

The Implications of Reading Strategies in EFL/ESL Contexts

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Abstract

Reading activities are made to comprehend the academic materials and to learn the conceptual framework. Students are supposed to read and understand the assigned texts before coming to classes on their own. Such a reading process means to read beyond the lines and to think critically. But students are not strategic and selective while they are studying a text for an exam although students support that such a reader profile is beneficial for comprehension and remembering the information better. The ways learners should read are different from one learner to another and knowing them is a need to be a strategic reader. Therefore the present descriptive study aims to review reading strategies using several categorizations including cognitive, metacognitive strategies as well as a combination of these to have better learning. The aims of reading strategies are to help readers remember the key points, distinguish the necessary and unnecessary information, think about the main idea and comment on the subject matter. This paper tries to define the reading strategies and describe two kinds of processing which are top-down and bottom-up processing and different types of reading strategies according to the review of related literature. According to the findings, raising students' awareness of strategies help them to use this strategies where relevant and so it improve reading comprehension and efficiency in reading.

Keywords: *bottom-up processing, reading strategies, strategic reader, top-down processing.*

1. Introduction

Chamot (2004) believes reading skill is a process that involves the activation of relevant knowledge and language skills in order to get information across from one individual to another. Duffy (as cited in Schmitt, 2002, p. 232) defines reading strategies as "plans for solving problems encountered in constructing meaning". In fact, reading strategies show how readers understand a task, what textual cues they attend to, how they make sense of what they read, and what they do when they do not understand. Reading strategies range from simple fix-up strategies such as simply rereading difficult segments and guessing the meaning of an unknown word from context, to more comprehensive strategies such as summarizing and relating what is being read to the reader's background knowledge (Mehrpour, Bagheri, & Sadighi, 2012).

There are different types of strategies, and readers use different types of strategies in different ways to improve their performance on tests of comprehension and recall. Actually, in the teaching approach of Brown and Palincsar (as cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 288) teachers teach students by four reading strategies: summarizing, predicting, clarifying, and asking questions. Richards and Renandya (2002) believe that the characteristics of transactional teaching approach to strategy instruction are as follows: strategies are learned while the students are engaged in their regular reading; they are taught through direct explanation, and teacher modeling as well as feedback; recycling the strategies over new texts and tasks and developing them over the long term may be several years. In addition, Richards and Renandya (2002) expressed the ways of becoming strategic by raising awareness of strategies, demonstrating

strategies overtly for students, assisting students to use these strategies where relevant and having more responsibility for using the appropriate strategies independently. The dilemma is that "teachers have to make students into strategic reader rather than teach them reading strategies" (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p.281). Dogan (as cited in Cogmen&Saracaloglu, 2009, p. 249) believed that good readers use many strategies before, during and after reading. In addition, Susar (as cited in Cogmen&Saracaloglu, 2009, p. 249) expressed that reading strategies are activities to let students control their learning. As a result of this, it is critical for a college student to use reading comprehension strategies while reading academic materials for an effective learning (Cogmen&Saracaloglu, 2009).

Similarly Paris, Wasik and Turner (as cited in Schmitt, 2002, p. 226) concluded that 'strategic reading is a prime characteristic of expert readers'. Anderson, Bachman, Perkins, & Cohen (as cited in Plakans, 2009, p. 253) believed that the subjects who employed more strategies tended to score higher on reading comprehension tasks and successful strategic reading was not only a matter of knowing what strategy to use, but also knowing how to use a strategy successfully and to orchestrate its use with other strategies. Schmitt (2002) claimed that second language readers can be successfully trained in strategy use. Raymond (as cited in Schmitt, 2002, p. 227) stated that learners who were taught mapping strategies to recognize and use the rhetorical structure of texts and also strategies for word, sentence and discourse analysis (Kern, 1989) and strategies relating to experience-text-relationship (ERT) and semantic mapping (Carrell, Paris & Liberto, 1989), improved their reading skills. According to Block and Pressley (2002), metacognition has been a well-established principle of first-language reading research that expert readers use a variety of reading strategies in order to comprehend the language. Therefore the purpose of present descriptive study is to review reading strategies using several categorizations including cognitive, metacognitive strategies as well as a combination of these to have better learning.

Research on Reading

There are three general types of research on reading which are analytic, comparative, and instructional. Analytic studies usually focus on the identification of fundamental components of skilled reading such as eye movements or decoding. Comparative studies usually contrast the performance or knowledge of readers who differ in skill, age, or background characteristics. Contrasts between novices and experts on fundamental skills can then guide remediation. Instructional research, in turn, provides experimental manipulation of variables and tests of methods to enhance performance (Paris & Oka, 1986).

Bottom-Up and Top-Down Processing of Reading Strategy

Brown (2001) concluded that some reading strategies related to bottom-up procedures, and other enhance the top-down processes. These reading strategies included identifying the purpose in reading, using graphemic rules and patterns to aid in bottom-up decoding, using efficient silent reading techniques for relatively rapid comprehension, skimming the text for main ideas, scanning text for specific information, using semantic mapping or clustering, guessing when you are not certain, analyzing vocabulary, distinguishing between literal and implied meanings (Brown, 2001). Abbott (as cited in Plakans, 2009, p.253) believed that distinguishing reading strategies as top-down or bottom-up appears often in research on L2 reading strategies, a contrast that runs parallel to global and local strategies.

In addition, Phakiti (as cited in Plakans, 2009, p. 253) expressed that top-down reading strategies focus on main ideas, discourse organization, and the use of background knowledge, while bottom-up strategies center on word level meaning, sentence structure, and textual details. Another perspective on reading strategies considers the difference between cognitive and metacognitive strategy processing based on the L1 research of Flavell (as cited in Plakans, 2009, p. 253). Metacognitive strategies are defined as self-regulating thoughts that monitor cognition while cognitive strategies process the language for the task. Reading strategies have also been grouped by purpose or function, arranging them as goal-motivated actions. Plakans (2009) used an inductive analysis of think-aloud protocol data and interviews to uncover the reading strategies of L2 non-native English writers.

Types of Reading Strategies

Dogan (as cited in Cogmen&Saracaloglu, 2009, p. 249) states that good readers use a lot strategies before, during and after reading. There are strategies such as underlining, taking notes in the margins, highlighting mostly used to remember the desired information better. According to Eilers and Pinkley (as cited in Cogmen&Saracaloglu, 2009, p. 249) using strategies not only increase the academic success but also successful students use strategies while reading. Chastain (1988) believed that reading strategies enable students to read at much higher levels of proficiency. Alternatively, Tierney and Pearson (as cited in Chastain, 1988, p. 224) mentioned that in order to understand and accomplish various tasks and assignments, teachers should spend more time helping students develop strategies for reading. Krashen and Terrell (as cited in Chastain, 1988, p. 225) explicated that there are some communicative reading strategies which are: read for meaning, do not look up every word, predict meaning and use context. Hosenfeld, Arnold, Kirchofer, Laciura, and Wilson (as cited in Chastain, 1988, p. 231) identify twenty good reading strategies which are, "The skilled reader (1) reads for meaning, (2) skips unknown words or guesses based on the context, (3) uses the context of prior and subsequent material, (4) identifies the grammatical structures, (5) evaluates the validity of the guesses, (6) makes predictions based on the title, (7) continues to read, (8) recognizes cognates, (9) makes interpretations based on his knowledge of the world, (10) analyzes unknown words, (11) reads expecting the materials to be meaningful, (12) reads for meaning rather than language, (13) is willing to guess, (14) uses illustrations, (15) makes use of glosses, (16) looks up the meaning of words only as a last resort, (17) gets the correct meaning when looking up words, (18) skips unimportant words, (19) follows through on predictions, and (20) utilizes context clues".

From these studies of reading strategies, a number of individual characteristics related to strategy use have been identified and readers with higher proficiency use more strategies which are more global (Koda, 2005). A distinction has also been made between cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies by scholars in the field, most notably Oxford (1990). Cognitive reading strategies have been defined as strategies that enable learners to accomplish the reading task, such as summarizing, inferencing, note-taking, and using contextual clues. Four sets of cognitive strategies exist: practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning, and creating structure for input and output. The first letters of each of these strategy sets combine to form the acronym PRAC because cognitive strategies are PRACTical for language learning. Strategies for practicing are among the most important cognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategies, on the other hand, are those actions "which go beyond purely cognitive devices, and which provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process" (Oxford, 1990, p. 136). Oxford (1990) also believed that affective factors such as motivation, attitude and self-esteem are the factors which language learners can gain control over them through affective strategies. These strategies, as Lawrence (2007, p. 56) states, "Involve self-reflection and thinking about reading and learning".

2. Review of Related Literature

The results of the study by Mehrpour, Bagheri, & Sadighi (2012) for example on teaching reading comprehension strategies to Iranian EFL pre-university students showed that while strategy training appeared to raise students' awareness of reading strategies and could encourage strategy use by some students, some strategies were found to be harder to be acquired. Moreover, the reading strategy instruction was not able to enhance the students' reading performance significantly based on the results of a reading comprehension test given to the participants at the end of the program.

Nash-Ditzel (2010) using interviews, think-aloud protocols, informal observations and document analysis explored some outcomes of instruction such as increased knowledge of reading strategies, ability to use the strategies successfully to change overall reading behavior, and understanding of the strategies' value which seems to have contributed to the students' ability to self-regulate while reading.

Hong Nam and Leavell (2011) investigated on metacognitive awareness, use of reading strategies and self-perception of striving developmental college readers during one semester through metacognitive awareness of reading strategies inventory, personal and academic self-concept inventory, and individual background questionnaire. Fink (as cited in Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2011, p. 4) mentioned that the term 'striving readers' is being more frequently used to refer to readers in need of assistance with their reading skills. The aims of the research were to increase striving developmental readers' reported cognitive and metacognitive strategy use explicit instruction in reading strategies, enrolled the striving readers in a developmental reading course report a difference in the degree or nature of their cognitive and metacognitive strategy use at the end of the 16-week course, and founding the correlation between reading strategy use and self-perception. The study found the reading strategy instruction made positive effects on students' metacognitive strategic reading and led to significant increase in use of Global Reading Strategies. Although the overall correlation between strategic thinking and learner self-perception showed no statistical significance, correlations between Support Strategies and social anxiety and Global Reading Strategies and mathematical self-efficacy revealed statistical significance (Hong Nam & Leavell, 2011).

Khonamri (2009) investigated the relationship between ESL advanced students' belief, metacognition and their strategic reading performance during two phases. Three questionnaires were used to examine the relationship between metacognitive awareness and learners' beliefs in first phase and think-aloud protocol analysis. Retrospective questions and interviews were used in the second phase. She suggested an interaction between beliefs, metacognitive knowledge and strategic reading behavior of learners and this may mean that in reading instruction, a consideration of these variables can lead to better reading performances. By reporting data from an instructional study designed to improve students' use of reading strategies, the findings indicate that children in experimental classrooms made significantly greater gains in awareness about reading than control children and demonstrated superior strategic skills. Additional analyses revealed the patterns of reading strategies, motivation, and metacognition characterizing readers of different ages and abilities (Paris & Oka, 1986).

In still another study, Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) gathered the data from a survey of reading strategies which is based on metacognitive awareness of reading strategies inventory using 302 college students to examine the differences in reported use of reading strategies between native and non-native English speakers when reading academic materials, and the findings were in detail: In the United States (US) group which included comparable numbers of male and female students, the females show greater awareness of reading strategies but this effect is not reflected in the ESL sample and the major distinction between US and ESL students' reported usage of strategies is in the category of support reading strategies, the ESL group's mean for support reading strategies being considerably higher than the US group mean for the same category as well. Both US and ESL high-reading-ability students show comparable degrees of higher reported usage for metacognitive and cognitive reading strategies in contrast with lower-reading-ability students in the respective groups.

Cogmen and Saracalolu (2009) investigated the frequency level of reading strategies by using the Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire and the analysis of data indicated that the students often use the reading strategies.

Anderson, Bachman, Perkins, and Cohen (as cited in Plakans, 2009, p. 253) generated a taxonomy after reviewing prior reading research and theory, and then created a list of strategies grouped according to the following purposes: supervising, supporting, paraphrasing, establishing coherence in a text, and test taking.

Cohen (as cited in Plakans, 2009, p. 254) attempted to identify the role of reading strategies in integrated writing tasks. He investigated the reading strategies used by five Portuguese speakers of English when they composed for summary tasks. He found that the two higher proficiency writers used more strategies,

while the two middle proficiency writers used fewer and more detrimental strategies. The lowest proficiency writer used the most strategies but did not use them effectively. Apparently reading strategies used by writers in composing integrated tasks are impacted by their proficiency levels.

3. Implications and Conclusion

Reading strategies in EFL/ESL context have some implications for both teachers and students. The reader's metacognitive knowledge about reading may be influenced by a number of factors, including previous experiences, beliefs, culture-specific instructional practices, and, in the case of non-native readers, proficiency in L2, and it may be triggered, consciously or unconsciously, when the reader encounters a specific reading task.

Furthermore, teachers learn to raise students' awareness of strategies which help them to use these strategies where it is relevant and suitable. By raising awareness, students have more responsibilities for using the proper strategies independently.

Finally, strategies help students to improve reading comprehension and efficiency in reading. Besides they assist readers to process the text actively and connect what they read to their background knowledge and to other parts of the text. When students use strategies, they will be in the way that experts readers do so it is helpful for students.

My purpose in conducting this research is to aware the students and teachers about the reading strategies to use them in particular contexts. Just as the findings of my literature review generally report the benefits of reading strategies, I believe that this study can help students to learn another language.

All researchers believe that reading strategies need to be taught to the students. In fact, reading is a skill which is very important. So students should learn the strategies to read best. There are a lot of strategies that they are not similar to students. Teachers demonstrate the strategies for students and students often use strategies where relevant. We believe that teachers should spend more time on strategies which help students to choose the best one.

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