

Exploring the Reading Strategies Exploited by Better Readers

Noli Maishara Binti Hj Nordin
Roslan Bin Sadjirin
Roselina Binti Musahar

ABSTRACT

Students' level of understanding in reading depends much on the use of appropriate strategies during the activity. The strategies not only affect students' comprehension of the text, but also determine their academic achievement. This study aimed to investigate the reading strategies used by English as a Second Language (ESL) high achievers at tertiary level. Specifically, it aimed to identify the reading strategies frequently used by the respective ESL learners. Additionally, it aimed to find out whether there was any significant difference in the type of strategies used by ESL high achievers? Forty undergraduate students were randomly selected as the respondents for this study. A twenty-eight-item questionnaire, which focused on the frequency of use of pre, while, and post-reading strategies was utilised in the study. It was found that ESL high achievers frequently used certain reading strategies to grasp the meaning of the text. The ESL high achievers were also reported to significantly use post-reading strategies as their distinctive remark. The findings suggest that the use of appropriate reading strategies should be exposed to students to help them enhance their comprehension of a reading text and make them become better readers.

Keywords: reading strategies, ESL, reading comprehension

Introduction

Reading effectively and efficiently is an essential skill in life. In the educational contexts, the ability to read well is an important asset for students, which, in turn helps them in their academic achievement at large. Yilmaz (2000), for instance, confirmed that reading had a positive effect on the educational achievement of students. It was found that those who failed in their third grade were due to the fact that they were non-readers. It is often the case that reading at higher institutions of learning demands certain skills. Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) further asserted that successful learners use more strategies than unsuccessful learners. Skillful readers regularly engage in purposeful activities that involve planful thinking, flexible strategies, and periodic self-monitoring. They think about the topic, look forward and backward in the passage, and check their own understanding as they read. Even though many students have the ability to read, many are not skilled readers and such they fail in grasping the whole meaning of text as intended by the writer. Horning (2010) confirmed the earlier study by stating that the effective readers are more aware of strategy use than less effective readers. This clearly suggests that one needs to be a strategic reader to be an effective reader.

Where learning is concerned, each individual has different learning abilities that are very much related to different levels and types of intelligence. In relation to this, Gardner (1983) points out that human beings do not share the same types and levels of intelligence, which are referred to as 'multiple intelligences'. In other words, what is emphasised here are individual differences and abilities. Such emphasis is supported by Noli and Sabariah (2011) who states that a variety set of skills and preferred strategies are used by different learners to approach a task. In this light, this study attempts to find out the reading strategies used by English as a Second Language (ESL) high achievers at tertiary level.

Objectives

1. To investigate the reading strategies frequently used by English as a Second Language (ESL) high achievers.
2. To identify whether there is any significant difference in the type of strategies used by ESL high achievers.

Methodology

Forty undergraduate students were randomly selected as the respondents for this study. The selection was based on their performance in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). A twenty-eight-item questionnaire, adapted from Salleh's questionnaire (2007) based on major reading strategies listed by Gardner (1983) which focused on the frequency of use of pre, while, and post-reading strategies was utilised in the study. The data from the questionnaire were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run on the data to test for any significant difference in the types of reading strategies used within the ESL high achievers.

Result and Discussion

Pre-reading strategies frequently used by ESL high achievers

As can be seen in Table 1, the ESL high achievers tended to use pre-reading strategy S3 (mean=2.75) i.e. to scan through the chapter introductions/summaries before reading the whole text. This method relates very much to the use of metacognitive strategies as quoted from El-Hendi (2001) in which planning is considered as a crucial step before reading, other than monitoring and evaluating. Schmitt (2005) further claimed that strategic readers used planning strategies before they began to read in order to make the texts more comprehensible.

Table 1 Means of frequency of use of pre-reading strategies among the ESL high achievers

Pre-reading strategies	Mean score of ESL high achievers	Rank
S1 I set my purpose for reading.	2.70	2
S2 I determine the points that I want to look for before reading a text.	2.50	5
S3 I scan through the chapter introduction/chapter summaries before reading the whole text.	2.75	1
S4 I ask a lot of WH-questions related to the subject matter to myself before I read.	2.60	3
S5 I predict the content of a text before reading it.	2.50	6
S6 When I start reading a new chapter or text, I first think about the best way to understand it.	2.55	4

While-reading strategies frequently used by ESL high achievers

As shown in Table 2, the ESL high achievers tended to use while-reading strategies S20 'guessing meaning in context' (mean=3.00) and S19 'rereading difficult expressions and sentences' (mean=2.95). These findings suggest that nearly all ESL high achievers reread sentences that they did not understand while reading a text. This may be a sign of a lack of tolerance of ambiguity among the participants. This observation actually contradicts the finding of Brown (2000), which revealed that the ability to tolerate ambiguity in any reading text portrays the characteristics of effective readers.

Table 2 Mean of frequency of use of while-reading strategies among the ESL high achievers

	While-reading strategies	Mean score of ESL high achievers	Rank
S7	I give my complete attention as I read.	2.95	3
S8	As I read the text, I make notes simultaneously.	2.45	15
S9	I highlight main ideas as I read the text.	2.75	8
S10	I use different colours or highlighters to differentiate main ideas from supporting details.	2.15	16
S11	I imagine what I read	2.70	10
S12	I work through a chapter in a textbook item by item and I study each part separately.	2.65	11
S13	I repeat the main parts of a subject matter until I know them by heart.	2.65	12
S14	I try to find the key words of a text as I read.	2.80	4
S15	I do not proceed to the subsequent chapter until I have mastered the current chapter in detail.	2.80	5
S16	I try to see the connection between topics discussed in different chapters of a textbook.	2.80	6
S17	I try to construct an overall picture of a text for myself.	2.75	9
S18	When I am reading a topic, I try to think of cases I know from my own experience that are connected to that topic.	2.50	14
S19	When I don't understand an expression/ sentence, I read it again.	2.95	2
S20	I guess meanings of difficult words from contexts.	3.00	1
S21	I use dictionaries/ encyclopedias while reading.	2.55	13
S22	I communicate with myself as I read.	2.80	7

Post-reading strategies frequently used by ESL high achievers

As seen in Table 3, the ESL high achievers preferred to use post-reading strategies S28 (mean=2.95) but not in favour of S24 (mean=2.60) and S25 (mean=2.65). This supports Cabral's (2002) results, which indicate that many students tended to avoid the use of strategies that involved interaction with teachers. Students' shyness might have been the contributing factor for this situation.

Table 3 Means of frequency of use of post-reading strategies among the ESL high achievers

	Item	Mean score of high ESL achievers	Rank
S23	I summarize the major ideas in a text after reading it.	2.90	2
S24	If I don't understand a text well, I try to find others sources (i.e. books, articles from websites, etc) about the subject concerned.	2.60	6
S25	If I don't understand a text well, I approach my lecturer for further explanation.	2.65	5
S26	I solve my doubts/exchange opinions with the people around me about the text that I read.	2.80	4
S27	When I have difficulty in understanding a text, I try to analyze why it is difficult for me.	2.85	3
S28	I try to recall what I have read.	2.95	1

Comparison in the use of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading strategies used by the ESL high achievers

Table 4 and Table 5 present detailed information of the means and standard deviation of each type of strategy, and the result of the ANOVA, respectively.

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics of the ESL high achievers for pre, while, and post-reading strategies

Strategies	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error
Pre-reading (n=120)	2.6000	.55610	.05076
While-reading (n=320)	2.7031	.51558	.02882
Post-reading (n=120)	2.7917	.44714	.04082
Total (n=560)	2.7000	.51385	.02171

Table 5 One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) result for the ESL high achievers

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Between Strategies	2.211	2	1.106	4.236	.015*
Within Strategies	145.389	557	.261		
Total	147.600	559			

As shown in Table 5, the ANOVA results indicated that there was a significant difference [$F(2, 557) = 4.24$, $p = 0.015$] in the use of reading strategies by the ESL high achievers at $p \leq 0.05$ level of significance. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean frequency of use for post-reading strategies was significantly different from that of the pre-reading strategies, in that the mean frequency of use of post-reading strategies was higher than pre-reading strategies ($\bar{X}_{\text{post}}=2.79$, $\bar{X}_{\text{pre}}=2.60$). However, the post hoc Tukey HSD test did not reveal any significant difference between the while-reading and post-reading strategies, or between the pre-reading and while-reading strategies. These results suggest that the post reading strategies were more frequently utilized by the ESL high achievers. These findings support the findings of an earlier study which illustrate that the use of strategies tended to differ according to the readers' learning stages (Takeuchi, 2002).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it was found that ESL high achievers frequently used certain reading strategies to grasp the meaning of the texts in all the pre, while, and post-reading strategies. The ESL high achievers were also reported to significantly use post-reading strategies as their distinctive remark which labels them as better readers. The findings suggest that the use of appropriate reading strategies should be exposed to students to help them enhance their comprehension of a reading text and make them become better readers.

References

- Brown, H. D (2000). Principles of language learning and teaching. NY: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Cabral, A.P. (2002). Practising college reading strategies, *The Reading Matrix*, 2 (3). Retrieved March 24, 2011, from <http://www.readingmatrix.com/cabral/article.pdf>.
- El-Hindi, A.E (2001). Enhancing metacognitive awareness of college learners. *Reading Horizons*, 36,214-230.
- Gardner, H. (1983). Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences. New York: Basic Books. In *Infed Encyclopedia*. Retrieved March 2, 2009 from <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/gardner.htm>.
- Horning, A. (2010). Reading, Writing and Digitizing: A Meta-Analysis of Reading Research. *The Reading Matrix*, 10 (2). Retrieved from http://www.readingmatrix.com/articles/sept_2010/alice_horning.pdf.
- Mokhtari, K., and Reichard, C. (2002). Assessing students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94 (2), 249-259.
- Noli, M.N., and Sabariah, M.R. (2011). Read it right: How ESL learners differ in their reading strategies. *Journal of Language Studies*, 7 (1).
- Salleh, S.H.M. (2007). (Unpublished thesis). Reading Strategies of Bachelor of Education (Teaching English as a Second Language) Students: A case study of UNISEL undergraduates. IIUM.
- Schmitt, M. C. (2005). Measuring students' awareness and control of strategic processes. *AILA Review* 11, 11-16.

Takeuchi, O. (2002). What can we learn from good foreign language learners? Qualitative studies in the Japanese FL context. In *Proceedings of the 29th JACET Summer Seminar* (pp 20-26). Tokyo: JACET.

Yilmaz, B. (2000). Reading and library usage habits of the students whose mother tongue is Turkish in Vienna, Austria. International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. Retrieved February 19, 2009 from <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla66/papers/084-52e.htm>.

NOLI MAISHARA NORDIN, ROSLAN SADIJIRIN, ROSELINA MUSAHAR.

Universiti Teknologi MARA (Pahang).

nolinordin@pahang.uitm.edu.my, roslancs@pahang.uitm.edu.my, roselina@pahang.uitm.edu.my