

Improving Reading Comprehension Skills of HRD Students at Mandalay University of Foreign Languages by Using Reading Strategies

Sandar Win¹, Kyu Kyu Mar²

Abstract

This action research project was planned to improve reading comprehension of English Language learners at Mandalay University of Foreign Languages. Data were collected from 15 DE basic students, 15 PGDE Basic students and 15 PGDE Upper Intermediate students attending at Mandalay University of Foreign Languages who were selected randomly. This research is intended to improve reading comprehension by using higher-order thinking skills such as predicting, making connection, visualizing, inferring, questioning and summarizing. This paper aims to study the effective reading strategies in order to improve reading skills in class. In the classroom, the teacher modeled these strategies through the think- aloud process by using six strategies: predicting, making connection, visualizing, inferring, questioning and summarizing. This was followed by the students using these strategies through whole class, small group, and independent practice. The information was gathered prior to implementing the reading strategy. The Meta Comprehension Strategy Index indicated a lack of some student knowledge of strategies to use before, during, and after reading.

Key words: reading comprehension, strategies, reading skills

1. Introduction

This research intends to improve reading comprehension skills of HRD students from Mandalay University of Foreign Languages. 15 DE basic students, 15 PGDE Basic students and 15 PGDE Upper Intermediate students attending at Mandalay University of Foreign Languages were taught reading comprehension by using strategies for three weeks and then they were asked to answer MSI questionnaires. The comprehension scales they got were presented in the tables. The results of this action research indicated their reading comprehension skills and how their reading skills should be improved to expand.

This research paper was conducted at Mandalay University of Foreign Languages, with 15 DE basic students, 15 PGDE Basic students and 15 PGDE Upper Intermediate students, using the theories of (Kose, 2006), Teele (2004), (Block & Israel, 2005), (Duke & Pearson, 2005), (Adler, 2001) and (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). In the classroom, the teacher modeled these strategies through the think- aloud process by using six strategies: predicting, making connection, visualizing, inferring, questioning and summarizing. This was followed by the students using these strategies through whole class, small group, and independent practice.

1.1 Aim and objectives

The aim of this research is to improve students' reading comprehension skills. The objectives of this paper are to find out which teaching reading comprehension techniques are available for students and, to classify which techniques are used for which IQ level students appropriately.

2. Literature Review

According to Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985), reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone for a student's success in school and, indeed, throughout life. Without the abilities to read well, opportunities for personal fulfilment and job success will be lost.

¹ Daw, Lecturer, Department of English, Mandalay University of Foreign Languages

² Daw, Lecturer, Department of English, Mandalay University of Foreign Languages

Despite its importance, reading is one of the most challenging areas in the education system. If students want to get the most out of the materials they are assigned, they have to read critically or analytically. The idea here is that when they read something, the purpose is to try to understand what the author's intention is. When dealing with reading, they encounter two layers of reality: one that they can see and one that they cannot see. Therefore, the purpose of reading is to make the invisible layer, the underlying meaning, visible and clear (Kose, 2006). Teele (2004) asserts that the goal of all readers is that they should understand what they read (2004). Research shows that good readers are actively involved with the text, and they are aware of the processes they use to understand what they read. Students can improve comprehension through instruction of reading strategies; predicting, making connection, visualizing, inferring, questioning and summarizing are strategies shown by research to improve reading comprehension (Block & Israel, 2005). It is important to teach the strategies by naming the strategy and how it should be used, modelling through the think- aloud process, group practice, pair work practice, and independent use of the strategy (Duke & Pearson, 2005).

2.1. Predicting

In order to be a good reader, learners should set a goal for their reading. One strategy for improving comprehension is predicting, which helps the readers set a purpose for their reading. Good readers use their experiences and knowledge to make predictions and formulate ideas as they read (Block & Israel, 2005). This strategy also allows for more student interaction, which increases student interest and improves their understanding of the text (Oczkus, 2003). It is important to compare the outcome in the actual text with the prediction process as it will lead the learner to improve his understanding. Without this aspect of the prediction process, it becomes meaningless to improving the student's comprehension (Duke & Pearson, 2005). Some of the approaches for teaching predicting are teacher modeling, predicting throughout the text; with partners, with a graphic organizer, or using post-it notes throughout the text. Using the title, table of contents, pictures, and key words is one prediction strategy. Another key prediction strategy is to have students predict at specific points through the text, evaluate the prediction, and revise predictions if necessary (Teale, 2004).

2.2. Visualizing

Another strategy that the good readers employ when comprehending a text is visualization (Adler, 2001). Visualization requires the reader to construct an image of what is read. This image is stored in the reader's memory as a representation of the reader's interpretation of the text (National Reading Panel, 2000). Teachers can motivate students to visualize settings, characters, and actions in a story and ask them to make drawings or write about the image that come to their minds after visualizing the text.

2.3. Making connections

Making connections is another strategy that can be used in the reading process. By making connections, the learners can activate their prior knowledge and connect the ideas in the text to their own experiences and beliefs, and the things happening in the outer world. "Text- to-Text, Text- to- Self, Text- to- World" is a strategy that helps students make connections. Students can make text-to- self connections through drawing, making a chart, or writing. Teachers might ask students if they have ever experienced anything like the events in the text. Students can make text- to-text connections through drawing, making a chart, or writing and graphic organizers. These text- to-text connections could be based upon how characters in the story relate to each other, or how story elements relate between stories. Students can make text-to- world connections through drawing, making a chart, or writing and

graphic organizers. Text-to- world connections could be done by comparing characters in a story to characters today or comparing the content of the text to the world today (Teele, 2004). Giving a purpose to students' reading by asking them to find connections would help them comprehend the ideas better in the text.

2.4. Summarizing

The process of summarization requires the reader to determine what is important when reading and to condense the information in the readers' own words (Adler, 2001). During the summarizing process, the students will be able to distinguish the main ideas from the supporting ideas. Distinguishing the related knowledge from the unrelated ones is another point in the summarizing process which will help the students' capacity to improve text comprehension. Summarizing is a strategy which will help the students to organize the ideas even in the long reading passages which are usually perceived as threat for the students.

2.5. Questioning

Reader can use the questioning before, during, and after reading. The questioning process requires readers to ask questions themselves to construct meaning, enhance understanding, find answers, solve problems, find information, and discover new information (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). In this strategy, the students return to the text throughout the reading process to find the answers the questions asked by the teacher before, during and after the reading. By this strategy, students practice to distinguish between questions that are factual, inferred, or based on the reader's prior knowledge. By using the student generated questioning strategy, text segments are integrated and thereby improve reading comprehension (NRP, 2000).

2.6. Inferring

Inferring refers to reading between the lines. Students need to use their own knowledge along with information from the text to draw their own conclusions (Serafini, 2004). Through inferring, students will be able to draw conclusions, make predictions, identify underlying themes, use information to create meaning from text, and use pictures to create meaning (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Students can be given techniques to use illustrations, graphs, pictures, dates, related vocabulary and titles from the text to make inferences.

3. Method of Research

There are many strategies to improve reading comprehension skills. Among them, this research paper used the methods of (Block & Israel, 2005) who said that good readers use their experiences and knowledge to make predictions and formulate ideas as they read. Predicting helps the readers set a purpose for their reading. Adler (2001) said that visualization requires the reader to construct an image of what is read. This image is stored in the reader's memory as a representation of the reader's interpretation of the text. Teele (2004) stated that text-to- world connections could be done by comparing characters in a story to characters today or comparing the content of the text to the world today. Giving a purpose to students' reading by asking them to find connections would help them comprehend the ideas better in the text.

Adler (2001) said that the process of summarization requires the reader to determine what is important when reading and to condense the information in the readers own words. Summarizing process will help the students' capacity to improve text comprehension. Harvey & Goudvis (2000) said that the questioning process requires readers to ask questions of themselves to construct meaning, enhance understanding, find answers, solve problems, find information, and discover new information. By this strategy, students practice to distinguish between questions that are factual, inferred, or based on the reader's prior knowledge. Serafini

(2004) said that inferring refers to reading between the lines. Students need to use their own knowledge along with information from the text to draw their own conclusions. Through inferring students will be able to draw conclusions, make predictions, identify underlying themes use information to create meaning from text, and use pictures to create meaning (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000).

Brigitte, A. McKown, B.S. Barnett, B.S. Cynthia, L. Brigitte, A. McKown, B.S. Barnett, B.S. Cynthia, L. have done the action research by using these techniques at Saint Xavier University, 2007.

The questionnaires used in this research is from the book “Improving Reading Comprehension Through Higher Thinking-Order Skills” Saint Xavier University, Chicago, Illinois. May 2007 by Brigitte, A. McKown, B.S. Barnett, B.S. Cynthia, L. Brigitte, A. McKown, B.S. Barnett, B.S. Cynthia, L. (2007).

3.1 Definitions of Action research questions

The focus of this research is to improve reading comprehension through the use of reading strategies. Without a solid foundation of reading strategies, the students will struggle throughout their academic and adult life. Reading awareness of the students can be improved by teaching reading comprehension strategies and by this way, they will develop a more meaningful reading experience. The research questions to measure how much awareness of reading strategies they have are expressed in Appendix. These questionnaires were adopted from the book “Improving Reading Comprehension Through Higher Thinking-Order Skills” by Brigitte, A. McKown, B.S. Barnett, B.S. Cynthia, L. (2007).. The purpose of this study was to analyze the improvement of the students reading skills after they have taken presentations on reading strategies.

3.2. Area of Research

As this research was done in the real situation, the students who are attending now at HRD class opened at Mandalay University of Foreign Languages participated to practice the reading comprehensive exercises and to answer these questionnaires. They are post graduate and undergraduate students. This research was conducted during three-week training course.

3.3. Research Instruments Used for Data Collection

To get the data needed, 10 questions for before reading strategies, 10 questions for while reading strategies, and 5 questions for after reading strategies were distributed to 15 DE basic students, 15 PGDE Basic students and 15 PGDE Upper Intermediate students attending at Mandalay University of Foreign Languages who were collected randomly. The data obtained from the questionnaires were described in percentage in the tables.

3.4. Data collection

The aim of this research is to improve students’ reading comprehension skills. The objectives of this paper are to find out which teaching reading comprehension techniques are available for students and, to classify which techniques are used for which IQ level students appropriately. Six strategies: predicting, making connection, visualizing, inferring, questioning, and summarizing were introduced to the students and practiced for three weeks. First the strategies were modeled by the teacher and then the strategies were trained by the whole class, small group, and finally independently. Following the presentation of the reading strategies, the teacher administered the Metacomprehension Strategy Index (MST) to see if the strategies presented have changed students’ understanding in reading. The index is a tool which measures students’ familiarity about reading strategies used before, during, and after reading. Three reading texts from their coursebooks were for three weeks.

4. Findings and discussion

The question type used before, while and after reading comprehension is multiple choice. As before reading task, the students were asked 10 questions, in while reading task 10 questions, and in after reading task, the students had to answer 5 questions. All students were expected to be able to give right answers satisfactorily because they had practiced three articles for three weeks by using reading comprehension strategies.

Table 1: Scores of DE Basic Students' reading comprehension skills DE Basic

Student	Before Reading										While Reading										After Reading						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25		
1	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	60%	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	✓	40%	x	x	x	x	x	0%
2	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	40%	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	50%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	80%
3	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	x	40%	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	20%	✓	✓	x	x	✓	40%	
4	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	50%	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	✓	40%	x	x	x	✓	x	20%	
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	40%	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	✓	40%	x	x	✓	✓	x	40%	
6	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	50%	x	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	30%	x	x	✓	x	x	20%	
7	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	20%	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	30%	x	x	x	x	x	0%	
8	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	40%	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	✓	60%	x	x	✓	✓	✓	60%	
9	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	10%	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	20%	x	x	✓	✓	x	40%	
10	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	70%	✓	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	40%	✓	✓	x	✓	x	60%	
11	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	x	40%	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	x	x	✓	50%	x	✓	x	✓	x	40%	
12	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	30%	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10%	x	✓	✓	x	x	40%	
13	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	30%	x	✓	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	50%	x	x	x	✓	x	20%	
14	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	20%	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	40%	x	x	✓	✓	✓	60%	
15	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	30%	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x	50%	x	✓	x	✓	✓	70%	

In table 1, the scores of 15 DE basic students that they got for the reading task are shown. The least score that one of them got is 10% and the highest score is 70%. The other students got from 20% to 60% respectively. The scores of 15 DE basic students that they got at the while reading task are shown. The least score that one of them got is 10% and the highest score that one of them got is 60%. The other students got from 20% to 50% respectively. The scores of 15 DE basic students that they got at the after reading task are shown. The least score that two of them got is 0% and the highest score is 80%. The other students got from 20% to 60% respectively.

Table 2: Scores of PGDE Basic Students' Reading Comprehension Skills PGDE Basic

Student	Before Reading										While Reading										After Reading						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25		
1	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	✓	70%	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	✓	30%	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	80%
2	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	60%	×	×	✓	×	×	✓	×	×	✓	40%	×	×	✓	×	×	20%	
3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	×	×	70%	✓	×	✓	×	×	✓	×	✓	✓	60%	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	80%	
4	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	×	×	40%	✓	×	×	×	✓	×	×	×	×	30%	×	×	✓	✓	✓	60%	
5	×	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓	✓	×	60%	✓	×	×	×	✓	×	×	×	×	30%	×	×	×	✓	×	20%	
6	✓	×	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓	×	50%	×	×	×	×	✓	×	×	×	×	30%	×	×	×	✓	×	20%	
7	✓	✓	✓	×	×	×	✓	×	×	40%	×	×	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	60%	×	×	×	✓	×	20%	
8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	×	×	70%	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	✓	×	40%	×	×	×	✓	×	20%	
9	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	×	50%	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	×	×	×	60%	×	×	✓	×	✓	40%	
10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	×	✓	70%	✓	×	✓	×	×	✓	×	✓	✓	50%	×	×	✓	✓	×	40%	
11	✓	×	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	×	50%	✓	×	✓	×	×	✓	×	✓	✓	60%	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	80%	
12	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	×	×	50%	✓	×	✓	×	×	✓	×	×	✓	40%	×	×	✓	✓	×	40%	
13	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	×	40%	✓	×	✓	×	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	70%	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	80%	
14	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	×	80%	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	70%	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	60%	
15	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	×	50%	✓	×	×	×	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	50%	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	60%	

Table 2 shows the scores of 15 PGDE basic students that they got for the reading task are shown. The least score that three of them got is 40% and the highest score that one of them got is 80%. The other students got from 50% to 70% respectively. At the while reading task, the least score that four of them got is 30% and the highest score that two of them got is 70%. The other students got from 40% to 60% respectively. The scores of 15 PGDE basic students that they got at the after reading task are shown. The least score that five of them got is 20% and the highest score that four of them got is 80%. The other students got from 40% to 60% respectively.

Table 3: Scores of PGDE Upper Intermediate Students' Reading Comprehension Skills PGDE (Up-Inter)

Student	Before Reading										While Reading										After Reading						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25		
1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	80%	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	x	✓	x	✓	60%	x	✓	✓	x	x	40%
2	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	x	50%	x	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	50%	x	x	x	x	x	0%
3	x	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	30%	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	60%	x	✓	x	✓	x	40%
4	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	50%	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	40%	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	80%
5	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	x	x	30%	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	40%	x	x	x	✓	x	20%
6	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	70%	x	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	x	40%	x	x	x	x	x	0%
7	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x	x	50%	x	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	40%	x	✓	x	✓	x	40%
8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	80%	x	x	✓	x	x	✓	x	✓	x	x	30%	x	x	x	✓	✓	40%
9	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	20%	x	x	x	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	x	30%	x	✓	x	x	x	20%
10	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	x	x	50%	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	x	40%	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	80%
11	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x	70%	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	x	x	40%	x	x	x	✓	✓	40%
12	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x	60%	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	40%	x	x	✓	✓	x	40%
13	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	30%	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	✓	50%	x	x	✓	✓	x	40%
14	x	x	✓	x	x	x	✓	x	x	20%	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	20%	x	x	x	x	✓	20%
15	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓	60%	✓	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	30%	x	x	✓	✓	x	40%

Table 3 shows the scores of 15 PGDE upper intermediate students that they got at the before reading task. The least score that two of them got is 20% and the highest score that two of them got is 80%. The other students got from 30% to 70% respectively. At the while reading task, the least score that one of them got is 20% and the highest score that two of them got is 60%. The other students got from 30% to 50% respectively. The scores of 15 PGDE upper intermediate students that they got at the after reading task are shown. The least score that two of them got is 0% and the highest score that two of them got is 80%. The other students got from 20% to 40% respectively.

The results of this observation shows that their awareness levels base on their IQ level and their degrees they had got. So, according to Before Reading task table 1, some DE basic students got the lowest percentage, 10%, and some got the highest percentage, 70%. For PGDE basic students, some got the lowest percentage, 40%, and some got the highest percentage, 80%. for PGDE upper intermediate students, some got the lowest percentage, 20%, and some got the highest percentage, 80%. According to While Reading task table 2 for DE basic students, some got the lowest percentage, 10%, and some got the highest percentage, 60% for PGDE basic students, some got the lowest percentage, 30%, and some got the highest percentage, 70%. In PGDE upper intermediate students, some got the lowest percentage, 20%, and some got the highest percentage, 60%. According to After Reading task table 3, for DE basic students, some got the lowest percentage ,0%, and some got the highest percentage, 80%. For PGDE basic students, some got the lowest percentage, 20%, and some got the highest percentage, 80%. For PGDE upper intermediate students, some got the lowest percentage, 0%, and some got the highest percentage, 80%.

According to these results, the scores are very different from each other because among DE basic students some passed matriculation examination with distinctions and some passed with no distinction. So their intelligent quotient is very different. And then, the PGDE basic students and PGDE upper intermediate students are engineers, nurses, arts and sciences graduates, and the teachers of private schools. Therefore, their awareness levels may be very different.

This paper shows that the needs to improve their reading comprehension skills are: they are divided into different classes according to their scores they have got in their entrance exam, not the number of application forms. For example, average level students class, lower level students class and higher level students class should be divided. If not, when the teacher gives the activities or exercises, higher level students always finish firster than the others and they have to wait for them and then they may feel bored. Moreover, they don't want to attend reading classes regularly. Therefore, in order to improve all students' reading comprehension skills, according to their knowledge of reading comprehension skills, they have to be taught in different classes and the teacher should encourage and stimulate lower level students to attend the class cheerfully.

Conclusion

The results of this observation show that a few students in these classes have a lack of knowledge in the area of reading strategies at three weeks of the study. After finishing their three-month course, it is sure that the students' reading comprehension skills can be improved by using the reading strategies. The number of the strategies was another obstacle as the students might have found them confusing. Another question in mind was about the success of the students' using the comprehension strategies independently as many of these reading comprehension strategies were new to the students. In order to overcome this situation, they have to be guided and monitored in every step of the process especially for the questioning, inferring, and summarizing strategies. The action research is productive experience. So the teachers who have been teaching these classes have seen an increased understanding of reading

comprehension strategies and an improvement in reading comprehension of their students. The students will be continued using these strategies in their three-month course.

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Internet Resources

- http://www.ctap4.org/in_folit/trainers/comprehe-strategies.pdf
- <http://www.belgeler.com/blg/12ta/effects-of-portfolio-implementation-and-assessment-on-critical-reading-and-learner-autonomy-of-elt-students>
- [http://www. Nichd.nih.g](http://www.Nichd.nih.g)