required to take tests, write papers or give speeches. Thus, strategies used to comprehend a text is crucial since it is a medium of "purposeful means of comprehending the author's message" (Olshavsky, 1977). According to Pearson, Roehler, Dole and Duffy (1992), "good readers are better able to alter their reading strategies to compensate for a problem once they realize that one exists." Research in

second language reading has also demonstrated that strategy use is different in more and less proficient readers and that the proficient readers use different types of strategies and they use them in different ways.

Therefore, strategy training for reading by educators is important to help improve trainee teachers' performance on tests of comprehension. Strategy training comes from the assumption that success in learning mainly depends on appropriate strategy use and that unsuccessful learners can improve their learning by being trained to use effective strategies (Weinstein & Underwood, 1985). Carrell (1985) concludes that reading strategies can be taught to students and when taught, strategies help improve students' test performance.

METHOD

Participants

This study was carried out in one of the teachers training college in Kuala Lumpur. The subjects of this study were 40 low proficiency (in reading) trainee teachers from the B.Ed (Foundation Course). These respondents were selected based on the reading proficiency test administered prior to the study. The respondents were divided into two groups (control and experimental) for the quasi-experimental study. Respondents from the experimental group were given the reading strategy training for a duration of one month by one lecturer.

Instruments

Reading proficiency tests

Reading proficiency tests were administered twice. The first proficiency test was conducted by the college and the second test was administered by the researcher. The reading proficiency test was taken from MUET (Malaysian University English Test).

Questionnaire adopted from Carrell (1989).

The question was adopted from Carrell's Silent Reading Strategies. There are 36 items in the questionnaire on perception of respondents reading strategies. These items are divided into the bottom-up and top-down strategies.

Reading comprehension passage (Quasi-experimental design to test the reading strategy training)

A reading comprehension passage (expository text) was selected and questions were designed by the researcher to test on both the strategies (bottom-up and top-down). The questions were divided into 5 parts and consist of structured and unstructured items.

Procedure and Data Analysis

Reading proficiency tests

The reading proficiency tests were administered before the study. Both the scores were compared to identify the low proficiency respondents (in reading).

Questionnaire adopted from Carrell (1989).

The selected respondents were asked to answer the questionnaire twice. First before the reading strategy training and second is after the training session. The data collected was analyzed by using SPSS version 10.0. data were tabulated by seeking the frequency count of each item.

Respondents answered the questionnaire before and after reading strategy training. For a duration of one month, respondents in the experimental group were trained on reading strategies (bottom-up and top-down). An expository passage was used for the purpose of testing. Respondents from both groups (control and experimental) sat for the test before and after reading strategy training sessions.

Reading comprehension passage (Quasi-experimental design to test the reading strategy training)

Respondents (control and experimental groups) were asked to answer the reading comprehension passage twice. First was before the treatment (reading strategy training) given to the experimental group. After a duration of one month, the same questions were given to the respondents and the scores for both pre and post tests were compared. This is done by using the paired sample t-test from the SPSS.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To identify the types of reading strategies employed by the respondents for pre and post tests, the frequencies count from the questionnaire were tabulated and compared. The result is shown in Table 1 and table 2.

Table I :Types of Strategies used by Respondents (Posttest -control group)

	Components	Types of Strategies Employed
1	Confidence	Unable to identify which is the main idea/supporting details
2	Repair strategies used	Dictionary Simply give up Simply guess meaning
3	Effective	Bottom-up strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sounds - meaning of words - pronounce - use of dictionary

4	Reading difficulty	Top-down strategy - relating to prior knowledge - overall meaning - text organization
5	Ability	Bottom-up strategy - sound out words - use of dictionary - word meaning

Table 2: Types of Strategies used by Respondents (Posttest -experimental group)

	Components	Types of Strategies Employed
1	Confidence	- could recognize main idea/supporting details - relate information which comes next in the text - use prior knowledge
2	Repair strategies used	- Read on - Go back to the point before problematic part.
3	Effective	- Top-down strategy - Overall meaning - Relate text to what one knows - Details of content - Organization of text
4	Reading difficulty	- Sound of individual words - Pronunciation of words - Grammatical structure
5	Ability	- Bottom-up strategy Recognize words Use of dictionary - Top-down strategy Use of prior knowledge Focus on details of content Grasp organization of text Overall meaning of text.

To identify the effectiveness of reading strategy training, the scores (reading comprehension test) for both the groups are shown below.

A	Pre (Control)	Post (Control)
	26.85 5.32	28.05 5.56
B	Pre (Experimental)	Post (Experimental)
	27.65 5.09	32.65 5.79

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Test Scores

Most of the respondents in the control group were unable to identify the main ideas and supporting details in the text. They felt that finding meaning from the dictionary and sounding out the words as important. Furthermore, the data also showed that they were unable to use prior knowledge and experience to understand the content of the text. Respondents from the experimental group for the post test showed that they were able to recognize main and supporting details and relate information which comes next in the text. Prior knowledge was also considered as important aspect when reading silently. Before treatment, respondents in the experimental group used the bottom up strategies. However after the reading strategy training, they used the combination of bottom up and top down strategies. Despite this, both the controlled and the treatment groups still felt that knowing the meaning of each word and pronunciation as important aspect in effective reading.

After the reading strategy training sessions, respondents from the experimental group took the effort to reread the text to find answers. Both the groups believed on the use of dictionary as the important means to find meaning of difficult words. Majority of the respondents from the control group simply guessed the meaning of difficult words as their answers. Both the treatment and controlled groups felt the sounds of individual words, pronunciation, recognition of words and alphabets as important aspect that contribute in reading difficulty.

The scores attained by the treatment group after the training sessions show that all the respondents had higher scores in their attempt to answer the questions for the comprehension questions. Thus, reading strategy training has helped these trainee teachers to enhance their understanding of the comprehension passage.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the types of reading strategies employed by trainee teachers of IPBA. It also aimed to obtain answers for the effect of reading strategy training on trainee teachers reading comprehension. Reading strategy is an important aspect that needs to be focused on in enabling trainee teachers to comprehend English expository texts. Studies have also shown that reading strategy can be trained among low ability trainee teachers in reading. The findings of the study show that lower ability trainee teachers from the control group prefer the bottom up strategy while the trainee teachers from the experimental group use the combination of both top down and bottom up strategies. This study also suggests that strategies can be taught. This study has demonstrated that less able readers may benefit more from the reading strategy training.

Limitation of the Study

This study focused only on the trainee teachers of the lower reading proficiency in one teachers' training college. Thus, this study might not reflect the reading strategies employed by the whole population. Respondents are teenagers, who have currently

completed their SPM examination and who are now undergoing the B.Ed (TESL) foundation course.

Recommendation

Reading strategy is an important aspect to study in relation to enhance trainee teachers reading comprehension. Unfortunately, schools and education institutions do not specifically stress on the importance of reading strategy and are not taught in isolation in the syllabus. Thus, trainee teachers need to be aware of ways to enable them to read and answer comprehension questions effectively. Only then can they be better teachers in the near future. Trainee teachers with lower proficiency in reading should not be seen as a group of trainees who are unable to read. They can be trained to master both the strategies since the study has shown that by using both strategies respondents are able to answer the questions effectively. This is in line with Rumelhat (1980) who states that the most efficient processing of test is interactive (combination of top down and bottom up strategies). Auerback and Paxton (1997) also point out that 'readers metacognitive awareness of their reading process and strategies enhance proficiency.' Hence, educators should make learners be aware of the skills they are or should be using in the process of reading.

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