The Comparative Study of Reading Strategies Used by Iranian Teachers and Students

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ABSTRACT: To do the purposes of this research, one thousand students and four hundred teachers engaged in Khuzestan pre-university centres were randomly selected. Using open-ended questions for teachers and students to answer, and also strategies identified and defined by different scholars, the researcher formulated and made a valid and reliable questionnaire for the participants of study to answer by giving them to two experts to approve their reliability and validity. All the strategies identified for the questionnaire making were: activating prior knowledge, clarifying, context clues (close procedures), drawing conclusions, evaluating, fix-up (think aloud), inferring (inferential), predicting (anticipating guide), question answer relationship (Q.A.R), rereading, restating, skimming and scanning, key words, surveying (concept-text application), visualizing, request (reciprocal teaching), and interactive notebook. After gathering and analysing data from the two groups, the results of the two groups were compared to see whether the strategies used by teachers and students were matched. Applying appropriate statistics, the following results, were indicated: Teachers are familiar with some of the strategies that correspond to before and during reading stages. These strategies are b, h, m, and n. Although teachers are familiar with the above mentioned strategies they do not always use them in their teaching. Teachers use some of the techniques of the familiar strategies not completely. Students apply the e, k, m, and n strategies when studying their lessons. Whereas two of the strategies m, and n, used by the groups are matched, in n strategy students use the techniques related to after reading, and teachers use the techniques related to before and during reading.

Key Words: Reading Strategies, Iranian Teachers, Students

INTRODUCTION

Any mode of language, whether it be listening, speaking, reading, or writing may be used to serve immediate needs, to learn from, or to give us pleasure in language for its own sake. An important feature which reading also shares with other modes of language use is its role in social interaction [1]. Reading is so much a part of daily life for those of us who live in literate communities that much of the time we hardly consider either the purposes or processes involved. Skilled readers have a range of strategies at their disposal, and select those strategies that match the purposes for which they are reading.

The present study attempts to explore familiarity degree of teachers with reading strategies, and also the application rate of the strategies by them. The other purpose of the current research is to determine the kinds of strategies used by students and their degree of application too. The comparison between the strategies used by teachers and those of students and their degree of application must also be done to see whether they are matched or not. As it is obvious, if they are matched the result must be positive, if not it will be necessary to try to make them match. Therefore the research questions are:

1. What reading strategies are the teachers familiar with?
2. What reading strategies do the teachers apply in their teachings?
3. To what degree do they use the strategies?
4. What reading strategies do the students use when they study their lessons?
5. Are the strategies used by teachers and their students matched?

Literature review

Reading strategies are tactics employed to achieve certain goals. Many strategies have been identified through years and some are used by different readers to achieve their goals. Most foreign language reading specialists view reading as interactive. The reader interacts with the text to create meaning as the reader's mental

processes work together at different levels [2]. The level of reader comprehension of the text is determined by how well the reader variables interact with the text variables.

When teachers of second or foreign language reading recognize that each reader brings to the reading process a unique set of past experiences, and interest level in the topic, they also recognize that not all teaching strategies will be effective for all students [3]. If teachers become familiar with the number of strategies used by successful and unsuccessful readers and know how and when they use the strategies, they will be able to increase the students comprehending and learning. So, the significance of the research becomes apparent.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The participants of this study are of two parts: the teachers and the students. All the teachers under the study here were all Iranian teachers who teach English in pre-university centers in different cities of Iran. The participants all had passed the in-service training course for pre-university teachers successfully and were busy teaching in the mentioned centers. Since the number of these teachers was somehow limited, about two third of them were selected randomly, that is 200 teachers as participants in this study.

The student participants in this study were all Iranian students in their sixth year of English studying. All were in pre-university centers and studied English as the foreign language. They were also homogenous in terms of age (16-18). They were native speakers of Persian or Arabic. None of them had the opportunity of studying in English speaking countries or had any chance to interact with the native speakers of English or had any effective interaction. These participants were selected from among the pre-university students of the mentioned teachers of the province, Khuzestan, whose majors were in different courses. The subjects here were 1000 students, five times the number of teachers. Based on the number of the students and the cities, 22 cities and 1000 students were selected as the subjects of study.

Different experts, linguists, and researchers have defined and introduced reading strategies differently, though most of them have many items in common. Different teachers may apply different procedures and strategies in their classes based on the proficiency levels of their students, number of their students, the time they have and also the title and subject of the text they are going to teach. So first of all the teacher participants were asked to descriptively name and describe the way they teach the reading skill in their different classes [4.] Based on their descriptions, and also the strategies described and named by different experts and linguists, a multiple choice questionnaire was designed as the first material used in this study. Fortunately the ways and strategies applied by students could be under the shade of the strategies defined by experts and linguists; although they were not completely specified or defined. They were as one or two parts of a specific one.

All the strategies identified for the questionnaire making were: activating prior knowledge, clarifying, context clues (close procedures), drawing conclusions, evaluating, fix-up (think aloud), inferring (inferential), predicting (anticipating guide), question answer relationship (Q. A. R), rereading, restating, skimming and scanning, key words, surveying (concept-text application), visualizing, request (reciprocal teaching), and interactive notebook [5].

a) Activating prior knowledge: This is used as a pre-reading task to help readers make connections between new knowledge and what is known. Students should read to complete the organizer after discussion and thinking about themes or ideas related to text.

b) Clarifying: The teacher must make the meaning of the text clear to the readers by asking questions, rereading, restating and visualizing. This strategy is used during reading.

c) Context clues (close procedure): The readers must use words surrounding an unknown word to determine its meaning. The teacher must have students complete a cloze task activity-fill in missing words, ideas, or concepts. It is done during reading.

d) Drawing conclusions: The reader must figure out something that is not directly stated by using written or visual cues. The teachers create leading questions relating to the passage, and have students respond with their own opinions, thoughts, or ideas based on information from the reading. It is done after reading.

e) Evaluating: The readers are to be encouraged to form opinions, make judgments, and develop ideas from reading. The teacher creates evaluative questions that will lead students to make generalizations about and critically evaluate text. This strategy is done during and after reading.

f) Fix up (Think Aloud): The readers are encouraged self-monitoring and checking for understanding. By making explicit for students what is implicit for more expert readers, it becomes possible for students to develop and apply these strategies themselves. While reading the teacher interjects questions that make his / her thinking public and employ the strategy to fix the problem. It is done during reading.

g) Inferring (Inferential): It provides a list of the various types of inferences that readers make while reading even seemingly straightforward text. Recognizing that there are different types of inferences helps students analyze text more consciously and strategically during reading.

h) Predicting (Anticipating Guide): This is used as a pre-reading strategy and help to engage readers in thought and discussion about ideas and concepts that they will encounter in the text. By using the think, pair, share technique, they are to form prediction, share with a partner, and participate in a class discussion. It can also be used during reading.

i) Gist Strategy (Q. A. R.: question, answer, relationship): The students have to label questions related to a text as "right there", "think and search", or "on my own". Seven prompts are asked to focus the students' thinking on making and proving their predictions. The first two are used before reading :

a) What do you thing this material is going to be about? What makes you think so?

b) What do you think the text is going to tell you about? What makes you think so?

The next three occur during reading:

c) Did you find evidence that supports your prediction? What was it?

d) Did you find evidence that does not support you? What was it?

e) Do you want to change your prediction? If not, why not ?

The last two are used after reading:

f) Do you want to make any changes in your statement of what this is about?

g) What did you learn that you did not know before reading?

j) Re-reading: This strategy is used in during reading phase of reading. In this the teacher will have students practice rereading a passage to check for understanding and identify when rereading is helpful. The purpose behind this strategy is to give the reader more than one chance to make sense of challenging text.

k) Re-stating: The goal in using this strategy is to retell, shorten, or summarize the meaning of a passage orally or in written form. To do this, the teacher will have students practice restating a selection of text orally or in written form. It is done during reading.

l) Skimming / Scanning: During reading the teacher assists readers in getting specific information from the text. The teacher expects them to brainstorm a list of textual clues that will aid in skimming / scanning such as bold-face type, capital letters, dates, key words, etc. Skimming is reading quickly to get "gist" of a section; scanning is reading quickly to locate specific information.

m) Key words: The purpose of this strategy is to help identify words that guide the reader to determine the organizational structure and content focus of the written text. To do this the teacher must select experts of text from many sources, including (but not limited to) textbooks, and novels, and have students survey the text and list key words that indicate the structure or focus of the text. This strategy is used before and during reading.

n) Surveying (concept, text, application): The teacher gives the readers a general idea about text so they will be able to anticipate information and structure. The teacher must use a textbook inventory / scavenger hunt activity to have students explore and familiarize themselves with an unfamiliar text. In the first phase, concept, the teacher assesses the students' background and introduces those concepts and vocabulary that are new to students. In the second phase, text, the teacher sets a purpose, the students read the section silently, and the teacher asks literal question. When the entire section is completed, the teacher engages the students in discussion during which the information is organized into some type of visual structure. In the third phase, application, the teacher encourages the students to evaluate the material and to think divergently about the information. This strategy can be used in before, during, and after reading.

o) Visualizing: In this strategy the teacher uses mental images that emerge from reading the text to aid in understanding by reading aloud a descriptive passage while students close their eyes and imagine how it looks. Students then draw or write what they see and justify how the text supports their image. All is done during reading.

p) ReQuest: This is a pre-reading activity that helps development in the questioning ability of the student. The students read the title and first sentence of a text or story, and look at the picture. They then ask the teacher anything they want to know about the title, sentence, and picture. When the teacher finishes the answering all of their questions, the procedure is repeated from the second sentence. If the students run out of questions to ask, the teacher can suggest questions. Teacher questions not only add to the students' understanding of upcoming passage but they also serve as a model for good questions. After all the questions are answered, the teacher asks the students what they think will happen in the passage. At that point, the youngsters read the passage silently.

q) Interactive notebook: This highly adaptable strategy encourages students to use a two-column note-taking strategy. In the right column, they take notes to synthesize essential ideas and information from a text, presentation, film, etc.; in the left column, they interact with the content in any way they choose.

Procedure

The co-operating teachers of English in the present study completed an open-ended questionnaire before the start of program. They reported on (1) the way and the techniques they use while teaching reading (2) the kind of questions they ask during teaching, (3) and the time they devote for each stage of teaching reading. Based on the teachers' self-report on the subjects mentioned above, and also the strategies defined and identified by different linguists and experts, a questionnaire was designed for teachers to answer. Students were asked to answer some open-ended and also multiple choice questions based on the texts given as reading comprehension quiz. They were also asked about how they approach the text while reading. Again based on the answers given by the students, and also their methods of approaching the texts a questionnaire was designed for students to answer.

To introduce the program first of all, the teachers were requested to answer the questionnaire, and then the students were asked to answer the questionnaire. After gathering the data, they were analyzed based on the

accepted classification of different strategies. Next, the strategies were classified and the proportions of strategy use for individual teachers and students were determined. Finally the results were compared.

RESULTS

The two general questions of this study refer to the extent of the participants' application of reading strategies. 0, means never or rarely using the strategy, 1, means sometimes using the strategy and 2, means always or often using the strategy. Tables 1 and 2 show the extent of reading strategies applied by students and teachers respectively. In the tables 1 and 2 as mentioned briefly before shows that participants never or rarely use strategies and also they are not aware of strategies. 1, shows that participants sometimes use some parts of the specific strategy, which it means they have some information about some techniques but not in systematic way or they were not taught the strategy completely. 2, shows that participant are aware of the strategies and they are always or often trying to use its techniques. Using tables 4 and 5 we can compare the strategies used by teacher's group 2 and students group 1.

Table 1. Strategies applied by students

Strategies	0	1	2	Mean
a	18.45	47.5	34.05	1.15
b	18.92	50.46	45.1	1.26
c	17.85	27.1	55.05	1.37
d	22.1	45.8	32.1	1.10
e	19.85	54.8	25.35	1.60
f	25.55	24.0	50.45	1.24
g	22.25	41.6	36.15	1.13
h	23.15	40.4	36.45	1.13
i	21.25	43.07	33.92	1.12
j	23.63	41.13	35.23	1.11
k	14.6	24.5	60.9	1.46
l	16.15	65.1	18.75	1.02
m	15.5	25.6	58.9	1.43
n	15.83	25.5	58.67	1.42
o	16.1	46.9	37.0	1.20
p	18.95	49.75	31.3	1.12
q	17.5	30.9	51.6	1.34

Table 2. Strategies applied by Teachers

Strategies	0	1	2	Mean
a	18.5	31.75	49.75	1.312
b	15.83	12.66	71.5	1.55
c	22	38.87	39.13	1.168
d	26.5	16.0	57.5	1.31
e	22.5	25.75	51.75	1.29
f	27	23.5	49.5	1.225
g	29.5	27.75	42.75	1.132
h	16.75	11.25	72.0	1.55
I	28.12	33.75	38.13	1.098
j	21.0	24.0	55	1.348
k	27	22.5	50.5	1.24
l	20.25	45.5	34.25	1.13
m	20.5	16.5	63	1.43
n	17.5	16.66	65.84	1.48
o	32	57.5	10.5	0.790
p	23.25	43.25	33.5	1.102
q	28	19	53	1.25

Table 5. Group Statistics

Strategies	GROUP	N	Mean	SD
A	1	1000	2.3120	0.9130
	2	200	2.6250	1.0583
B	1	1000	3.7800	1.2398
	2	200	4.6700	1.4287
C	1	1000	5.4880	1.5964
	2	200	4.6750	1.5002
D	1	1000	1.1000	0.7297
	2	200	1.3100	0.8647
E	1	1000	3.2100	1.1407
	2	200	2.5800	1.1225
F	1	1000	2.4980	1.1956
	2	200	2.4500	1.1809
G	1	1000	2.2770	1.0418
	2	200	2.2650	1.0393
H	1	1000	2.2670	1.1004
	2	200	3.1050	0.9843
I	1	1000	4.5010	1.5376
	2	200	4.3950	1.6832
J	1	1000	3.3910	1.7120
	2	200	4.0450	1.5669
K	1	1000	1.4630	0.7356
	2	200	1.2350	0.8505
L	1	1000	2.0420	0.7892
	2	200	2.2750	1.1025
M	1	1000	1.4340	0.7458
	2	200	1.4250	0.8110
N	1	1000	4.2830	1.1808
	2	200	4.4400	1.3474
O	1	1000	1.2090	0.6984
	2	200	.7850	0.6170
P	1	1000	2.2510	1.0183
	2	200	2.2050	1.1222
Q	1	1000	1.3410	0.7585
	2	200	1.2500	0.8668

Table 6. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
A	Equal variances assumed	13.433	.000	-4.305	1198	0.001	-0.3130
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.902	261.493	0.001	-0.3130
B	Equal variances assumed	16.691	.000	-9.025	1198	0.001	-0.8900
	Equal variances not assumed			-8.213	262.269	0.001	-0.8900
C	Equal variances assumed	1.906	.168	6.640	1198	0.001	0.8130
	Equal variances not assumed			6.920	296.310	0.001	0.8130
D	Equal variances assumed	42.035	.000	-3.596	1198	0.001	-0.2100
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.213	258.691	0.001	-0.2100
E	Equal variances assumed	1.212	.271	7.149	1198	0.001	0.6300
	Equal variances not assumed			7.226	287.258	0.001	0.6300
F	Equal variances assumed	.081	.776	.519	1198	0.604	4.80
	Equal variances not assumed			.524	286.560	0.601	4.80
G	Equal variances assumed	.781	.377	.149	1198	0.882	1.20
	Equal variances not assumed			.149	284.728	0.882	1.20
H	Equal variances assumed	2.285	.131	-9.999	1198	0.001	-0.8380
	Equal variances not assumed			-10.769	307.104	0.001	-0.8380
I	Equal variances assumed	6.435	.011	.876	1198	0.381	0.1060
	Equal variances not assumed			.824	269.478	0.410	0.1060
J	Equal variances assumed	.448	.503	-4.999	1198	0.001	-0.6540
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.303	301.941	0.001	-0.6540
K	Equal variances assumed	20.437	.000	3.894	1198	.000	0.2280

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
	Equal variances not assumed			3.536	261.836	.000	0.2280
L	Equal variances assumed	93.003	.000	-3.542	1198	.000	-0.2330
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.847	241.376	.005	-0.2330
M	Equal variances assumed	4.861	.028	.153	1198	.878	9.03
	Equal variances not assumed			.145	270.471	.885	9. 03
N	Equal variances assumed	7.676	.006	-1.675	1198	.094	-0.1570
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.534	263.590	.126	-0.1570
O	Equal variances assumed	8.081	.005	7.984	1198	.000	0.4240
	Equal variances not assumed			8.671	310.015	.000	.4240
P	Equal variances assumed	2.485	.115	.573	1198	.567	4.60
	Equal variances not assumed			.537	268.500	.592	4.60
Q	Equal variances assumed	19.488	.000	1.511	1198	.131	9.10
	Equal variances not assumed			1.383	263.393	.168	9.10

DISCUSSION

Considering the data achieved, concerned with the frequency of strategies usage by students, among the to q strategies, most of them have some techniques. In strategies h, i and j the scores intend toward the first half which means students may have done some of techniques unaware of the specific strategy and it seems they have done them accidentally. In strategies, k, m, n, and q the scores intend toward the second half which means they have been aware of the techniques and also strategies but not systematically. In other strategies namely a, b, c, d, f, g, l, o, p central scores can be seen mostly, that means they are aware of some techniques but not the exact strategy, and those used techniques are not meaningfully related. Considering the data concerned with the frequency of strategies used by teachers when teaching reading, among the a to q strategies, it can be seen that in strategies c, g, i, l, p, and specifically in the o strategy scores intend toward the first half which means teachers may have done some of the techniques unaware of their relations and also a specific strategy that each technique may concerned with. In strategies b, h, k, m, n, and q scores intend toward the second half that means they have been aware of the techniques and somehow of the related strategies but not completely and systematically. In strategies a, d, e, f, j, and q central scores can mostly be seen, that means they are aware of some techniques but not of the related strategy.

In comparing the means in the two mentioned tables, just two strategies are in common, namely m, and n.

Referring to tables 3 and 4, by comparing the mean and DF of the strategies it is proved that we see the meaningful difference between the two groups just in o, e, and b strategies.

Applying appropriate statistics, the following results, were indicated:
- Teachers are familiar with some of the strategies that correspond to before and during reading stages. These strategies are b, h, m, and n.
- Although teachers are familiar with the above mentioned strategies they do not always use them in their teaching.
- Teachers use some of the techniques of the familiar strategies not completely.
- Students apply the e, k, m, and n strategies when studying their lessons.
- Whereas two of the strategies m, and n, used by the groups are matched, in n strategy students use the techniques related to after reading, and teachers use the techniques related to before and during reading.
- In comparison with students, teachers know more techniques of reading but don't use them systematically.
- Teachers are not familiar with a variety of strategies.
- Teachers don't know the known strategies completely.
- In j strategy which is related to all the three stages of teaching reading, teachers use only those techniques related to before and during stages but not the after reading stage.
- Teachers are not completely familiar with the different kinds of questions related to comprehension, their variety, and their purposes.
- Students consider those techniques and strategies which are related to after reading stage.
- Students know less strategies and techniques.
- Teachers cannot properly help students to make inferences and analyses level of learning, so the students are dependent on their teachers and don't have enough creativity and justification ability.
- It seems that the view of teachers and students on reading comprehension is somehow different.

Pedagogical Implications

Knowing the abilities and disabilities of teachers and students first of all can help material and test designers. Knowing this helps them to select topics with those topics and subjects which force teachers and students to use a variety of strategies. Using different kinds of tests can also force them again toward that purpose [6]. Passing specific in-service courses, teachers will become familiar with variety of strategies as well as techniques of teaching and testing reading, and they will become more aware of the purpose behind each technique.

Mastering in reading strategies and their purposes, teachers can help students to become creative and independent of their teachers [7]. It seems necessary to establish a link between the pre-university level and the levels before and after it. Syllabus designers should take necessary steps in order to establish the relationship.

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