

Developing EFL Reading Comprehension Through Using Collaborative Strategic Reading Approach

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the effectiveness of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) in developing reading comprehension skills of EFL secondary stage students. Two intact classes of second year secondary stage students from Belqas Al-Azhar Secondary Institute for Girls participated in this study. One class (N= 30) was assigned as the experimental group and received CSR instruction. The other class (N= 30) was assigned as the control group and received regular instruction of reading comprehension. The treatment lasted for 12 weeks. To collect data, a pre-post reading comprehension skills test was used to assess the EFL students' reading comprehension skills before and after the treatment. T-Tests and Eta-square (η^2) were used to analyze the data statistically. Results showed that there is a statistically significant difference at the 0.01 level between the mean score of the experimental group students and that of the control group on the post-administration of the reading comprehension test in favor of experimental group students. Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that CSR had a positive effect on developing secondary stage students' reading comprehension skills and was more effective in developing critical comprehension skills than inferential or literal comprehension skills.

Keywords: Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), reading comprehension skills, EFL

المخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من فعالية القراءة الاستراتيجية التعاونية في تنمية مهارات الفهم القرائي للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية. شارك فصلين من طالبات الصف الثاني الثانوي بمعهد بلقاس الثانوي الأزهرى للفتيات في هذه الدراسة. تم اختيار واحد من هذين الفصلين ليمثل المجموعة التجريبية والآخر ليمثل المجموعة الضابطة. استمر التطبيق لأثنتي عشر أسبوعاً واستخدمت الباحثة اختبار مهارات الفهم القرائي لقياس وتقييم مهارات الفهم القرائي قبل وبعد التطبيق. استخدمت الباحثة الأساليب الإحصائية المناسبة لتحليل البيانات وأسفرت النتائج عن فروق إحصائية بين المجموعتين الضابطة والتجريبية في اختبار الفهم القرائي البعدي لصالح المجموعة التجريبية التي درست باستخدام القراءة الاستراتيجية التعاونية. وفقاً لنتائج هذه الدراسة، فإن مدخل القراءة الاستراتيجية التعاونية له أثر إيجابي على تنمية مهارات الفهم القرائي لدى طلاب المرحلة الثانوية.

Introduction

Reading is an important language skill. It is a bridge to world knowledge. Learners obtain knowledge of any field, absorb information of any kind, and explore this changing world through the processing of reading. Reading also helps learners to enhance their overall language proficiency, activate their minds, develop their creativity and imagination and widen their vision (Keyser, 2015). The centrality of reading in our lives has been the reason for the surge of interest in the study of reading.

Reading Process

Reading is a twofold process. First, it is a process of decoding a printed material and second, it is an active process of constructing meaning (comprehension). According to this perspective, the reading process includes two integrated dimensions.

- The first dimension involves processing the words visually; identifying their phonological, orthographic, and semantic representations; and then connecting the words of a sentence using rules of syntax to understand the underlying meaning of that sentence (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014).

- The second dimension involves integrating the meaning across sentences, making use of relevant background knowledge, generating inferences, identifying the text structure, and considering the authors' goals and motives (Graesser, 2015).

Merging these two dimensions results in “a mental representation that reflects the overall meaning of the text” (Kendeou, McMaster, & Christ, 2016).

Thus, comprehension is the goal and purpose of reading. Without comprehension, reading is a meaningless activity of word decoding. It is no exaggeration to say that developing reading comprehension affects greatly on students' success in school and life as reading comprehension has been described as “the most critical skill students need to be successful in school” (Watson et al., 2012, p. 80)

Therefore, reading comprehension instruction should aim to help students become competent and proficient readers by providing various effective instructional approaches such as comprehension strategy instruction and cooperative learning.

Table 7. Comparing the performance of the experimental and control groups on the post-administration of the reading comprehension test

Reading comprehension skills	Experimental Group (N=30)		Control Group (N=30)		t-value	Sig.
	mean	S. D.	mean	S. D.		
Identifying the main idea	3.20	0.99	1.86	1.27	4.50	0.01
Reading for details	3.00	1.01	1.90	1.22	3.66	0.01
Reading for specific information	3.13	1.36	1.86	1.27	4.05	0.01
Identifying reference words	3.33	1.09	1.80	1.42	4.67	0.01
Literal comprehension skills	12.66	2.94	7.46	3.96	5.77	0.01
Inferring cause and effect relationships	2.93	1.14	1.66	1.39	3.84	0.01
Making inferences and Drawing conclusions	2.60	1.40	1.46	1.38	3.14	0.01
Inferring sequences of events	2.73	1.22	1.66	1.39	3.13	0.01
Inferring the meaning of unknown words	3.00	1.14	1.93	1.33	3.31	0.01
Inferential comprehension skills	11.26	3.03	6.73	4.15	4.82	0.01
Figuring out the author's purpose	2.66	1.32	1.60	1.22	3.24	0.01
Distinguishing fact from opinion	2.53	1.38	1.46	1.27	3.10	0.01
Expressing personal opinions	3.16	0.74	2.06	0.94	5.00	0.01
Summarizing	4.33	1.21	2.56	1.10	5.89	0.01
Critical comprehension skills	12.70	3.82	7.70	3.87	5.02	0.01
Total	36.63	9.48	21.90	11.55	5.39	0.01

Results in table 7 illustrate that the calculated t-values are significant at the 0.01 level with regard to the reading comprehension sub-skills, levels of reading comprehension, and the total score of the test. All the calculated t-values in table 7 are greater than the critical t-value (2.46) at the 0.01 level of significance. Table 7 indicates that the t-value for the literal comprehension skills is (5.77), the t-value for the inferential comprehension skills is (4.82), the t-value for the critical comprehension skills is (5.02) and the t-value for the

total test score is (5.39). According to that, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference at the 0.01 level between the mean score of the experimental group students and that of the control group on the post-administration of the reading comprehension test in favor of experimental group students. These results indicate the improvement of experimental group students' reading comprehension skills after the treatment in comparison with the control group students and provide evidence for the effectiveness of CSR

in developing the experimental group students' reading comprehension skills.

Testing the second hypothesis

There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.01 level between the mean score of the

experimental group students on the pre- and post-administration of the reading comprehension test in favor of the post-administration.

A dependent samples t-test was used to test the second hypothesis. Results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Comparing the performance of the experimental group on the pre- and post-administration of the reading comprehension test.

Reading comprehension skills	Pre-test (N=30)		Post-test (N=30)		t-value	Sig.
	mean	S. D.	mean	S. D.		
Identifying the main idea	1.73	1.25	3.20	0.99	8.93	0.01
Reading for details	1.80	1.42	3.00	1.01	6.59	0.01
Reading for specific information	1.86	1.38	3.13	1.36	6.23	0.01
Identifying reference words	1.80	1.42	3.33	1.09	6.70	0.01
Literal comprehension skills	7.20	3.91	12.66	2.94	13.85	0.01
Inferring cause and effect relationships	1.60	1.32	2.93	1.14	7.61	0.01
Making inferences and Drawing conclusions	1.46	1.27	2.60	1.40	6.15	0.01
Inferring sequences of events	1.53	1.25	2.73	1.22	5.83	0.01
Inferring the meaning of unknown words	1.73	1.46	3.00	1.14	7.07	0.01
Inferential comprehension skills	6.33	4.00	11.26	3.03	12.57	0.01
Figuring out the author's purpose	1.40	1.30	2.66	1.32	7.07	0.01
Distinguishing fact from opinion	1.33	1.32	2.53	1.38	5.83	0.01
Expressing personal opinions	1.90	0.92	3.16	0.74	11.89	0.01
Summarizing	2.46	1.19	4.33	1.21	23.54	0.01
Critical comprehension skills	7.10	4.22	12.70	3.82	16.75	0.01
Total	20.63	11.80	36.63	9.48	15.57	0.01

Results in Table 8 indicate that the calculated t-values are significant at the 0.01 level with regard to the reading comprehension sub-skills, levels of reading comprehension, and the total score of the test. Table 8 indicates that the t-value for the literal comprehension skills is (13.85),

the t-value for the inferential comprehension skills is (12.57), the t-value for the critical comprehension skills is (16.75) and the t-value for the total test score is (15.57). These values show that the experimental group students' reading comprehension skills increased

significantly after using CSR. According to these values, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference at the 0.01 level between the mean score of the experimental group students on the pre- and post-administration of the reading comprehension test in favor of the post-administration. These results show the positive impact of the CSR treatment on developing second year secondary stage students' reading comprehension skills and answer the study question: To what extent is Collaborative Strategic Reading effective in developing reading comprehension skills of second year Al-Azhar secondary stage students?

Discussion of Results

Results reported a statistically significant difference between the control group and the experimental group in favor of the experimental group. They also revealed a great improvement in the experimental group students' reading comprehension skills on the post administration of the reading comprehension test. All these results fostered the positive effect of collaborative strategic reading approach in developing reading comprehension skills of secondary stage students.

Combining two important teaching practices: cooperative learning and reading comprehension strategies, CSR yielded positive

outcomes. CSR provided opportunities for students to interact effectively with peers and enhance comprehension through using effective reading comprehension strategies.

In addition, comprehension strategy instruction provided students with actionable steps that they followed before, during, and after reading to overcome barriers to comprehension and enhance extracting meaning from the text. Moreover, the group dynamics generated in cooperative group work, ensured students' strategic reading and active engagement and produced the motivation necessary for comprehension to take place. Each student had a role to perform within the group and each of these roles helped the group to achieve their reading goals successfully. During group discussions, students assisted one another in understanding the meaning of challenging words, getting the main idea, asking and answering questions, and establishing relationships what they were reading and their previous knowledge. Besides, English language sessions during which the students worked cooperatively using CSR were favorable for the students. All these factors contributed to developing students' reading comprehension skills.

Conclusions

According to the results of this study, it was concluded that:

1. Collaborative Strategic Reading approach had a positive effect on developing secondary stage students' reading comprehension skills.
2. Employing reading comprehension strategies in an effective manner enhanced reading comprehension of secondary stage students.
3. Using cooperative learning techniques helped secondary stage students improve their reading comprehension skills.

Recommendations

In the light of the results and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. EFL teachers should integrate strategy instruction as a central component of reading comprehension instruction and train students to use a number of reading comprehension strategies and teach them how, why, and when to use these strategies independently to read different texts efficiently.
2. EFL teachers should replace the traditional whole-class, teacher-led approach that involves introducing vocabulary, reading the text and answering the questions at the end with different

cooperative learning techniques to ensure strategic reading and active engagement with the text and to generate the motivation necessary for comprehension to take place.

3. EFL teachers should encourage students to read different types of texts: books, magazines, journals, novels and other reading materials that engage them in the reading process.
4. EFL teachers should engage students in high-level academic discussions and support students' language acquisition through academic discourse with peers.

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