

A Study On Students' Perception Of Reading Strategies While Comprehending An Academic Text By UTM Students

Noor Zainab Abdul Razak & Siti Norashikin Amir
Fakulti Pendidikan,
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

Abstract : Reading is a skill that enables readers to acquire knowledge and information from the text that they have read. The use of adequate reading strategies while reading can help the readers be independent and efficient readers. Therefore, the aim of this research is to identify the perception of first year students of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai towards the reading strategies while comprehending an academic text. The respondents of this research are first year students who are taking UHB 1412 (English for Academic Communication) course from various faculties in UTM for the 2008/2009 session which consists of 60 students. A set of questionnaire containing 58 items were distributed to the respondents to analyse the reading strategies used by them. The analysis was carried out to find the frequency, percentage and mean. Based on this research, it was found that the students use the three reading strategies as proposed which are cognitive, metacognitive and social reading strategies while comprehending the text that they read. Besides that, it was found that the social reading strategy is the most frequently used by the first year students. However, based on the result found, there are not many differences in the number and type of strategies used by the high and low proficiency students. Based on the analysis, the high proficiency students use all three reading strategies proposed by the researcher while for the low proficiency students, all of them use metacognitive reading strategies but not the other two strategies. Discussions on recommendations for further research have been made as reference for other researchers who are interested in carrying out researches in this field.

Keyword : students' perception, reading strategies, academic text

Introduction

This chapter describes the background of the study. This is followed by the statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, scope and then relevant terms and definitions.

Statement of the problem

Reading is important in both acquiring the language and also in obtaining knowledge. However, not all students are able to read well especially in reading comprehension. Reading comprehension has come to be the "essence of reading" (Durkin, 1993), essential not only to academic learning in all subject areas but also to professional success and to lifelong learning (Pritchard et al.,1999) (Rings, 1994) (Strydom,1997). This means, the ability to read academic texts is considered one of the most important skills that university students of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) need to acquire (Levine et al., 2000).

Since reading revolves mostly around comprehension of the text, students who cannot sufficiently restructure the author's main idea, supporting ideas, and supporting facts, as well as make some critical evaluation of these things, cannot read for the purposes of the course, regardless of what types of material they read outside of class (Falke, 1982). Most of the students still have these difficulties while reading academic text even for students at university level.

There may be a number of reasons why they are not able to read as effectively as they should. According to Falke (1982), sometimes the reader lacks the background knowledge to properly interpret a particular item, while sometimes a reader lacks the strategies necessary to read even the simplest material. These students may not have learnt to use a variety of reading strategies and some of them might have problems due to the inappropriate reading strategies that they employ. This problem has led the researcher to investigate the reading strategies employed by university students, primarily first year undergraduates of UTM.

Thus, a survey was conducted to examine whether these university students employ a sufficient number of reading strategies while comprehending an academic text, specifically in their second language which is English. At the same time, the researcher also aims to study the variety of reading strategies employed by the subjects and determine the reading strategies most commonly used among this particular group of students as well as the differences of reading strategies between high and low proficiency students while comprehending an academic text.

Objective of the study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the students' perception of reading strategies while comprehending an academic text.
2. To examine the students' most frequently used reading strategy while comprehending an academic text.
3. To determine any differences of students' perception on reading strategies between high and low proficiency students of UTM while comprehending an academic text.

Significance of the study

This study hopes to find out the reading strategies employed by the first year students while comprehending an academic text. Besides, this study could help the students to discover their own reading strategies so that they can manipulate it in making the reading more successful. In addition, the findings of the research will contribute some ideas or knowledge to classroom teaching and learning and give the teachers the opportunity to implement strategy that appropriate to their students' learning style and needs while carrying out the reading lesson. Furthermore, the findings will determine whether there are significant differences in reading strategies used by good students compared to that used by proficiency students.

Research Instruments

The instrument used to collect the data was a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two main sections. The two main sections are Section A: Demographic Data, and Section B: Strategies used in Reading which are Cognitive, Metacognitive and Social Strategies. The responses by the respondents were presented using the Likert scale. Then, the questionnaire was distributed to each respondent in their classes. The statements of the questionnaire for cognitive reading strategies were adapted from Yesim and Muharrem (2006), whereas the statements of the questionnaire for metacognitive reading strategies were adapted from Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002). Next, the statements of the questionnaire for social reading strategies were adapted from Noor Zainab (2000). This questionnaire contains 58 questions, which consists of 24 questions from cognitive reading strategies, 30 questions from metacognitive reading strategies and 4 questions from social reading strategies

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Comparisons In Reading Strategies Between High And Low Proficiency Students While Comprehending An Academic Text Cognitive Reading Strategies

The figure reports the frequencies of high and low proficiency students to show the comparisons of reading strategies in cognitive reading strategies.

Table 1 : Comparisons In Cognitive Reading Strategies Between High And Low Proficiency Students While Comprehending an Academic Text

Cognitive Reading Strategies	Proficiency		TOTAL
	Low	High	
NO	1	0	1
YES	29	30	59
TOTAL	30	30	60

Based on the findings in Table 1, only 1 student did not use the cognitive reading strategies and this student is reported as low proficiency student. Meanwhile 30 students chose to use cognitive reading strategies and they have high proficiency of the language. However, another 29 students choose to use cognitive reading strategies and they have low proficiency of the language. This is might due to the objective of the reading is to comprehend the meaning of the text. A comprehension includes using cognitive reading strategies. We can infer that all the high proficiency students employ the cognitive reading strategies as suggested by Ozek and Civelek (2006).

Metacognitive Reading Strategies

The figure reports the frequencies of high and low proficiency students to show the comparisons of reading strategies in metacognitive reading strategies.

Table 2 : Comparisons In Metacognitive Reading Strategies Between High And Low Proficiency Students While Comprehending an Academic Text

Metacognitive Reading Strategies	Proficiency		TOTAL
	Low	High	
NO	0	0	0
YES	30	30	60
TOTAL	30	30	60

Table 4.25 shows that the proportion of high and low proficiency students in using metacognitive strategies while comprehending an academic text. The result shows that 30 students from high proficiency and another 30 from low proficiency Table 4.25 shows that the proportion of high and low proficiency students in using metacognitive strategies while comprehending an academic text. The result shows that 30 students from high proficiency and another 30 from low proficiency

Social Reading Strategies

The figure reports the frequencies of high and low proficiency students to show the comparisons of reading strategies in social reading strategies.

Table 3 : Comparisons in Social Reading Strategies between High And Low Proficiency Students While In Comprehending an Academic Text

Social Reading Strategies	Proficiency		TOTAL
	Low	High	
NO	2	0	2
YES	28	30	58
TOTAL	30	30	60

Based on the findings in Table 3, only 2 students did not use the social reading strategies and these students are reported as low proficiency student. Meanwhile, 30 students chose to use social reading strategies and they are high proficiency of the language. However, another 28 students chose to use social reading strategies and they have low proficiency of the language. This is might be because the students do not really enjoy the benefits of working with others in order to comprehend the text. Basically, it is not a big difference for both types of students in terms of use of the reading strategies. However, we can infer that all the high proficiency students employ the social reading strategies as suggested by Noor Zainab (2000).

As a conclusion, based on students' perceptions, there is no significance difference between low and high proficiency students in their preferences of using strategies in reading.

Conclusion

This research investigated the perceptions of the reading strategies employed by the first year students of UTM while in comprehending an academic text. Primary data were collected by distributing questionnaires to 60 students in UTM.

The following conclusion can be drawn from the study. To begin with, the study has shown that the students prefer to use the three types of reading strategies as suggested that are cognitive, metacognitive and social reading strategies. The result of this study shows that the reading strategies used by the students most often are social reading strategies. The comparison between high and low proficiency students in reading strategies show that there is actually not much differences between the two groups. For the high proficiency students, they employed all

the three reading strategies, whereas for the low proficiency students, they fully used the metacognitive reading strategies. However, there are small differences for cognitive and social reading strategies where the differences are only 1 student for not using the cognitive reading strategy and 2 students for not using the social reading strategies compared to high proficiency students. Based on the students' perceptions, there is no significance difference between low and high proficiency students in their preferences of using strategies in reading.

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