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STRATEGIES BASED INSTRUCTION FOR ENHANCING READING COMPREHENSION
ABILITY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the impact of Strategies Based Instruction (SBI) to enhance reading comprehension ability of Assamese ESL learners. A total of 20 students from two colleges of Assam, India, participated in the study. The goal of this paper is to examine if LLSs instruction enhances experimental groups' ability in answering reading comprehension questions in English. There was no significant difference between control and experimental groups in their performance in reading comprehension ability before strategy instruction. However, after the LLSs instruction an impact was witnessed which is evident from the independent samples t-test. The T values obtained (6.934, 3.216 & 3.639) are significant ($p=.000$, $.005$ & $.002$; $p<.05$) in all the three types of questions. The result indicates that there is statistically significant difference in the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in answering three types of comprehension questions after LLSs instruction. The experimental group outperformed the control group in all the three types of questions in the posttest.

Key words: SBI, Reading Comprehension, Assamese ESL Learners, LLS Instruction

Introduction

Paradigm shift of emphasis from teacher and teaching to learner and learning is paramount important in ESL teaching learning situation. Being the second language, English occupies a prestigious status in the state of Assam. Knowledge of English is essential for better social and economic status. Realising its importance in almost all spheres of life, teaching and learning of English has been introduced from the early stages of school education. However, despite learning English for almost twelve years, at the undergraduate level most Assamese ESL learners display below expected level of proficiency in all the four major language skills. In this backdrop this study is carried out to investigate the impact of SBI in enhancing reading comprehension ability of Assamese ESL learners.

Review of literature

The concept of Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) is the outcome of the development of cognitivist theory in language learning during 1970s. LLSs are 'operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information...; specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations' (Oxford,

1990:8). Therefore LLSs are good indicators of how learners approach tasks or problems encountered during the process of language learning. A considerable number of studies have proved that LLSs instruction improves reading comprehension ability of learners (for example, Tang & Moore, 1992; Fuping (2006); Karbalaei & Rajyashree, 2010; Feng, 2020 etc.).

Tang and Moore (1992) conducted a study on investigating the effectiveness of pre-reading activities such as title discussion and vocabulary training in decreasing oral reading errors and increasing reading rate and comprehension across a range of reading levels. In experiment 1 they examined the effects of these cognitive activities in combination on the reading comprehension of three adult ESL emergent readers. In experiment 2 they explore the relative effects of this procedure, and a metacognitive strategy for presenting these pre-reading techniques, on the comprehension levels of five adult ESL learners. Single subject research designs were employed in both studies. Results of both studies indicated that the cognitive strategy was effective in raising comprehension levels. However, in experiment 2, the metacognitive instructional strategy, while similarly effective in raising comprehension levels, was also maintained beyond the end of the treatment.

Fuping (2006) conducted a study on 76 intermediate EFL students of non-English major who were divided into two groups. One group was a participant of a strategies-based instruction treatment and the other was a comparison group receiving regular language course. Both groups filled out a pre-treatment learning strategy questionnaire and then performed a pre-test and a post-test. The data looked for links between strategy training and proficiency in answering different types of reading comprehension questions. The findings indicated that LLSs instruction increased learners' score in main idea and inference questions but not in detailed questions.

Karbalaei and Rajyashree (2010) conducted a study on the effectiveness of Summarization instruction on reading comprehension at undergraduate level. A sample of 63 students majoring English, aged 17-25, were selected from four intact classes in three different colleges in India. The effects of summarization instruction were measured by their performance on two reading comprehension texts. Students' performance on a proficiency test was used to group students into high and low levels and it functioned as another independent variable in addition to gender. Findings indicated that the explicit instruction was effective in enhancing reading comprehension of Indian students. There was no statistically significant difference between two groups after instruction. It indicated that the lower level learners received more benefit of summarization strategy training than their higher level counterparts

Feng (2020) presents a small-scale study examining the effects of metacognitive reading strategy instruction on English language learners' reading comprehension in a Hong Kong international school. Twenty-five primary school (Grade 5) students who learn English as a second language participated in this study. Metacognitive instruction was incorporated into 10 process-based reading lessons. Data were collected from notes learners took during reading, post-reading reflection reports, teacher-facilitated group discussions and two types of reading tests. Results revealed that the young learners could articulate several knowledge factors that influenced their reading. In addition, learners reported a better understanding of the nature and demands of reading, a deeper awareness of metacognitive knowledge in improving reading comprehension and increased confidence in handling reading exercises. The learners also showed enhanced reading performance compared to those in a control group without metacognitive intervention. This study highlights the potential of metacognitive instruction to enhance primary school English learners' reading literacy.

Hypothesis and Research Questions

Following hypothesis and research questions guided the present research.

Null Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant impact of the Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) instruction on the Assamese ESL learners' ability in answering main idea, factual information and inference questions of the reading comprehension test.

Research Questions:

1. Is there any difference between control and experimental groups in answering main idea, factual information and inference questions of the reading comprehension test before LLSs training?
2. Is there any difference between control and experimental groups in answering main idea, factual information and inference questions of the reading comprehension test after LLSs training?

Methodology

This study is conducted as an Intervention Study that adopted an experimental design known as 'pre-test - post-test control-group design'. The target population in the study was the first semester undergraduate Assamese ESL learners from the humanities and allied subjects of Dibrugarh University, Assam. They had 10 to 12 years of English learning experience at the time of the experiment. The average age of the participants was 19 to 20 years. A total of 20 participants took part in the study. The learners were pretested before LLSs treatment. They were then divided into control group (N=10) and experimental group (N=10). The control group did not receive any special teaching. They received traditional method of teaching. The experimental group received LLSs instruction for four weeks on different LLSs pertaining to reading comprehension ability in English. After the treatment sessions, the groups were again post tested on the same reading activity questionnaire in order to identify the impact, if any, of the LLSs instruction on the experimental group.

A reading activity questionnaire was designed as an instrument to test the participants' reading proficiency in English. The questionnaire contained a total of 20 multiple choice comprehension questions, 5 each from four passages. Out of the 5 multiple choice comprehension questions, there were 2 main idea questions, 2 factual information questions and 1 inference question. There were four options for each multiple choice comprehension questions and the participants were required to read the passage and mark the correct option. The score for each question was 1. Thus, the highest score was 20. Two passages were selected from previous undergraduate level question papers of the Dibrugarh University and the rest two passages were based on the TOEFL (2005). The experiment lasted for four weeks comprising of three phases. The first phase was the pre-test, second phase was the LLSs instruction and the third phase was the post-test.

Results and findings

For ease of reference the hypothesis and research questions have been reproduced here.

Null Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant impact of the Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) instruction on the Assamese ESL learners' ability in answering main idea, factual information and inference questions of the reading comprehension test.

Research Questions:

1. Is there any difference between control and experimental groups in answering main idea, factual information and inference questions of the reading comprehension test before LLSs training?
2. Is there any difference between control and experimental groups in answering main idea, factual information and inference questions of the reading comprehension test after LLSs training?

Results for the research questions:

1. Is there any difference between control and experimental groups in answering main idea, factual information and inference questions of the reading comprehension test before LLSs training?

An independent samples t-test is carried out to investigate the above question.

Table 1: Answering Reading Comprehension Questions in Pre-test

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Main Idea	Experimental Group	10	1.4	0.966	0.306
	Control Group	10	1.2	1.229	0.389
Factual Information	Experimental Group	10	5.8	1.317	0.416
	Control Group	10	7	1.764	0.558
Inference	Experimental Group	10	0.9	0.876	0.277
	Control Group	10	2.1	1.287	0.407

Table 1 demonstrates that in the pre-test context, there is no high difference in the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in main idea questions. But, in case of factual information questions and inference questions the mean score of the control group is higher than that of the experimental group.

Table 2: T-test of Groups in Answering Reading Comprehension Questions in Pre-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Main Idea	Equal variances assumed	.073	.790	.405	18	.691	.200	.494	-839	1.239
	Equal variances not assumed			.405	17.048	.691	.200	.494	-843	1.243
Factual Information	Equal variances assumed	.006	.938	-1.724	18	.102	-1.200	.696	-2.662	.262
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.724	16.653	.103	-1.200	.696	-2.671	.271
Inference	Equal variances assumed	2.355	.142	-2.438	18	.025	-1.200	.492	-2.234	-.166
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.438	15.864	.027	-1.200	.492	-2.244	-.156

The Leven’s test of equality of variance in Table 2 indicates that the F values (.073, .006 & 2.355) were not significant ($p=.790$.938 & .142; $p>.05$). This implies that there was no significant variability in score between the groups in the three types of comprehension questions. In case of main idea and factual information

questions, the T values (.405 & 1.724) are not significant ($p=.691$ & $.102$; $p>.05$). On the other hand, for the inference questions, the T value (2.438) was found to be significant ($p=.025$, $p>.05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that both control and experimental groups answered the main idea and the factual information questions nearly in the same way but there were differences in answering the inference question. The control group performed significantly better in answering inference questions.

2. Is there any difference between control and experimental groups in answering main idea, factual information and inference questions of the reading comprehension test after LLSs training?

An independent samples t-test is carried out to investigate if there is any difference between the experimental and the control groups in answering different types of reading comprehension questions in the post-test context.

Table 3: Mean Scores in Answering Reading Comprehension Questions in Post-test

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Main Idea	Experimental Group	10	3.80	.422	.133
	Control Group	10	1.30	1.059	.335
Factual Information	Experimental Group	10	9.60	1.265	.400
	Control Group	10	7.60	1.506	.476
Inference	Experimental Group	10	3.10	.994	.314
	Control Group	10	1.50	.972	.307

It can be observed from Table 3 that the mean scores of the experimental group is considerably high than the control group in all the three types of comprehension question after the LLSs treatment.

The Leven's test of homogeneity in Table 4 states that the F values ($F=.346$ & $.099$) are not significant ($p=.564$ & $.757$; $p>.05$) in case of factual information and inference questions. This shows that there is not much variability in mean scores of the two groups in these two types of questions. However, the F value ($F=5.693$) of main idea question is significant ($p=.028$, $p<.05$) which indicates that the variability in mean scores of the two groups is not same in case of main idea questions. The T values obtained (6.934, 3.216 & 3.639) are significant ($p=.000$, $.005$ & $.002$; $p<.05$) in all the three types of questions.

The result indicates that there is statistically significant difference in the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in answering three types of comprehension questions after LLSs instruction. The experimental group outperformed the control group in all the three types of questions in the posttest. In other words, we can reject the null hypothesis and state that there is significant impact of the LLSs instruction on the Assamese ESL learners' ability in answering main idea, factual information and inference questions of the reading comprehension test.

Table 4: T-test of Groups in Answering Reading Comprehension Questions in Post-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Main Idea	Equal variances assumed	5.693	.028	6.934	18	.000	2.500	.361	1.743	3.257
	Equal variances not assumed			6.934	11.782	.000	2.500	.361	1.713	3.287
Factual Information	Equal variances assumed	.346	.564	3.216	18	.005	2.000	.622	.694	3.306
	Equal variances not assumed			3.216	17.480	.005	2.000	.622	.691	3.309
Inference	Equal variances assumed	.099	.757	3.639	18	.002	1.600	.440	.676	2.524
	Equal variances not assumed			3.639	17.990	.002	1.600	.440	.676	2.524

Discussion

The findings of the statistical analysis revealed that before the LLSs instruction there was no significant difference in answering main idea and factual information questions by both the groups. On the other hand, the control group performed significantly better in answering the inference questions. But after the LLSs instruction there was statistically significant difference in the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in answering all the three types of comprehension questions. The experimental group outperformed the control group in all the three types of comprehension question. Therefore, it can be easily inferred that the impact of LLSs instruction was positive in improving the reading comprehension ability of Assamese ESL learners. This confirms the findings of previous studies in SL and FL reading which demonstrated that LLSs instruction improves reading comprehension and performance such as Tang and Moore (1992), Fuping (2006), Karbalaeei & Rajyashree (2010) and Feng (2020).

The findings reasserts that LLSs are teachable its instruction can increase learner autonomy by enabling learners to control their own learning. Pedagogically, the study recommends that the curriculum planners and policy makers should integrate SBI in the educational system from early stages of ESL learning. The textbooks should provide scope, opportunity and necessary information for providing exclusive and integrated strategies instruction in the schools and colleges. Steps should be taken for training teachers to carry out strategies based instruction.

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