

Using Strategic Reading Techniques for Improving EFL Reading Skills

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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of the strategic reading techniques for improving EFL reading skills. The present study utilized the quasi-*experimental* research design. The researcher divided the participants into two groups. The innovative group used strategic reading techniques, while the control group did not receive any training except for the regular method. The main question raised in this study was to what extent were the strategic reading techniques effective in improving reading skills for Jazan University students? To this end, the researcher collected data through a questionnaire and a strategic reading test. Furthermore, a model of teaching program, based on using strategic reading techniques, is improved and tested with a group of learners in the chosen university in Saudi Arabia. The findings revealed that the learners need an innovative strategy to help them improve their reading. The application of “clarifying, prediction, questioning, and summarizing” CPQS strategy as a pedagogy helped the learners improve their reading skills. The conclusion of the research recommends that there is a need for using new techniques for providing feedback to EFL learners in reading, such as peer-review, reading conferences, and self-correction.

Keywords: EFL reading skills, reading techniques, strategic reading

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Introduction

Reading is one of the important skills in teaching English as a foreign language. EFL experts viewed reading as a receptive and a productive skill. In reading, students receive and perceive the content of the text, and then produce their comments, interactions, and suggestions. They also express viewpoints and proper solutions to some expected challenges in the text that require them to be creative in solving these situations to understand the reading content. Reading is an extremely complex activity since an authentic reading comprehension implies deep understanding, ability to infer, analyze, apply, and evaluate, (Yurika, 2008). EFL students need to know how to read and be able to deal with a text independently.

Reading is a way of thinking, evaluating, judging, imagining, reasoning, and problem-solving, (Okasha, 2004). That is why the students actively interact with the author's ideas in a dynamic process. When good readers make decisions about the text, they may set their purpose for reading, engage in a dialogue with the author, and thus become active readers (Maria, 1990). Reading is a problem-solving situation that involves taking all the text cues and information from prior knowledge into account. Learners need to become active readers by solving problems if they are truly to understand texts. Comprehension depends on probe questions following a silent reading exercise. Probe questions should reflect different levels of cognitive complexity, such as the following, who was the main person in this text? Where did the event take place? What was the main idea of the reading? Retell what you have read in your own words. Abdul-Alhaq, et al. (2013) pointed out that reader who can use reading strategies effectively to construct meaning, can achieve independence and use literacy for lifelong learning. Zoghi, et al. (2010) pointed out that reading strategies can be any comprehension-enhancing action taken by the readers, such strategic readers can draw on a variety of strategies to accomplish a purpose in reading

Strategic Reading

Research indicates that effective or expert readers are strategic. They have purposes for their reading and adjust these purposes for each reading task. Strategic readers use a variety of strategies and skills as they construct meaning (Okasha, 2009). A strategy is a plan selected deliberately by the reader to accomplish a particular goal or to complete a given task (Paris, 1992). The goal of all reading instruction is to help students become expert readers so that they can achieve independence and can use literacy for lifelong learning and enjoyment. Learning to use strategies effectively is essential to constructing meaning. Readers who are not strategic encounter difficulties in their reading (Paris, 1992). These early difficulties in reading may influence the way readers learn throughout the rest of their lives. Strategic readers use a variety of strategies to construct meaning, such as predicting and questioning strategies. Students can learn strategies in a variety of ways. Some strategy learning takes place through reading and writing experiences. Strategic readers have strategies for dealing with many different learning tasks (Harris & Sipay, 1990). Therefore, learning to use strategic reading skills effectively is a crucial part of becoming a strategic reader. Helping students learn to use these skills requires continuous reading practice to help students become independent in their learning (Yurika, 2008).

Reading Strategies

Before teachers expect their students to read strategically, they must invest the needed time in properly training them how (Okasha, 2009). Regardless of the strategy are about to learn, research supports and suggests the following six-step plan to apply a reading strategy (Jeanette & Sharon, (1999), Okasha, (2009).

Preparation

The focus should be on teaching one strategy. After stating the strategy, the teacher should choose a reading selection material. He should read the text carefully, and mark points where he can use strategy. He should make notes to guide the explanation, and choose another text, passage, or portion of the text for guided practice. He should read the text carefully, and mark points where he wants the students to stop. He should list the stopping points on either individual practice sheets or the board.

Description

The teacher should define the strategy clearly. Students can predict the text to make guesses about what will come next. When the students can use the strategy, they can predict before, and during the reading.

Demonstration

The teacher should model the strategy. He should start by reading the selected text aloud. When he gets to his marked spot, stop, and begins to think aloud. He should tell the students that he has made a prediction. He should read to confirm or reject his prediction. He should continue reading until he sees his prediction outcome, and tell the students about the outcome.

Interactive practice

In this phase, the teacher should tell the students that now they will take part in making predictions. He should continue reading aloud until he arrives at the next marked stop point. He should stop and invite the students to make predictions with him orally. Example: "What do you think will happen next in the passage, and why?" The teacher should give the students opportunities to share their predictions, and positively respond to these predictions.

Guided Practice

The teacher should lead the students into a guided practice of using the strategy. He should hand out the text selection to the students to read silently, and stop at designated spots to use the strategy. Students can do this technique in small or big groups.

Independent Use

In this phase, the teacher tells the students that they will be using the strategy they learned while they read silently. Example: "Today we learned about the strategy _____. While you read silently, I want you to think of this strategy and use it as you go along." As a means to connect with the text, proficient readers ask questions. They question the actual version, the author, and themselves before, during, and after reading. According to Okasha (2009), "Active reading depends on reading silently and quickly. Good readers must develop the ability to understand new words

from the context, the main versus supporting ideas and make inferences and predictions from the written text.” (P.5).

Strategic Reading Activities

The researcher strongly agrees with the researchers Jeanette & Sharon, (1999), Okasha, (2009), who focused on the following activities to practice during the reading process. These activities are as follows:

- 1- Read and Summarize:
- 2- Write down the main ideas in the written text.
- 3- Read for specific information
- 4 - Guess the meaning of the words
- 5- Infer the moral lesson out of the read text.

Strategic Reading Studies

Lara & Jean (1999) conducted a program for advancing reading comprehension skills. The problem of lacking comprehension skills was clear through teacher observations, student and parent surveys, comprehension checklists, teacher journals, and reading inventories. The analysis indicated that many factors influence a student's reading comprehensions such as poor questioning techniques by the teacher, lack of student motivation, and lack of self-monitoring during reading. They recommended that teachers should teach comprehension strategies to their students. The problem setting resulted in the development of several reading comprehension interventions. This program taught students how to self-monitor their reading to increase direct instruction of comprehension strategies. This program helped students to use comprehension strategies well to understand the content of the reading material.

Jeanette & Sharon (1999) explored the influence of using collaborative vital text on reading comprehension. They used the collaborative strategic reading as an instructional approach for multilevel classrooms. In this approach, students learned four strategies as a part of collaborative vital text: preview, click and clunk, get the gist, and warm-up. Students used preview before reading the entire text for that lesson and warm-up after reading the whole text. The other two strategies click and clunk and get the gist are used repeatedly while reading the text after each paragraph or two. Results indicated that the target students achieved significant progress in reading comprehension than those who followed the traditional method.

Abdul Alhaq, et al. (2013) experimented the correlation between vital reading and reading comprehension skills in English language for first-year secondary school students. The study sample consisted of 72 students from El-Ramla El-Moshtaraka Secondary School in Benha, Qalyoubia Governorate, Egypt. Tools of the study were a vital reading questionnaire, vital reading interview, vital reading checklist with think-aloud protocol and reading comprehension test prepared by the researchers. They tested the students, and calculated the Pearson correlation coefficient. Results showed that there was a positive correlation between vital reading and reading comprehension skills in English language in favor of the target group.

Zoghi, et al. (2010) attempted to probe into the effectiveness of a reading instructional approach called "Modified Collaborative Strategic Reading" based on a pretest-posttest design. The sample

of the study was 42 university-level EFL freshmen. They met once a week and received EFL reading instruction according to MCSR for 90 minutes over six weeks. The researchers assigned a developed reading comprehension test for both groups as a pre-test and post-test. Quantitative results indicated that participating students did not demonstrate significant gains in reading comprehension skills. However, the qualitative evaluation revealed that students did have positive attitudes towards Modified Collaborative Strategic Reading.

The experimental Design

Design of the study

The present study utilized the quasi-experimental research design, and a pre-post control group design for conducting the survey. The innovative group and the control group had a pre and post-test. The innovative group received training via using a strategic reading technique while the control group did not receive such training.

Sample of the Study

The sample of the present study consisted of 70 Students from Jazan University. They were 35 for the innovative group and 35 for the control group.

Variables of the Study

The independent variable

The use of strategic reading techniques included (clarifying- predicting – questioning – summarizing).

The dependent variable

EFL reading skills.

The purpose of the study

The study aimed at improving students' EFL reading comprehension skills via using strategic reading techniques.

Research questions

The present study was an attempt to answer the following main question:

To what extent are the strategic reading techniques effective in improving reading Skills for Jazan University students?

From this question, the following questions emerge:

1. To what extent are the strategic reading techniques effective in improving reading clarifying skill?
2. To what extent are the strategic reading techniques effective in improving reading questioning skill?
3. To what extent are the strategic reading techniques effective in improving reading predicting skill?
4. To what extent are the strategic reading techniques effective in improving reading summarizing skill?

Hypotheses of the study

The present study attempted to test the following hypotheses:

1. There would be a statistically significant difference between mean scores obtained by the students of the innovative and the control groups on the post-performance strategic reading questionnaire in favor of the innovative group.
2. There would be a statistically significant difference between mean values obtained by the students of the innovative and the control groups on the post-performance test of the strategic reading techniques in favor of the innovative group.
3. There would be a statistically significant difference between mean values obtained by the students of the innovative and the control groups on the post-performance test of the strategic reading sub-skills (clarifying – predicting – questioning - summarizing) in favor of the innovative group.

Instruments of the Study

The tools of the present study were:

An EFL strategic reading questionnaire

An EFL vital reading checklist.

A reading test.

Research Program

The strategic reading program designed for the present study consisted of fourteen sessions. The first session was devoted to the introduction of the application to the innovative group students. The remaining sessions were instructional. The program included some reading activities to the innovative group through the implementation of self-reflection, teacher and peer feedback, formative and summative feedback, individual conferences, and self-understanding for weak and good points...etc. At the beginning of each meeting, the researcher set the objectives of the session, the teacher's role, and the instructional materials. The teacher asked the students to perform reading tasks. At the end of each session, the teacher gave the students some tasks to achieve.

Duration of the Implementation

The program lasted for seven weeks: two sessions per week, and each session lasted for about 45 minutes.

Instructional Aids

The researcher used the following instructional aids in implementing the program: white and smartboard, paper and pencil to allow students to take notes and interact with each other.

Strategic Techniques for improving Reading Comprehension.

The researcher used CPQS strategy technique for improving reading comprehension skills. CPQS stands for clarifying, predicting, questioning and summarizing as explained below:

Clarifying is simplifying the meaning of the text to the readers via asking questions, rereading, restating, and making the text more comprehensible.

Predicting is using students' power of expectations to know what is coming next in the text. This strategic reading technique was competent enough to let students interact positively with the

reading text. In this stage, students can share their ideas, thinking, discussions in pair work, small groups, teamwork, workshops etc. The researcher noticed that the students' interest increased as they were passing their ideas together. The researcher used prediction technique before and during reading.

Questioning involves collecting information from students before reading the text in the form of brainstorming to support and encourage the students to interact with the given paragraph. The researcher used this technique during reading to increase students' positive involvement with the paragraph. The more students ask questions about the given paragraph, the more they get detailed information about the given reading material. Post-reading questioning is a strategic reading technique to prove that students mastered the paragraph and comprehended it thoroughly as a whole or as one unit.

Summarizing is guiding students to organize and restate information of the reading passage in written form as an indication of their understanding of the assigned paragraph. The researcher used this strategic reading technique during and after the reading process. The researcher tested both groups; innovative and control group before implementing the strategic reading program and after applying the experiment.

Reliability of the test

Reliability of the Strategic Reading test and questionnaire

The researcher used the following method for estimating the authenticity of the reading test.

Inter-rater reliability

Two raters corrected the strategic reading test. The first was the present study researcher. The second rater was a university colleague, who is expert in the field. The researcher used the correlation coefficient between the scores of the first and the second rater by using Pearson Formula. The reliability coefficient was 0.760 in the strategic reading questionnaire and in the strategic reading test was 0.720, which were statistically significant at 0.01 level hence; the questionnaire and the test were reliable.

Findings

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis of the study predicted that there would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores obtained by the students of the innovative and the control groups on post strategic reading questionnaire in favor of the innovative group. The following two tables showed the differences between students' performance on the EFL strategic reading questionnaire.

Table 1. "T" pre-test scores of the strategic reading questionnaire

Groups	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Sig.
Innovative	35	61.18857	6.4204	-.126	.319
Control	35	62.6254	8.6254		

It is evident from table (1) that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-test of the two groups. The mean scores of the innovative group is (61.18857). The mean scores of the control group is (62.6254). Hence, the two groups are homogenous in the strategic reading questionnaire as illustrated by the t-value (.319) which is not significant according to the distribution table.

Table 2. “T” post-test scores of the strategic reading questionnaire

Groups	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Sig
Innovative	35	77.2286	10.3159	4.249	0.01
Control	35	67.3143	9.1740		

It is evident from table (2) that there is a statistically significant difference at 0.01 (one-tailed) between the two groups. The mean scores of the innovative group is (77.2286) .The mean scores of the control group is (67.3143) in the post-test of the EFL strategic reading questionnaire. The mean scores is in favor of the innovative group as indicated by the t-value (4.249) which is significant at 0.01 (one-tailed).

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis of the study predicted that there would be a statistically significant difference between mean values obtained by the students of the two groups on the post-strategic reading test in favor of the innovative group. The data in the following two tables will show the differences between students' performance on strategic reading test for both groups.

Table 3. “T” pre-test scores of the strategic reading test

Groups	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Sig.
Innovative	35	55.9197	11.3399	-.113	.910
Control	35	56.1944	9.3803		

Table 3 indicates that the mean scores of the innovative group is (55.9197).The mean scores of the control group is (56.1944). They are approximately the same. The t-value for both groups is (-.113). This means that there are no significant differences between the innovative and the control groups in the pre-test in overall strategic reading test according to the t-distribution table (2.683). It is evident that both groups are homogenous.

Table 4. “T” post-test scores of the strategic reading test

Groups	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Sig.
Innovative	35	126.5278	13.86	5.884	0.01
Control	35	102.2778	20.47		

It is evident from the table (4) that there is a statistically significant difference at 0.01 (One-tailed) between the two groups. The mean scores of the experimental group is (126.5278). The mean scores of the control group is (102.2778) in the post-test of the overall strategic reading test. The mean scores of the both groups is in favor of the innovative group as indicated by the t-value

(5.884). These differences prove the effect of the strategic reading techniques program with the innovative group.

Hypothesis 3

There would be a statistically significant difference between mean values obtained by the students of the innovative and the control groups on the post-performance on the test of using strategic reading sub-skills techniques (clarifying- predicting – questioning – summarizing) in favor of the experimental group. The following data in the two tables show the differences between the two groups.

Table 5. “T” pre-test scores of the EFL strategic reading sub-skills

Reading Sub-skills	Group	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Sig.
Clarifying	Innovative	35	12.0278	4.4432	-.085	.932
	Control	35	12.1111	3.8156		
Predicting	Innovative	35	8.0278	2.2739	-.243	.808
	Control	35	8.1667	2.5579		
Questioning	Innovative	35	9.2778	2.6034	.184	.855
	Control	35	9.1667	2.5242		
Summarizing	Innovative	35	8.9722	3.1576	.225	.823
	Control	35	8.8333	1.9494		

It is evident from table (5) that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups in the pre-test in each strategic reading technique sub-skill. It is evident that the two groups are homogenous and equivalent.

Table 6. “T” Post-test scores of the EFL strategic reading sub-skills

Reading Sub-skills	Group	N	Mean	S.D	t-value
Clarifying	Innovative	35	29.13	4.4432	6.15
	Control	35	21.18	5.8156	
Predicting	Innovative	35	11.08	2.2739	4.48
	Control	35	8.58	2.5579	
Questioning	Innovative	35	19.22	2.6034	4.18
	Control	35	15.51	3.9015	
summarizing	Innovative	35	18.97	2.71	4.28
	Control	35	16.83	3.94	

Table (6) indicates that the t-test results statistically show that there **are** significant differences between the mean scores of the two groups in favor of the innovative group in both four sub-strategic reading skills.

Discussion of the Results

The findings of the present study showed that strategic reading techniques were effective in improving EFL reading skills for the target group. This progress indicated to some factors. One of these factors was that the students in the innovative group had the opportunity to practice a lot of reading activities during the application of the strategic reading techniques. Another factor was dividing the innovative group students into sub-groups and assigning rules to the students to do. The above-mentioned technique created a sense of duty and cooperation within the group. A third factor was that there was a sense of positive competition among class groups to do the assigned tasks correctly. There was a positive interaction between students within the same group; good students exerted much effort to help weak students to rank their group in the first level.

The design and execution of strategic reading techniques used in this study helped students improve their reading skills. Training students on how to use strategic reading and clarifying the meaning of the text to the readers via asking questions, rereading, restating were very constructive and made the textual materials more comprehensible.

Predicting skill to the given paragraph was sufficient to let students interact positively with the reading material. In this stage, students shared their ideas, thinking, discussions in pair work, small groups, teamwork, workshops, etc. Exchanging ideas within the groups encouraged the students to continue their work.

Questioning skill enabled students to develop their reading comprehension to the given paragraph by asking many questions related to the nature of the content before tackling the paragraph, e.g., what is the paragraph about? What do you know about this title? Do you like this title? Can you give some examples about this topic? What do you think will come in the content of this paragraph? The researcher divided his class into five groups and set the first task to each group" The researcher talked about the topic .The topic was about "Sports and Obsession." The researcher used some questions to motivate students to tackle the paragraph, e.g., games are very essential for everyone. There are many kinds of games. Why do people like practicing games? Where do people practice their games? How do games help people to be healthy? Each group started to form some questions about the paragraph, and interacted with each other. The above-mentioned technique created a sense of cooperation and support within groups. It was effective and beneficial.

The fourth strategic reading technique is summarizing. It means organizing and restating reading information in a written form as a sign of students' understanding of the given paragraph. This strategic reading technique was beneficial as it enabled students to focus on main and sub-main ideas of the given reading passage.

Conclusion

The strategic reading techniques were beneficial and effective in developing and improving EFL reading skills. These techniques provided a useful framework for developing reading skills.

Students should focus on teaching reading in the English language as a process, not as a product. There is a need for using new techniques for providing feedback to EFL learners in reading, such as peer-review, reading conferences, and self-correction.

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Appendix A Strategic Reading Questionnaire

Strategic Reading	Statement	Completely agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Completely disagree
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Before Reading	I look through the text before I read it to see what it is about					
	To find something specific, I know where to look to find it					
	I use the information I already know about the text.					
	I make my picture of the text I read					
During Reading	I ask self-questions about the reading text					
	I can identify which information is important					
	I can make a connection about the parts of the text					
	I guess the meaning of the difficult words					
Post Reading	I can judge the reading text.					
	I can summarize it in points					
	I can relate it to other texts I have already read					

Source: Leisa G., (2005) The Effects of Collaborative Strategic Reading and Direct Instruction on Sixth-Grade Students Persuasive Writing and Attitudes. The University of Maryland, College Park in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy