

The Effect of RAP Paraphrasing Strategy on Improving Iranian EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

The importance of reading English for EFL learners cannot be ignored. It is widely accepted that comprehension is at the heart of reading and the vigorous process of making meaning from text (Durkin, 1993). Comprehension counts on not only traits of the reader, such as prior knowledge, and activating it, but also effective strategies to making meaning through decoding the text. Thus the present study aimed at investigating the effect of paraphrasing on improving reading comprehension. Sixty male learners with age range of 18 -21 participated in the quasi-experimental study which lasted for one semester. The collected data was analyzed by means of SPSS. It was indicated that through paraphrasing, learners acquired how to get the meaning of the texts, and also they learn how reconstruct a text rather than rote memorizing it. This resulted in deep understanding and longer retention of the reading materials.

Keywords: RAP paraphrasing strategy, reading comprehension, Iranian EFL learners

1. Introduction

Reading is an essential skill to aid people learn from the findings of humans and what is reported as a result of their experiences. It is extremely safe to claim that reading is the most effortless way to raise people's learning level (Hung & Tzeng, 2001). Reading comprehension has been defined by (Sweet & Snow, 2003), as simultaneous extraction and construction of meaning. Reading comprehension is an intricate interaction among automatic and strategic cognitive processes that helps the reader to make a mental representation of the text (van den Broek & Espin, 2012). For Woolley (2010), there are numerous causes why some students experience serious troubles in making sense of reading materials. One reason might be that students have not mastered reading skill accurately. When a student who is struggling to read words and focuses so hard on just saying the words correctly, they are not focusing on what they are reading. All learners in general and students with learning disabilities in particular put more emphasis on correct producing the words during reading rather than struggling to making sense of the reading materials (Woolley, 2010). The final goal in reading is comprehension. It makes the reader to make sense of what the text tells us. One of the well-studied learner-characteristics is background knowledge; there is no doubt that the central point is its effect upon reading comprehension. This research rose from such developments in cognitive psychology as the advancement of schema theory contributing to the varying conceptions in research and practice in reading (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). As stated by Rumelhart (1980), schemata can represent knowledge at all

levels—from ideologies and cultural truths to knowledge about the meaning of a particular word, to knowledge about what patterns of excitations are associated with what letters of the alphabet. We have schemata to represent all levels of our experience, at all levels of abstraction. Finally, our schemata are our knowledge. All of our generic knowledge is embedded in schemata (p. 41). The significance of schema theory in reading comprehension also has been emphasized, but there should be effective strategies to activate the relevant schemata of learners during reading. Thus teachers are to teach their students the most important strategies to develop comprehension (Anderson et al, 1977). Pressley (2000) is amongst the researchers, who strongly believe that the call for teaching students techniques to develop their reading comprehension is really essential. A number of investigations revealed that understanding of text can be improved through explicit instructions (e.g. Brown & Palincsar, 1989). Reading strategies aid students their academic needs in particular, and their life goals in general. Generally speaking Schumaker and Deshler (2006) define a learning strategy as “an individual’s approach to a task. It includes how a person thinks and acts when planning, executing, and evaluating performance on a task and its outcomes. While reading strategies are planned or established ways of reading. A paraphrase is an expression of published ideas of other authors in one’s own words without making any change in the original meaning. In paraphrasing we change the structure of the paragraphs and use other, simpler vocabularies for making the text more understandable to ourselves.

2. Review of the related literature

2.1 Reading comprehension

The act of reading is an interaction between the reader and the reading task, ultimately the author interrelates with the reader and she longs readers will understand what she aims to convey. Farris, et al (2004), state that reading comprehension is the process of understanding the message that the author is trying to convey very simply, it is making meaning from the text at hand. According to Akmar, there are some processes in comprehending a text: The first process, “literal comprehension”, is the most evident one. Comprehension at this level has surface connotations. At this level, teachers usually ask students to uncover information and schemes that are clearly mentioned in the text. Besides, it is also appropriate to test vocabulary. The second process is “interpretive” or “referential” comprehension. At this level, students exceed what is said and read for more profound information. Finally, the third level of comprehension is “critical reading” through which ideas and information are assessed. Critical evaluation arises only when students have got the ideas and information that are mentioned by the author (1999).

Reading conventionally has been categorized into two categories: intensive and extensive. Senin (2012), believes that intensive reading points to the features of a text such as grammatical forms, literal meaning and vocabulary. In the programs which focused on intensive reading students are asked to read shorter texts, normally under 500 words. He continued his claims and stated that texts are often re-read and interpreted for meaning. The Reading Recovery Program uses many intensive reading techniques. In the mentioned program, students are involved with a trained Reading Recovery teacher for a half-hour per day for 12 to 20 weeks until they attain grade level. Afterward he cited that working with the teacher, the student practices” letter identification” and learns the association of words and sounds. Besides, concerning extensive reading he affirmed that it aims to provide a wide, general understanding of a text instead of centering on details, it pays more attention to perceiving the gist of the reading. School programs that make use of parent volunteers offer help with extensive reading. He also believed that in these programs the emphasis is on reading.

2.2 Learning Strategies

Learning strategies are procedures used by language users with the intention of facilitating the process of language and also language use. (Mitchell, 2004).It can be said that strategies are processes through which the ways language users learn a second /foreign language are determined. A foreign language is not the chief medium of daily wants foreign language learners , thus they experience deep problems with input exposure. Actually they even don’t have adequate opportunities to make use of learnt items in genuine positions. (Oxford,2003). Commonly Learning strategies are “specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task by students to enhance their own learning” (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992, p.63). These processes help learners to develop self-regulated strategies which will ease with which students learn the materials. When learners get familiar with the appropriate tactics that are compatible

with their style also personality their learning improve significantly. These strategies would be a powerful aid for them. (Williams & Borden, 1997). When learners have access to the procedures of which lead to storing, recalling and promoting the autonomous learning, they become systematic learners (o'malley & chamot, 1990). Rigney (1978) and Rubin (1987), state that language learning strategies are every step gotten by users in the way of aiding learning. According to Oxford 1990 "cognitive" and "social views" of language learning strategies which increase learning skills and also self- regulation should be comprised in the definition. Regarding a range of activities like writing or reading learners can utilize the most efficient ones based on their styles and preferences, thus it is safe to claim that the degree of improvement relies on the appropriate strategies used (Richard, 1994). Characteristics of language learning strategies are provided with Oxford as follows (1990, P.9):

Language learning strategies:

- *contribute to the main goal, communicative competence
- *allow learners to become more self-directed
- *expand the role of teachers
- *Are problem-oriented
- *Are specific actions taken by the learner
- *Involve many aspects of the learner not just the cognitive
- *Support learning both directly & indirectly
- *Are not always observable
- *Are often conscious
- *Can be taught
- *Are flexible
- *Are influenced by a variety of factors.

2.3 RAP Paraphrasing Strategy

"RAP is a three-step strategy: **Read** a paragraph; **Ask** myself, 'What was the main idea and two details?' and **Put** it into my own words. The RAP strategy is based on sound theory utilizing paraphrasing to help improve memory of main ideas and details in text (Hagaman & Reid, 2008, p.222). RAP can enhance the reading comprehension of students with and without disabilities and is really flexible (ibid). In this kind of strategy students are deeply engaged in reading tasks through asking questions and paraphrasing to enhance their comprehension. Jitendraa et al (2006) examined the effects of a direct instruction main idea summarization curriculum and a self-monitoring method on the reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities. Results indicated the main idea instructional program produced increases in identifying and generating main ideas, with even higher levels of performance following self-monitoring instruction. Khoshsima and Rezaeian Tiyar (2014), also conducted a study on the effect of summarizing strategy on improving reading comprehension. They came to conclusion that summarizing strategy has a significant effect on learners' reading comprehension.

3. Method

3.1 Research Question

The current study was an attempt the answer the following question:

Does RAP reading Strategy have any effect on improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension?

3.2 Null Hypothesis

RAP reading Strategy has no effect on improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

3.3 Research variables

The independent variable of the experimental group was RAP reading strategy, while the dependent on was reading comprehension. In the control group the independent variable was traditional instruction while the dependent variable again was reading comprehension.

3.4 Design of the study

The design of the study is quasi-experimental, namely without random assignment. Typical experimental study takes in a control group in order to comparing the results of treatment and at least one experimental group of which receives treatment.

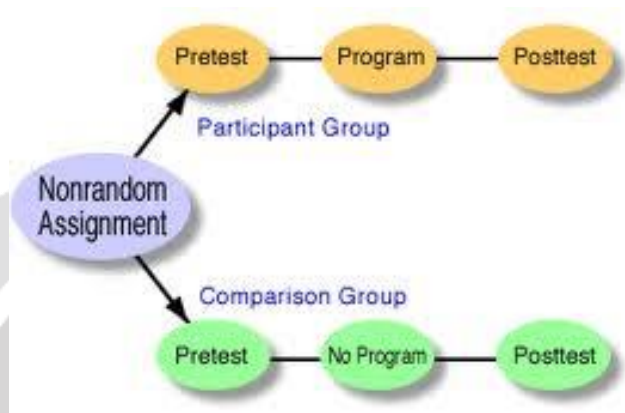


Figure pre-test & post-test designs

3.5 Participants

Sixty male learners with age range of 18 -21 participated in the quasi- experimental study which lasted for one semester. The participants were all from Persian background. It is worth mentioning that all of the participants were selected from one of the institutions of *Tehran, Iran*.

3.6 Procedure

Before starting the program a PET language proficiency test was performed in the both groups including Listening, speaking, reading, and writing. After eliminating the problem of unbalanced proficiency level of participants, a pre-test was run to agree on the reading comprehension performance of participants before the treatment, for experimental group, and before traditional instruction for control group. Pre-test was for quartering comparability of the both groups (Experimental and Control) and removing the probability of pre-existing differences between two groups at the beginning of the program. Afterward the researcher began the lessons. He introduced the RAP paraphrasing to the experimental group, and then started teaching reading through using RAP paraphrasing strategy. At the beginning of each session in experimental group, researcher provided the student with reading tasks. He then asked them to read each paragraph first, and then they need to ask themselves “what is the main idea and its main details? “Afterwards the researcher asked them to put the given information in their own words. By time when the researcher assured that learners can do the act of paraphrasing by themselves, he told nothing and students were to do all of the steps without any aid - this is based on the Zone of Proximal Development Was firstly introduced by Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist. In the control group the researcher provided learners with the same reading materials but the procedure was based on traditional instruction. In the control group learners were simply asked to read the text and answer the relevant questions given at the end of each lesson. After completing the program one post-test was administered to the both groups, and scores have been gathered. The

collected data was analyzed via SPSS. Given that there were two groups in the current study hence the researcher made use of t-test for analyzing the scores. An independent t-test was used for comparing the results between groups, and paired t-test was utilized for comparing the results within groups.

4. Results and discussion

In the following part the results of the analysis will be discussed with the intention of answering the research question of the investigation.

Table 1. Paired Samples Statistics-Control Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest	13.333	30	1.862	0.305
	Posttest	14.222	30	1.344	0.246

As it is shown in the Table 1, the control group of the study had a mean score of 13.333 ($SD=1.862$) in the pretest. The group, however, scored higher ($M=14.222$, $SD=1.344$) in the posttest. It can be seen that from Pretest to Posttest for the participants scores changed in the control group.

Table 2. Paired Samples Test- Control Group

	Paired Differences	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
					Pair 1	Posttest - Pretest			

It is evident in the table 2 that the mean increase in the reading scores of the control group was -.164 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -.583 to 0.250. It is also indicated that the mean increase in the writing posttest was not statistically significant ($t(29) = -.817$, $P = 0.420$).

Table 3. Paired Samples Statistics-Experimental Group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 2	Pretest	13.441	30	1.849	0.339
	Posttest	18.248	30	1.224	0.224

Table 3 demonstrates the descriptive statistics for the experimental group (RAP paraphrasing strategy). Having a glance at the table it will be noted that there was a statistically significant increase in the reading comprehension scores from Pretest ($M= 13.441$, $SD= 1.849$) to Posttest ($M= 18.248$, $SD=1.224$).

Table.4. Paired Samples Test- Experimental Group

Paired Samples	Paired Differences	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
					Posttest - Pretest	-4.200			

Based on the information given in the Table 4, the mean increase in the reading comprehension scores of the experimental group was -4.200 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -5.064 to -4.141. The mean increase in the reading comprehension posttest was statistically significant ($t = (29) = -19.476, P = 0.000$). While comparing with the control group, the experimental group outperformed in the reading comprehension posttest. Consequently, the Null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics-Pretest

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest Control	30	13.333	1.862	0.305
Experimental	30	13.441	1.849	0.339

Table 5 depicts the descriptive statistics for the reading comprehension pretest. The experimental and control groups of the study had a mean score of 13.333 ($SD=1.862$) and 13.441 ($SD=1.849$) respectively. To be precise, the two groups did not perform differently in the pretest and they were harmonized in terms of their reading comprehension ability.

Table 6. Independent Samples Test-Pretest

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	Sig.	t Test for Equality of Means						
				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	0.335	0.562	0.436	58	0.662	0.200	0.454	-0.711	1.111
	Equal variances not assumed			0.436	57.505	0.662	0.200	0.454	-0.711	1.111

As it can be found in the table.6 an independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the statistics scores of experimental and control groups in the reading comprehension pretest. The mean difference in statistics scores was 0.200 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -.711 to 1.111. The results reported no significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups in the reading comprehension pretest $t(58) = 0.436, p = 0.662$. Then, the two groups performed consistently in the reading comprehension.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics-Posttest

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Control	30	14.222	1.344	0.246
	Experimental	30	18.248	1.224	0.224

According to the descriptive statistics made known in the Table7, the experimental group performed much better than the control group in the reading comprehension posttest. The mean score for the former was 18.24 ($SD= 1.224$) whereas for the latter the mean score is 14.22($SD= 1.344$).

Table 8. Independent Samples Test-Posttest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	Sig.	t-test for Equality of Means					
					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	0.00	0.99	-12.71	58	0.00	-4.21	0.31	-4.90	-3.57
	Equal variances not assumed			-12.71	57.31	0.00	-4.21	0.31	-4.90	-3.57

Another independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the statistics scores of the two groups in the reading comprehension posttest. The mean difference in statistics scores was -4.21 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -4.90 to -3.57. The results pointed out significant difference between the mean scores of experimental and control groups in the reading comprehension posttest $t(58) = -12.71, p = 0.00$. Hence, the Null hypothesis is rejected. As a result, the answer to the research question of the study is positive. RAP paraphrasing strategy improves the performance of the learners in reading comprehension tests which is reported due to the statistical analysis. The results of this study indicate that the RAP paraphrasing strategy can develop the reading comprehension performance of the students. The retention of the learnt materials also increased, since learners would learn more meaningfully and connectedly through RAP paraphrasing. Although there is a handful of studies which investigated the role RAP paraphrasing, but it is worth mentioning that the findings of the present study are in agreement with them. For instance, the findings provide support to what was reported by (Hagaman, & Reid, 2008). Our findings are in line with the work of Jitendra et al in (2006). There is strong connection between the findings of the present study with that of Khoshsima and Rezaeian Tiyyar (2014) which reported strong support for the effectiveness of the summarizing/ paraphrasing in reading comprehension. In sum, based on the consequences of the

present study, it is safe to claim that comprehension skills and abilities would be improved by employing appropriate strategies. Strategy instruction would assist learners to think systematically about the strategies might be efficient to enhance their reading comprehension and become expert readers. Since their awareness is increased when working on texts; therefore, they learn how to manage the process of reading in particular and all process of learning in general. All in all, like any other research study, the current investigation had also number of limitations that make the users to generalize the results with caution. First and maybe the most serious one is the number of participants which is too low for enabling us to use the results to large populations. Second one is the gender issues. Since the study was done only by male learners, thus cannot be linked to females. The next point was the time limit of the course. To be exact, researcher could not made use of various text types to work on, and only limited genre type was worked on. As a result, all of these should be taken into account in further studies.

5. Implications

The outcomes of the study have some points which are suggested to be taken into account by teachers/ educators/ syllabus designers. Since while paraphrasing a text students have to read the source critically, they will be thoughtful users of language. Through RAP paraphrasing learners perceive that instead of just reading a text for correct pronunciation, intonation etc, they need to understand what the original author has to say to his audience, before they reproduce it for their own audience. Pupils would also learn how to recognize the important points of a text/ message instead of wasting time to memorize unimportant issues. Through paraphrasing learners are trained to add their own background knowledge for clarifying the target information and this would be a real path to meaningful learning. Learners would be more strategic, autonomous and self- regulated users when they feel they have a tool to control their learning process. Through thinking on texts, finding out the most important and less important parts, learners deeply notice the materials, and it is supported by noticing hypothesis. Actually Schmidt (1990) is the first researcher who believes what is noticed gets intake. Schmidt utters that noticing is the essential and adequate condition for converting input to intake. Consequently due to the importance of reading for all of the language users, there would be more efficient teaching / learning programs if the mentioned points taken into consideration by teachers/educators/ syllabus designers.

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