

Investigating and some solutions to improve reading comprehension skills for the students of foreign language faculty at Dong thap university

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Abstract: Reading is a collaborative process that many learners take it for granted. Reading and understanding a text can be regarded as an arduous process. It requires the learners to construct a meaningful representation of a text using effective reading strategies and applying several different brain functions to work together. Reading comprehension is so complicated because we can often find ourselves understanding the most basic interpretation of a text, but cannot solve all the questions in a text. How to improve reading comprehension skill effectively is a question. Effective reading strategies are considered as crucial skills that have received the special focus on students' reading comprehension proficiency. In this paper, the author defines the terms of reading and reading comprehension, explains the types of reading, reviews the effective strategies for reading comprehension.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, types of reading comprehension strategies

1. Rationale for the study

According to Wixson, Peters, Weber, and Rober (1987), reading is the process of creating meaning that involves: (a) the reader's existing knowledge; (b) the text information; and (c) the reading context. Pourhosein Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) stated that the main goal of reading is to gain the correct message from a text that the writer intended for the reader(s) to receive. Reading comprehension is the skill all students have to know. Many of the students are reading words from the text, however, do not appear to comprehend the information they are reading. Reading comprehension is the process of eliciting and making meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. McNamara and Magliano (2009) emphasized that this process is a task of both reader and text factors that happen within a larger social context. Hedge (2003) described it as skimming and scanning activities while Hafiz and Tudor (1989 as cited in Alyousef 2005) expressed that exposing learners to large quantities of meaningful and fascinating materials and activities will have a significant impact on the learners' knowledge of L2. A lot of researchers have shown great interest in extensive reading in the last years.

In general, reading comprehension is not a simple process and how important it is to help learners attain the best results in this process is a matter of study

(Bullein, 1952, in Saricoban, 1990).

Nevertheless, it can be challenging for English learners to ameliorate their reading comprehension skills and not many learners feel confident when taking the reading comprehension test, and reading comprehension is a challenge for them. This challenge requires not only teachers but also learners to realize that reading comprehension is an important skill from which to make efforts from the very beginning (Duzer, 1997). With the same view, Austin (1979) said that reading comprehension is a difficult skill that learners need to focus on, need to have an understanding of this skill.

2. The result(s) of research

Table 1. The frequency of applying reading strategies of the student(s)

Content	Total (100%)				
	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Usually	Always
1. Skimming for getting the main ideas	0%	3%	5%	12%	80%
2. Scanning for finding detailed answers	0%	3%	3%	20%	74%
3. answering correctly all the vocabulary questions in the text	25%	38%	17%	11%	9%
4. applying the techniques to answer all the inference or implication questions in the text	41%	28%	17%	8%	6%

5.utilizing the strategies to answer the reference questions in the text	5%	12%	32%	35%	16%
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Responding to the first question on the frequency of applying reading strategies of the students, more than 90% of the students participating in the survey acknowledged that they “usually, and always” use the strategies “skimming” and “scanning” to get the main ideas and answer detailed questions, respectively 12% and 80% for the former, 20% and 74% for the latter while only 3% and 5% of the students asserted that they are “seldom and sometimes” applying “skimming” and “scanning” to get the main ideas and answer detailed questions and 0% for the students who select “never”. It can, therefore, be said that the fluency of applying reading strategies “skimming” and “scanning” of the students is utilized frequently. For answering the vocabulary questions; the inference or implication questions, there are more than 80% of the students (namely 80%, 86%,) claiming that they “never, seldom, and sometimes” use the strategies for these questions whereas 20% and 14% of the students “usually” and “always” take advantages of the strategies to get the answers. By contrast, the number of students who “usually” and “always” applied the strategies to answer the reference questions in the text reached to 35% and 16% respectively. From the above analyses, it can be concluded that the strategies for reading skills are overlooked by the students effectively.

Table 2. Students’ difficulty in doing a reading comprehension text

Difficulties	Number of students	Percentage
1. Lack of vocabulary	74	74%
2.failure in using reading comprehension strategies effectively	68	68%
3. Not understanding the main ideas	54	54%
4. Not understanding complex structures	84	84%
5. time-controlling	87	87%

Which requires not only the strategies, but the knowledge of vocabulary, structures, and time controlling as well. The result of table 2 shows that most of the students felt difficult in doing a reading comprehension text. There are 74% of the students lacking vocabulary while 54%, 68%, 84%, and 87% of them fail to use reading comprehension strategies effectively, understand the main ideas, structures and time controlling.

Table 3. The rate of the students answering correctly the questions in the text

Questions	Total (100%)	
	Correct	Incorrect
1, Main ideas	24%	76%
2. detailed answers	68%	32%
3. vocabulary	25%	75%
4. inference or implication	17%	83%
5. reference	63	37%

The figures from the Table 3 remarkably show that there is a dialectic connection among the table 1,2,3. If the table 1 shows the fluency that the students used reading strategies at the “usually and always” level, the table 2 notices that most of the students felt difficult in doing a reading comprehension text. There are 74% of the students lacking vocabulary while 54%, 68%, 84%, and 87% of them fail to use reading comprehension strategies effectively, understand the main ideas, structures and control time. Consequently, the students’ wrong answers are respectively 76%, 32%, 75%, 83%, 53% (seen table 3)

Table 4. The first semester result of students for reading comprehension

Marks	Total(%)	
	Number of students	Percentage
0	0	0%
1	0	0%
2	3	3%
3	12	12%
4	29	29%
5	33	33%
6	15	15%
7	6	6%
8	2	2%
9	0	0%
10	0	0%

The figures from the first semester result of students for reading comprehension were not positive. These figures, however, reflects the reality of learning reading comprehension of the students. Due to not knowing how to use the strategies for reading a text or lacking of vocabulary, structures, especially time controlling, it can lead to a negative result. From the table 4, there are 44% of the students who are under 4 marks, 33% of the students gets 5 marks while there are only 23% of the students is above 6 marks.

3. Some solutions to improve the students’ reading comprehension skills

From the above analyses, the findings reveal that the students are in short of vocabulary and restricted in using reading comprehension strategies. To sort out these problems, the author of this research attempts to offer some recommendations of effective strategies

reading comprehension with the aim to help students to improve their reading comprehension skill. There are a lot of strategies for reading comprehension that the students can apply for their reading process

3.1. Skimming

Skimming refers to looking only for the general or main ideas, and works best with non-fiction (or factual) material(s). The students do not read word for word or detail. Read quickly to find the main idea and general organization. To get the main idea, the students should read the title, the information of the first paragraph, headings and sub-headings, notice pictures, charts, graphs

3.2. Scanning

Scanning is another useful tool for speeding up your reading. Unlike skimming, when scanning, the students should look only for a specific fact or piece of information without reading everything. In addition, they scan when looking for their favorite show listed in the cable guide, for friend's phone number in a telephone book, and for the sports scores in the newspaper.

For scanning to be successful, the students need to understand how their material is structured as well as comprehend what they read so you can locate the specific information you need.

3.3. Strategies for reference and vocabulary questions

When answering reference questions, the students should be aware that the nouns close to the reference word may not always be the correct answer. If the students do not know which of the four choices, substitute the choices for the reference word. For vocabulary questions, try to get the meaning from context by the clues. Sometimes clues are not given but are implied. The students can get the meaning after they have read the whole passage. In addition, roots, prefixes, and suffixes should be used to get the meaning of a word.

3.4. Using Background Knowledge

In this strategy, readers activate their background knowledge and apply it to aid them comprehend what they are reading. This knowledge consists of individuals' experiences with the world together with their concepts for how written text work, involving word recognition, print concepts, word meaning, and how the text is formed (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). Schema theory is very important in comprehension process (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, & Goetz, 1977). This theory is

based on how people form and activate their previous knowledge. This theory explains that as persons learn about the world, they create a series of knowledge structures or schemas. These schemas develop and shift as the persons learn new information through experience and reading. For instance, a child's schema for dog can involve her or his comprehending of the family pet such as white, furry, and fun. When the child gets more experiences with a lot of dogs in different environments, the dog schema develop and can be improved.

4. Conclusions

The findings of this study showed that reading strategies have a great impact on the students' reading comprehension ability. Students are not just passive receivers of information but they are active makers of meaning. Successful readers try to apply numerous skills to grasp meaning from the texts. Readers should be involved in the reading process by using different strategies to monitor their meaning. This study emphasized the idea that comprehension processes are influenced by a lot of strategies. All of these strategies work together to construct the meaning process easily and effectively. Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that reading materials and activities should be very attractive to students in order to understand a text easily and they should be related to the students' proficiency levels. Teachers have a big responsibility to motivate their students in reading these materials, should be very sensitive to their learners' comprehension difficulties, and should help their learners to modify their views towards reading and have positive attitudes towards their reading activities so that they can better understand the different texts.

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