

The Effect of IEPC Strategy Instruction on Teaching ESL Reading: A Study

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Abstract

Strategic reading has become a widely recognised phenomenon in the recent years. Researchers now agree to the fact that strategic reading is vital in academic pursuits, where reading often is inseparable from learning, retaining complex, often unfamiliar concepts. Moreover, they also argue that strategy use once understood, can be demonstrated for others. To put it simply, once identified, strategies used by good readers can be shared, through explicit instruction and training, by those who do not use them. This study was conducted as a response to the need to develop effective reading habits in ESL learners and to find out the feasibility of a few reading strategies in a context where the students are not accustomed to strategic reading in the second language. The context chosen is Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya and the students are studying VII class. For this purpose, a reading strategy was adopted namely: Imagination, Elaboration, Prediction, and Confirmation (IEPC), to find out if by using reading strategy a change can be brought to the whole process of teaching and learning. The findings of this study revealed that the strategy had a positive effect on the students. It was seen that the students were actively participating in the class, they were more articulate and were more confident in their approach apart from the increase in comprehension abilities.

Key words: Imagination, Prediction, Elaboration, Confirmation, Comprehension

Introduction

Second language reading has been recognised as an essential skill. It is not only within the confined walls of our classrooms that we need to read and comprehend but beyond that throughout our life span we have to read and comprehend different materials. To achieve this, we can use different reading strategies, which help the reading process in general. Reading strategies are defined as specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques that are meant to facilitate the reading process. When orchestrated or implemented properly they can help learners improve their perception, reception, storage and retention. Above all, strategies make reading more fun and develop one into independent reader. That is a reason why so many studies (Carrell, Gajdusek, and wise, 1989) have been conducted on finding out the effectiveness of different strategies. Teachers don't give enough importance to teaching different reading strategies, which helps an individual comprehend a text or make a meaning out of it. But generally it is seen that teachers adopt the same day-to-day approach to teaching.

Reading as a skill

Reading skills are like building blocks. To learn to read well, children need the blocks of knowing the sounds of letters and the blocks of knowing the meanings of words (vocabulary), word parts (grammatical markers), and groups of words (overall meaning or semantics). To build these foundations of reading, children need effective reading instruction. Apart from that, it is now a known fact that reading is not only a receptive skill but also an active one in that it primarily includes the cognitive abilities such as predicting or guessing. Reading also involves a number of cognitive processes. It has a communicative value and it functions as an active skill as cognitive processes are working during reading. The reader both reads and tries to work on the information in the reading itself. (Cook, 2002).

Reading strategies

Strategies are defined as any mental operations that the individual uses, either consciously or unconsciously, to help him- or her learn. Strategies are goal oriented; that is, the individual initiates them to learn something, to solve a problem, or

to comprehend something. Strategies include, but are not limited to, what have traditionally been referred to as study skills such as underlining, note taking, and summarizing, as well as predicting, reviewing prior knowledge, and generating questions.

Strategies are also said to be learning techniques, behaviors, problem-solving or study skills which make learning more effective and efficient (Oxford and Crookall, 1989). One commonly used technical definition says that learning strategies are operations employed by the learners to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information. Strategies refer to specific action taken by the learners to make learning faster, easier and more enjoyable, more self-direction, more affective and more transferable to new situations (Oxford, 1990) Researchers have time and again tried to identify the mental activities that readers use in order to construct meaning from the text. These activities are generally referred to as "reading strategies". Research in second language reading suggests that learners use a variety of strategies to assist them with the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information (Rigney, 1978). Reading strategies are the specifications taken by the learners to read and understand a particular text, understand to assimilate, store, retrieve and recall whenever necessary in the future. Reading strategies are of interest for what they reveal about the way readers manage their interaction with written text and how these strategies are related to text comprehension (Singhal, 2001).

Developing Strategic Reading

Accomplished readers continuously adjust their reading behaviours to accommodate text difficulty, task demands, and other contextual variables. Monitoring their reading process carefully, they take immediate steps when encountering comprehension problems. Aware of their own cognitive and linguistic resources, they are capable of directing their attention to the appropriate clues in anticipating, organising, and retaining text information. These and similar behaviours, separating accomplished and less accomplished readers essentially characterizes what is referred to as strategic reading. It is generally acknowledged that beyond information-processing skills, reading proficiency requires capabilities for exploiting cognitive and other resources to their maximum benefits. For these reasons, reader's real-time thoughts and actions-what they do and why -have attracted serious attention in both L1 and L2 reading research. Three issues are central: What behaviours are consciously initiated by readers to improve their ongoing comprehension, how such reader-initiated behaviours can be examined systematically, with different groups of readers under varying conditions, and which reader-initiated actions are most efficacious in enhancing comprehension.

Strategy Implemented:

Imagine, Elaborate, Predict, and Confirm

Imagine, Elaborate, Predict, and Confirm (IEPC) strategy takes the predictive process back to its origins in the imagination and extends it throughout the pre-reading, reading, and post-reading stages of a lesson (Wood and Endres, 2004). IEPC is designed to motivate students' interest in reading while simultaneously enhancing their ability to comprehend and write descriptively (Wood, 2004).

Imagine means imagining about things. It has been proved by numerous researchers that mental imagery plays an important role in the dynamic, interactive, reading process (Gambrel & Bales, 1986; Sadoski, 1983). Paivio(1971) said that imagery is the means of symbolically making meaning. Paivio also argues that information that is supported by both aural and visual cues should increase recall and retention. Studies by Mayer and Anderson (1991) have also shown that visual information helps to process and remember verbal information and vice versa. Talking on the same line, Goia and Bass (1986) observed that students had grown up in an intensive environment of television, movies and video games, have developed learning styles where comprehension occurs through visual images. It is not surprising that decades of research (Douville, 1999; Fillmer&Parkay, 1990; Gambrels & Bales, 1986; Peters & Levin, 1986; Pressley, 1977; Sadoski, &Paivio, 2001; Williams, Konopak, Wood &Avett, 1992) have proven that getting students to create visual images before, during, and/or after reading is a viable way of enhancing comprehension.

Elaboration means the practice of forming connections between our background knowledge and new content through imagery, visualization, and analogies (Anderson &Armbruster, 1984). Specifically, elaboration is the practice of forming connections between previously learned information and new content through imagery, visualization, analogies, descriptions, and details. Research has supported the use of elaboration to develop understanding by getting students to extend and modify their verbalizations during reading. (Hartman & Allison, 1996)

In a similar way, getting students to **predict** what will occur in a text is widely accepted as a means focusing their attention on the content to be read, thereby improving their understanding of key concepts (Copper, 2002). Prediction also involves getting students to use their prior knowledge to anticipate what may occur in the text. By doing so, the student's interest in the text is heightened. So, to predict about a text, students must have prior knowledge or experiences about a topic and means or a reason to retrieve this latent information and knowledge. It is sort of triggering of the information- a retrieval of images of previous experiences which motivates the students to read effectively. As pointed out by researchers' prediction becomes a method for students to set their own purposes for reading, to question these predictions, and to read for further proof and evidence (Stauffer, 1975; Woods & Robinson, 1983). However, getting students to make predictions about a selection involves more than just telling them to "guess what will happen in this story."When effective, it seems likely that some sort of "triggering" of the imagination, retrieval of images and of previous experiences is necessary to ensure adequate predictions (Wood and Endres, 2004).

Finally, **confirmation** entails reading and confirming if the predictions were right. Hence, this is a post reading activity.

The IEPC uses the assumption that students of all ability levels can be taught by using this predicting and imagining strategy (Finch, 1982; Gambrell & Bales, 1986; Gambrell & Koskinen, 1982). The strength of IEPC appears to be in the whole-class participation aspect, which enables the teacher to guide, focus, and direct class wide responses and discussions, thereby capitalizing on the collective experiences of the students (Wood, 2002). This strategy involves three phases:

1. Pre Reading Stage 2. Reading Stage 3. Post Reading Stage

The Pre Reading stage:

The pre reading stage is important as during this stage the prior knowledge of the students are elicited, background information is developed, purposes for reading are established, and a general interest and enthusiasm for the lesson to follow are established (Wood, 2002). This stage consists of The Imagining Phase. In this phase the idea of exploring a new world should be brought to the students. Based on the title of the story, cover page etc, students are encouraged to use their sensory experiences to imagine. This phase consists of instructions such as close your eyes, imagine the scene, character, and event, share your thinking with partners, and so on. The second phase in this stage is The Elaboration Phase. Here the students are encouraged to talk about their thinking. They should be encouraged to talk about their visual images and add details, anecdotes, prior experiences, and sensory information. The elaboration stage includes instructions such as Elaborate, tell, describe or give details of what you see in your mind.

The third phase in this stage is **The Prediction Phase**. The prediction phase includes instructions such as use the ideas to make some predictions or guesses about the passage to be read. It is also important to explain to them that, as mentioned previously, they will return to the predictions after the reading to either confirm or disconfirm the content.

The Reading stage:

The reading stage may involve guiding students through the reading or having them read the selection on their own. It is also important to ask them to make mental graphic notes as they read the lesson, so that they can use these notes to confirm or reject their predictions.

The Post reading Stage:

This stage happens after the reading is completed. During this stage purposes for reading and predictions are re-examined and analyzed. This is a time when the information is discussed and combined and when the new knowledge is integrated with the pre-existing knowledge. This stage consists of **The Confirmation Phase** and Refer back to the selection. The Confirmation Phase takes place to modify or confirm the original predictions to organize with the newly learned information. Strategy like thinking aloud some sample responses can be helpful here. This stage demands instructions such as Read to confirm or change your predictions about the passage.

However, in order to successfully implement a strategy like IEPC a lot is expected from the teacher. In the words of Wood & Endres (2005) the strategy of elaboration requires strategic demonstrating, modelling, and prompting on the part of the tutor because students with reading comprehension difficulties typically do not offer elaborated and deeper responses without scaffold/ assistance. This is a reason why the teacher will have to put in his/her extra effort to make this strategy a success.

Implementation of the Strategy (IPEC)

The lesson selected for this class was titled "**The ship of the desert**"

(New wave Series, Appendix I) Researcher entered class VII, and told the students the objective of the class, that is teaching them through this strategy. As the students were new to the strategy, he also used the regional language throughout the class to make them comfortable. Similarly, they were also allowed to interact in the mother tongue.

He started with the Imagining phase. He told them the title of the lesson and asked them to describe a ship. After an initial silence, the student's response started to flow. As they gave me the answers, he drew the figure on the black board since the idea was to make them imagine; He didn't stop them at any point of time and just kept following their instructions. Researcher was constantly encouraging them to think and come up with some kind of response. For this purpose, he kept on asking them numerous questions. Once he was satisfied with this activity, he moved forward and asked the students to imagine a desert and what they can see there? The Students answered saying, "camel" among other things. As they described it, he once again went to the board and drew it. Once the introduction part was over, he asked them to predict the content of the text from the title of the lesson "The Ship of the Desert".

He then distributed the hand-outs of the text. To help them further, he selected a passage and asked one of the students to read the passage aloud so that they can have idea about what the text is all about. Once the reading was over and students came up with answers. He wrote their predictions on the board and read the lesson together to find out what the content was all about. Thus, we had entered into the confirmation stage. The comprehension questions asked at the end of the class clearly indicated the students really understood the lesson. It was really a pleasant sight to see most of the students in the class participating and trying add something.

Analysis of Implementation of IPEC

Thus, throughout this imagination phase researcher observed that all the students were highly interested in participating in the class. It was also worth an applause that they went back to their home and tried to find out more about the subject. This clearly replicates their interest in the class. Also, initially they used the regional language but as the class progressed they were trying to use more of English words. Most of the times, their pronunciations were faulty, but he didn't try to correct them as such, as this might have intimidated them to some extent. Instead, he used to pronounce it in the right way and repeat those words so that they could make out the right pronunciation.

After the imagination phase was over and after he was satisfied with the response of the students, he picked up the thread and asked the students to predict what the title "The Ship of the Desert" suggested. Till then he didn't give them the handouts. But before writing down the title on the board, he asked them what was the name of the title (as he had mentioned the same on the previous day). They gave answers like: *"the ship and the desert, the camel in the desert, the camel as the ship of the desert."* This proved that the students were paying attention to what the researcher was saying in the class and they were able to grasp it.

He wrote the title of the lesson on the board and asked them to predict what might be there in the lesson. Once again the students came up with answers such as: *"camel, camel and ship, camel and how they carry our luggage in a desert just like a ship carry our luggage in a river."* This showed that they could actually elicit meaning out from the title of the lesson. This was again a very positive sign that indicated that students have the knowledge and understanding power in them, as teachers our role is to tap them out.

An analysis of the answer scripts revealed the fact that 80% of the answers were given correctly. Researcher had created some multiple choice question answers because my aim was to check their comprehension ability. A few of the questions were critically posed. Interestingly, students were also able to give correct answer to those questions. This clearly indicated that the students had really comprehended the lesson well. So, in his opinion if teachers are trained to use this strategy students will become good readers, they will learn new words unconsciously, they will learn to find out the main points, they would learn to relate a text with the world, and they would emerge as creative and more confident readers.

Conclusion

It clearly revealed that the use of strategy brought a huge difference in students' behaviour, interaction, interest, and comprehension level. Clearly, students' found the strategies more useful and interesting than the other methods that they were exposed to after he used the strategy, the following developments in students were obvious:

- Students could relate their ideas with the text.
- Students were more confident in using the English language.
- Students were actively participating in the class. The picture of "dull and life less students" as portrayed by their teachers was completely wiped off.
- There was a drastic improvement in the interaction between the teacher and the students.
- Improved comprehension level.
- Students were actually trying to make out the meaning of difficult words from the context.
- They also showed a good knowledge of vocabulary.
- Group dynamics was at peak.
- Students could summarize paragraphs and put it in their words.
- Students could narrate incidents.
- Students could write stories on their own.
- Students learnt punctuation marks and other grammatical technicalities without being forced to do so.
- The classes were seen as a fun process.

Apart from these changes in the behaviour of the students it can also be claimed that by using the strategy the classes made:

- Reading an interactive and fun process.
- Taught the students to become independent readers.

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