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Master Candidates Usage of Reading Comprehension Strategies in Academic Context

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Abstract

Success at academic context depends on the students' ability to understand an English written text. The subjects of the current study are 13 postgraduate college students who wish to apply for master degree studies. Reading comprehension was the most problematic issue at their path. The current study investigates the impact of using reading comprehension strategies (RCS) on maximizing the students' ability to process a written academic text. The students enrolled in a three week coaching session of English language reading comprehension. The session focused on the "how" and "when" use of (RCS). Six RCS were under observation, namely: Predicting, Visualizing, Summarizing, Inferring, Scanning, and Identifying Main Idea. The results of this action research revealed that implementing RCS in curriculum led to significance development in academic context. The results also showed the students were selective in their usage of RCS.

Key words: Reading Comprehension Strategies, action research, academic context

Uso de candidatos a maestría de estrategias de comprensión lectora en el contexto académico

Resumen
El éxito en el contexto académico depende de la capacidad de los estudiantes para comprender un texto escrito en inglés. Los sujetos del estudio actual son 13 estudiantes universitarios de posgrado que desean solicitar estudios de maestría. La comprensión lectora fue el tema más problemático en su camino. El estudio actual investiga el impacto del uso de estrategias de comprensión lectora (RCS) para maximizar la capacidad de los estudiantes para procesar un texto académico escrito. Los estudiantes se inscribieron en una sesión de entrenamiento de tres semanas de comprensión de lectura en inglés. La sesión se centró en el uso de "cómo" y "cuándo" de (RCS). Seis RCS estaban bajo observación, a saber: predecir, visualizar, resumir, inferir, escanear e identificar la idea principal. Los resultados de esta investigación de acción revelaron que implementar RCS en el currículo condujo a un desarrollo significativo en el contexto académico. Los resultados también mostraron que los estudiantes fueron selectivos en su uso de RCS.

Palabras clave: Estrategias de comprensión lectora, investigación de acción, contexto académico.

Introduction

Given the importance of English language in the education sector, and the fact that many post graduate Iraqi students enter high education programs un prepared concerning their English language. Consequently, English Proficiency Test (EPT) has become one of the essential requirements for applying for master and PhD degree. Teachers, curriculum designers, and workers at education sector agree that reading comprehension is a crucial skill of second/foreign language learning. The criteria of a person achievement in his or her personal and professional life is determent by his/her ability to read (Block &Israel, 2005, p.2). Reading skill can be defined as a cognitive process in which the reader interacts with the text (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2012, p.1), and constructs knowledge. This ability to process and interact with a written text is called text comprehension (Zangana, 2019, p.7).

Nowadays, teachers try to create teaching context and instructions which bombers the learners with range of reading comprehension strategies

(RCS). previous studies on language acquisition give the evidence that those RCS promotes to a large extent the learners ability to comprehend a text. Strategies are intentioned actions which learners select and control to achieve goals and objectives (Paris et al., 1983; Van Dijk & kintsch, 1983). RCS seems to be a shortcut to fulfill English language teachers objectives conserving text comprehension. RCS are the outcome of on more than 25 years of research in Second/ forigen language teaching domain (Dole,Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Duke & Pearson, 2008).

The teacher researcher noticed that her students manage to solve problems that they face in the (EPT) which are related to the grammar, language function, conversation and paragraph writing sections. They managed to learn the grammar patterns, syntax, and to put together meaningful sentence. She also noticed that the most problematic area that they encounter was comprehension English written texts. This is due to the fact that Iraqi education system does not really assess the reading skill. In addition to the in sufficient vocabulary intake.

Having uneven educational backgrounds our student did not have equal stock of vocabulary. Which made the teachers job seems to be a hard endeavor taking into consideration the relatively short coaching course. The current action study tries to answer the question "would an intensive short reading comprehension coaching session help students to react positively at the online EPT". The current study also investigates the effect of implementing six effective strategies to classroom instructions explicitly on the learners' text comprehension. Predicting strategy means the reader's ability to foretell what is coming ahead while reading. This ability is usually powered by a cognitive metal process which is fed by the reader's previous knowledge. Visualizing refers to the images that are constructed by the reader's brain hiring pieces of information obtained during reading. Summing up the most important features or events of the written text is known as Summarizing strategy. Inferring refers to the metal connections that the reader make between the ideas extracted from the written text. The fifth strategy Identifying Main Ideas means constructing the texts most important concept through the reading process.

Reading is a skill is not necessary only for education but throughout life (Kucukoglu,2013, p.1) especially at the students' academic study or career. The current action research investigates maximizing text comprehension skill with the aid of (RCS) among Iraqi master degree candidates to prepare them to pass an online (EPT) which in turn guarantee their success at their academic path. Reading comprehension studies have secreted a

clear evidence of the importance of RCS. Yuksel & Yuksel (2012) state that "Recently, as a consequence of shift of focus in reading research to academic reading, the strategies used in academic reading has been the research focus" (p.2). They investigate Turkish EFL university students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies, the findings revealed that the students' awareness of RCS did promote their text comprehension. Ness (2009) investigated (RCS) in secondary schools, she observed the instructions adapted at the classroom, and the findings uncovered crucial obstacle in teaching those strategies embodied in the teachers inability of providing a comprehensive explanations of the strategies. Kucukoglu, (2013) conducted a study in which she investigated the effect of RCS in improving reading skills, her action research involved the effect of RCS on 14 intermediate school students. The findings indicated a significant improvement of reading skills after internalizing RCS.

Moving to Potchefstroom University in South Africa Dreyer & Nel (2003) investigated the classroom setting and structure of instructions for teaching (RCS) English for Professional Purposes course. The findings showed that the students groups which received the (RCS) instructions obtained much higher scores in text comprehension than the other group who did not receive any treatment.

the body of literature provide us with studies that proved the significance of RCS in second language acquisition for learners of English language. Yet, little have done concerning learners of other discipline who wish to learn English for academic purposes.

Method

The current study aims at evaluating the effectiveness of (RCS) on students in academic context. The teacher researcher was motivated to carry out this action research to help her students to interact positively with written academic texts on one hand, and to consider the impact of RCS on their performance in an online reading comprehension test.

Being a teacher of reading comprehension for three years, teacher researcher believed that a preliminary interview with each group of student of each coaching course (which lasts usually for three weeks) is crucial demand, because this interview will helps her to analyze the students' needs, and have an insight of what the teaching curriculum should involve. It will also generate ideas about what should be included in the coaching course. The subjects were 13 graduated students aged 20-35 years 6 female and 7

male. all of them were native speakers of Arabic language. The language of instruction in the classroom was English combined with Arabic. First, a preliminary reading comprehension Test was administrated which a copy of the previous online tests of the same year (2019) Appendix (1). The test included 2 academic texts each one was followed by some reading comprehension multiple choice questions. The pretest was administrated to shed light on the students' proficiency level in reading comprehension of English academic texts.

Foe three weeks the students had daily coaching session of English language reading comprehension, which last for two hours. The sessions followed PPP procedure of classroom activity; presenting, practice and production. Dole, Duffy, Roehler and Pearson, 1991 stated that "strategies emphasize intentional and deliberate plans under the control of the reader" so, the strategies were modeled and presented and explained with examples explicitly by the teacher.

Feedback was received continuously from the while the strategies were explained both in English and Arabic language. The second phase of the classroom activity was to encourage the students to practice the RCS in groups then individually with the teacher monitoring them. As for assessment it was an ongoing activity throughout all the sessions.

By the end of coaching session the students were able to take part in the online EPT. As mentioned before the researcher chose to adopt an action approach to carry out the current study. The motivation behind the action approach was to solve an immediate issue which the teacher researcher faces in coaching his students and prepared them for the online EPT.

Both of the Pretest and the post online test were followed by conducting Metacoprehension Strategy Index (MSI) survey for each student to measure their awareness of the (RCS) before and after the coaching sessions.

Results and Discussion

After comparing the scores obtained from the pretest which administrated by the teacher, and the online posttest. It can be clearly noticed that a significant improvement achieved by the students' scores after the treatment. Table (1,2) shows the progress that the students achieved.

Table (1)

Pretest and post test scores

Participants	Pretest score	Percentage	Posttest score	Percentage	Development
1	3	15%	12	60%	45%
2	7	35%	16	80%	45%
3	4	20%	12	60%	40%
4	3	15%	17	85%	70%
5	9	45%	15	75%	30%
6	5	25%	16	80%	55%
7	5	25%	18	90%	65%
8	6	30%	17	85%	55%
9	3	15%	13	65%	50%
10	4	20%	12	60%	40%
11	2	10%	15	75%	65%
12	3	15%	16	80%	65%
13	7	35%	17	85%	50%
The mean	5		15.5		

As table (1,2) shows the mean of the students' scores at the posttest was approximately (15.5 out of 20) which is significantly higher that the pretest mean score (5 out of 20) obtained by the same group of students before their enrollment at the three weeks coaching course. The low scores of the pretest were not surprising, because the teacher researcher have identified her students as having serious difficulties in processing written texts.

Taking into consideration this variation between the pre and posttest scores it can be inferred that the adopting a teaching curriculum of RCS was very beneficial for student of low efficiency level at English language. This evidence is supported by the results obtained from the MSI survey which shows the students unawareness of the "how" and "when" to use RCS at the pretest. This ignorance of RSC has affected their text comprehension which consequently affect scores. On the other hand, the MSI survey which accompany the posttest reflected the students awareness of RCS meaning, purpose and usage, Table (3). The students mastering of RCS helped them to bridge their background knowledge and storage of vocabulary and employ this in text comprehension.

Table (2)

Score variation between the pretest and post test

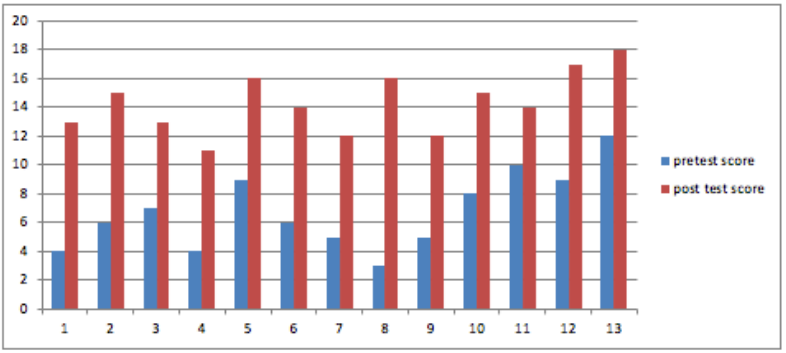
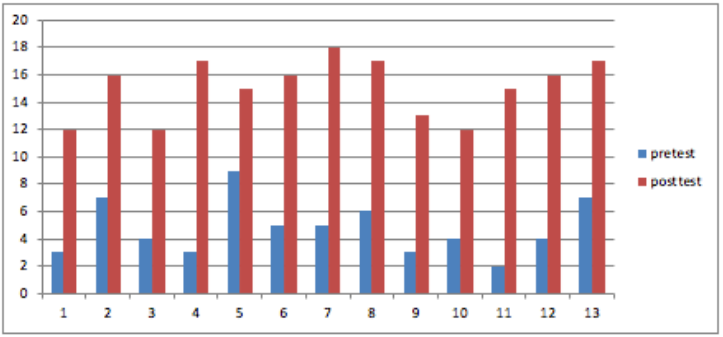


Table (3)

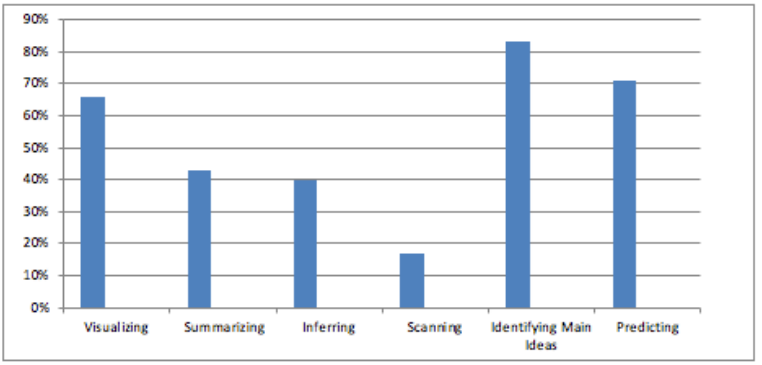
Students' awareness of RCS at pre and posttest



Another outcome of the MSI survey that is worth to be mentioned is the students' selection of the suitable strategy. Some strategies were more frequent than other, table (4). For instance "Identifying the main idea" strategy was the most frequent. Students find it easy to learn how to separate between the main sentence which hold the main idea of the written text, and the other sentences that support the main idea. It is due to their previous experience in interacting with written text. Then they manage to internalize the meaning and usage of predicting strategy.

Table (4)

Frequency of strategy usage



However, the researcher expected our student perform positively at the online test, because the researcher did noticed the students improvement during session, and assessment was an ongoing process. So, the answers of the research question listed ahead is that students recruit RCS towards a better understanding of text in academic context.

The outcomes of this researcher encouraged the teacher researcher to include RCS in her curriculum not only for at risk students' courses, but in each reading comprehension session in future.

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Appendix (1)

Philadelphia is a city known for many things. It is where the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, and it was also the first capital of the United States. But one fact about Philadelphia is not so well-known: it is home to nearly 3,000 murals painted on the sides of homes and buildings around the city. In fact, it is said that Philadelphia has more murals than any other city in the world, with the exception of Rome. How did this come to be? More than 20 years ago, a New Jersey artist named Jane Golden started a program pairing troubled youth with artists to paint murals on a few buildings around the city. From this small project, something magical happened. The young people involved helped to create magnificent pieces of art, but there were other, perhaps more important benefits. The young people learned to collaborate and get along with many different kinds of people during the various steps required to paint and design a mural. They learned to be responsible, because they needed to follow a schedule to make sure the murals were completed. They also learned to take pride in their community. It is hard for any resident to see the spectacular designs and not feel proud to be a part of Philadelphia. Take a walk around some of the poorest neighborhoods in Philadelphia, neighborhoods full of broken windows and littered front steps, and you will find beautiful works of art on the sides and fronts of buildings. Of course the murals are not just in poor neighborhoods, but more affluent ones as well. Special buses take tourists to different parts of the city to see the various murals, which range from huge portraits of historical heroes, to cityscapes, to scenes depicting the diverse ethnic groups that call Philadelphia home. As a result of its success, the mural program created by Jane Golden has now become the nation's largest public art program and a model for other cities throughout the country seeking to help troubled youth.

1. The main focus of the passage is

A. an art program designed to help troubled youth
B. the many tourists who come to Philadelphia to see murals
C. the reasons why Philadelphia is a unique city
D. how Jane Golden came up with the idea to start a mural program.

2) As used in paragraph1, the phrase "it is said" suggests that the author is

A. knowingly misleading the reader
B. using a quote from someone else

C. referring to something that is widely believed, but may be untrue

D. referring to something that he or she does not personally believe

3) As used in paragraph 1, the phrase "with the exception of Rome" means that

A. Rome has fewer murals than Philadelphia
B. Philadelphia has fewer murals than Rome
C. Rome has the most beautiful murals of all
D. Rome and Philadelphia are the only cities with murals

4) According to the passage, the murals in Philadelphia

I. draw tourists who want to see them
II. instill responsibility and pride in the people who paint them
III. are solely designed by the youth who paint them

A. I only
B. I and II only
C. II and III only
D. I, II, and III

4 5) According to the passage, the murals in Philadelphia

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B. I and II only

C. II and III only

D. I, II, and III

Have you ever heard someone use the phrase “once in a blue moon?” People use this expression to describe something that they do not do very often. For example, someone might say that he tries to avoid eating sweets because they are unhealthy, but will eat chocolate “once in a blue moon.” Or someone who does not usually like to go to the beach might say “I visit the shore once in a blue moon.” While many people use this phrase, not everyone knows the meaning behind it. The first thing to know is that the moon itself is never actually blue. This is just an expression. The phrase “blue moon” actually has to do with the shape of the moon, not the color. As the moon travels around the earth, it appears to change shape. We associate certain names with certain shapes of the moon. For example, when we can see a small part of the moon, it is called a crescent moon. A crescent is a shape that looks like the tip of a fingernail. When we cannot see the moon at all, it is called a new moon. When we can see the entire moon, it is called a full moon. Usually, there is only one full moon every month. Sometimes, however, there will be two full moons in one month. When this happens, the second full moon is called a “blue moon.” Over the next 20 years, there will only be 15 blue moons. As you can see, a blue moon is a very rare event. This fact has led people to use the expression “once in a blue moon” to describe other very rare events in their lives. A crescent is a shape that looks like the tip of a fingernail. When we cannot see the moon at all, it is called a new moon. When we can see the entire moon, it is called a full moon. Usually, there is only one full moon every month. Sometimes, however, there will be two full moons in one month. When this happens, the second full moon is called a “blue moon.” Over the next 20 years, there will only be 15 blue moons. As you can see, a blue moon is a very rare event. This fact has led people to use the expression “once in a blue moon” to describe other very rare events in their lives.

1) Which of the following would be a good example of someone doing something “once in a blue moon”?

A. Mary likes to go to the mountains every weekend. Mary goes to the mountains once in a blue moon.
B. Tom rarely remembers to take out the trash. Tom takes out the trash once in a blue moon.
C. Cindy hates to wash the dishes. Nevertheless, she does it every day. Cindy washes the dishes once in a blue moon.

D. Ming sometimes forgets to do his homework. Ming forgets to do his homework once in a blue moon.

2) When does a blue moon happen in nature?

A.when there are two full moons in one month
B.when the moon has a blue color
C.when we cannot see the moon at all
D.when we can only see a small part of the moon

3) Using the passage as a guide, it can be understood that which of the following sentences does not contain an expression?

A.Thomas has lost his mind.
B.An apple a day keeps the doctor away.
C.I'll mow the grass after I finish my homework.
D.It's never a bad time to start something new.

4) As described in paragraph 3, what is another example of something that has a crescent shape?

A.your thumb
B.a distant star
C.the letter "C"
D.the letter "H"

5) In the final paragraph, the author states: "Over the next 20 years, there will only be 15 blue moons." This means that over the next 20 years, a blue moon will happen

A.once a year
B.less than once a year
C.more than once a year
D.not enough information is provided

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