SO SÁNH CHIẾN LƯỢC ĐỌC HIỂU CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH Ở BẬC TRUNG HỌC PHỔ THÔNG VÀ NĂM NHẤT ĐẠI HỌC

COMPARING LHU FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH MAJORED STUDENTS' READING STRATEGIES AT HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL AND UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT. A plethora of studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between EFL students' use of strategies and reading comprehension. Findings from those studies agree on a consensus that reading strategies possess a significant relationship with reading performance. This study functions as an attempt to contribute to previous findings by examining how students develop their reading strategies acquired from thematic texts at high school level to university level with authentic texts. It also aimed at detecting what kinds of strategies should be introduced to students. Participants were 45 first-year English majors studying in Faculty of Language at Lac Hong University. Data were gathered from a questionnaire at the end of the semester to detect students' use of strategies and from pre- and post-tests to recognize students' development in reading comprehension. Findings from this study highlight that students' reading comprehension increased slightly after one semester and two kinds of strategies, namely memory and monitor strategy, possess a rather strong relationship with reading comprehension. As a result, teachers should pay attention to the two kinds of strategies and then integrate them in teaching reading lessons.

KEYWORDS. *reading, skills, strategies, reading comprehension*

TÓM TẮT. Rất nhiều nghiên cứu đã được thực hiện để kiểm tra mối quan hệ giữa việc sử dụng các chiến lược đọc hiểu và khả năng đọc hiểu của sinh viên học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ. Kết quả từ các nghiên cứu này đều thống nhất quan điểm rằng các chiến lược đọc hiểu có mối liên hệ quan trọng với khả năng đọc hiểu. Bài nghiên cứu này của tác giả đóng vài trò bổ sung thêm vào kết luận của các nghiên cứu trước đó thông qua việc nghiên cứu cách thức sinh viên phát triển các chiến lược đọc đã học từ các bài đọc thiết kế theo chủ đề ở bậc trung học phổ thông khi chuyển sang các bài đọc thực ở bậc đại học. Bài nghiên cứu này cũng hướng đến việc nhận dạng các chiến lược đọc hiểu nào nên được giới thiệu đến sinh viên. 45 sinh viên năm nhất chuyên ngành tiếng Anh đang theo học tại khoa Anh trường Đại học Lạc Hồng được mời tham dự bài nghiên cứu. Dữ liệu nghiên cứu được thu thập qua bảng câu hỏi khảo sát được phát ở thời điểm kết thúc học kỳ để nhận dạng việc sử dụng các chiến lược đọc hiểu của sinh viên. Hai bài kiểm tra trước và khi gần kết thúc học kỳ cũng được sử dụng để tìm hiểu sự phát triển khả năng đọc hiểu của sinh viên. Kết luận của bài nghiên cứu cho thấy khả năng đọc hiểu của sinh viên có tăng nhẹ sau khi kết thúc học kỳ. Hai chiến lược đọc hiểu gồm ghi nhớ và kiểm soát có mối quan hệ khá mạnh mẽ với khả năng đọc hiểu. Do đó, giảng viên nên chú ý đến hai loại chiến lược này và tích hợp chúng vào việc dạy các bài đọc hiểu.

TỪ KHÓA. *đọc hiểu, kỹ năng, chiến lược, khả năng đọc hiểu*

1. INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, high school students have spent three years on learning Reading with other skills (Speaking, Listening and Writing) from grade 10 to grade 12. After three years of learning Reading, students' ability to read has developed strongly. In 2012, the Pisa test scores showed that Vietnamese students did well in Reading. They scored 508 which was higher than the OECD average (496). Unfortunately, there was a decline in 2015. What are the main causes of this? Could strategy use be useful in improving students' reading comprehension? It is a pity that not much research has been conducted to examine the reasons of such decline in Vietnam.

Table 1. *Pisa 2012 and 2015 Vietnam scores compared with OECD average adapted from (McAleavy, Tran & Fitzpatrick, 2018)*

	Reading	
	2012	**2015**
Vietnam	508	487
OECD Average	496	493

There have not been many changes in the curriculum, textbooks and the ways English is taught. In fact, each skill is taught separately in the classroom. The texts selected are specially designed by authors in Vietnam under the guidance of the Ministry of Education and Training (Moet). The reading texts are thematic and reflect the Vietnamese contexts in English. At high schools, students have been equipped with several strategies throughout the process of learning. When those students become English majors at Lac Hong University (LHU), they are exposed to new learning contexts. As for Reading, this subject is taught differently with new authentic materials. This raises the questions for this study as displayed below:

Does first-year English majors' reading comprehension change after one year of studying reading with authentic materials?

What is first-year English majors' development of reading strategies when they study at Lac Hong University? This study is expected to throw some light on these questions.

2. CONTENT

2.1 Literature review

As mentioned before, a myriad of research into the relationship between students' strategy use and reading comprehension has yielded positive results. According to Nguyen and Vo (2018), both cognitive and metacognitive strategies possess a strong relationship EFL students' reading comprehension. Before embarking on this theme, it is worth to have a clear picture of how English is taught at high school and university level. English is a compulsory subject in the curriculum at high school level. The aims of this subject are to help students develop their ability to communicate in English based on four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) and increase the knowledge of language. The programs at each level are different. As for high school level, the lessons are thematic. The lessons are designed based on themes which are closed connected to each other to help students build as well as consolidate their abilities to communicate. The themes cover four main aspects, namely our lives, our society, our environments and our future. As for Reading, the requirements gradually increase for each grade. Grade 10 students have to understand the main ideas of a text ranging from 222 to 250 words. As for grade 11 students, the length of the reading texts are longer, from 250 to 280 words. In addition to understand the main ideas, students have to understand the details of the text. They have to master scanning techniques to find out the details required. With respect to the highest grade, grade 12, students face the longest texts from 280 to 300 words. They have to understand the flow of the text, identify main conclusions of the text and demonstrate the ability to summarize short documents such as letters and memos by using the original words and structures. In general, it can be inferred from the Moet's program that students mainly enhance their skills of skimming, scanning and basic summarizing.

English majors study in a different way. The books selected contain authentic texts and activities designed by experts in their native language. Hence, when transferring to new learning context at LHU, students need a new change in their reading strategies.

At high school level, compensation strategies are reported to be frequently used by high school students when taking tests. Nguyen (2018) also agreed that ESL students are reported to use cognitive strategies at a high level and outperformed EFL students in the reading tests. Cognitive and metacognitive strategies are frequently used by students when taking a reading test (Zhang, 2018). This conclusion contrasts slightly with a research conducted by Kung (2017) with the ELF learners in Taiwan concluded that those learners reported a preference of metacognitive over cognitive strategies. Students who are having difficulties in reading also earn benefits from the strategies used. Awada and Plana (2018) carried out a study to help students with dyslexia improve their reading comprehenson and strategies mentioned in the study can greatly boost students' reading comprehension. In terms of learning different languages, Lin and Yu (2015) concluded that English learners demonstrate a higher frequency of using metacognitive strategies than Chinese learners.

Not only increase students reading comprehension but also does strategy use enhance students' motivation and autonomy. Under the light of this theme, Liao and Wang (2018) from their quasi-experimental study to examine the effect of reading comprehension strategies claimed that the experimental group which received the training of the strategies lower their anxiety and achieve higher reading comprehension than the control group. Similarly, Willis (2008) noted that when students achieve good reading comprehenson, their motivation for learning reading moves up to higher level accordingly. In addition, learners' autonomy can be enhanced through their strategy use. According to Castillo and Bonilla (2014), reading strategies can slightly raise students' autonomies.

It is worth to clarify the two terms "*strategy*" and "*skill*" before discussing further. "*Reading strategies are commonly defined as mental processes that readers employ to comprehend a text*" (Kuzbirska, p.1). This definition points out the reading strategies refers to students' deliberation of selecting ways to achieve maximum reading comprehension. In fact, the author also notes that reading readings strategies are "*interactive*" which means that readers have to use various kinds of strategies simultaneously remove the blockages on their ways to comprehension. This concurs with Nguyen and Do's (2014) findings that good readers know how to orchestrate their strategies to overcome challenges in reading. Afflerbach, Pearson and Paris (2008) noted that when students can use the reading strategies automatically, those reading strategies become reading skills. Hence, it can be inferred that main factor that differentiate reading strategies from reading skills are the deliberate controlled processes in reading. This means using strategies take place before students can turn those strategies into skills.

With respect to the appreciation of strategy use, both teachers and learners do show high recognition of it. As for teachers, Rraku (2014) from his survey with the participation from 18 English teachers from diffenent levels of schools concluded that the teachers value the effectiveness of using strategies in teaching reading lessons and seek the best ways to integrate into their reading lessons.

2.2 Research method

The research was designed based on the form of a survey research. Two first year English majored classes, namely 19AV112 and 19AV114, were invited to join the study. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire translated in to Vietnamese and consisted 29 items was distributed to the students at the end of the semester. Prior to this, students were invited to take a pre-test taken from standard Cambridge Preliminary Tests at the beginning of the course and one more test at the end of the course. The levels of the two tests are which pre-intermediate equal to the level of the textbook used in the semester. All the students were given 10 minutes and 1 hour for questionnaire and the tests respectively. To enhance reliability of data, students were informed in advanced that taking the questions and doing the two reading tests would not affect their academic scores.

2.3 Data analysis

The Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was shown below:

Table 2. *The Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire*

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,656	29

As can be seen from the table above, the Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was 0.656 which is considered to be acceptable for this study as the first years English majors encountered new concepts of reading strategies (Taber, 2017). Hence, students' answers from the questionnaires can serve the purpose of this study.

A paired samples t-test was conducted to compare means of pre-test and post-test scores. Prior to this, a test of normality was taken to test the normal distribution of the pre-test and post-test scores.

Table 3. *Tests of normality*

Class		Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]
		Sig.
Prete st	19AV112	,114
	19AV114	,200*
Postt est	19AV112	,170
	19AV114	,200*

With the value (sig= 0.114, 0.200, 0.17, 0.2 > 0.05) seen in the table above, the pre-test and post-test scores were normally distributed.

Table 4. *Paired samples t-test*

		Paired Differences	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	
Pair 1	Pretest - Posttest	-,31333	,000

The value is smaller than 0.05. It can be concluded that there is a statistical difference between the scores of the pretest and posttest. It is clear from the table that the students' posttest scores are 0. 31 higher than their pre-test scores.

A multivariate regression was then selected to detect the relationships between 5 types of reading strategies with students' performance reading. The result is shown below:

Table 5. *Regression*

ANOVA[a]				
Model		Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2,132	1,279	,290[b]
	Residual	1,667		
	Total			
a. Dependent Variable: Posttest				
b. Predictors: (Constant), Evaluation, Comprehend, Retrieval, Memory, Planning, Monitor				

It can be inferred from the table above that all 5 types of strategies possess a weak correlation with students' improvement in the post-test score as *p value* (sig= 0.29) is larger than 0.05. Although there is a slight increase in the post-test scores, the use of all the strategies cannot attribute to this change.

Table 6. *Coefficients[a]*

Model		Sig.
1	(Constant)	,078
	Comprehend	,720
	Memory	,047
	Retrieval	,782
	Planning	,815
	Monitor	,053
	Evaluation	,225

Even though all the 5 types of strategies possess a weak relationship with the post-test score, a further inquiry to detect which types of strategies possess the strongest level among the weak ones is necessary. The table above informs that the type of strategies which has the strongest level is memory strategy. The memory strategy includes 5 sub-strategies, namely *highlighting main ideas, marking parts I understand, highlighting parts I do not understand, reading questions many times and rearrange structures of the text in my own ways*. Those sub-strategies are easy to learn and apply to reading texts, which may help explain why they possess the strongest levels of the 5 strategies.

3. CONCLUSIONS

From the data analysis above there are several prominent things which can be drawn for further research and teaching.

Kinds of strategies to teach

Students do make significant difference in learning reading after one semester. Their ability of reading can develop gradually as time goes by. The question is how to accelerate such development in a shorter time and what kind of reading strategies will serve this purpose best. However, the relationship between using strategies and improvement in reading is still vague in this study. This can be solved by focusing more teaching students' strategies in reading lessons. In this way, the use of strategies is much clearer and testing the relationship of the use with their reading performance should be more effective. The next step is to decide what kinds of strategies to teach. In accordance with the data analysis above, the choice here rests on what is available in the texts. This means the questions designed in the texts, the texts itself are important as students can easily get access to what is in their hands. That helps explains why memory strategy should be introduced first to students.

The next kind of strategies to consider teaching is monitor strategy consisting of 5 sub-category strategies, namely *correct mistakes when I find them, stop to check when I find something conflicting, find out why some strategies are effective, note down effective strategies for later use,* and *switch strategies*. Those strategies help students effectively monitor the use of strategies throughout the process of reading. Such strategies demand students' inventory of strategies from which they can draw appropriate strategies to use while reading. The choice and evaluating the effectiveness of those strategies taken out should take place

afterwards. Hence, teachers are expected to enrich students' strategies first and aid them in monitoring strategies later.

Method of teaching strategies

It is concluded above that memory strategy is well taught first and monitor strategy comes later. Giving time for students to practice those strategies is vital. This will smooth and shorten the process of turning strategies to be skills. In addition, teachers are expected to recognize students' learning styles so that they can develop the best ways to meet students' preference on strategy use (Uhrigh, 2015). Next, students do not only learn the use of strategy from their teachers but also from their peers. Hence, the use of reciprocal teaching suggested by Koch and Sporer (2017) can help spread the strategy use to all corners of a class in reading lessons.

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