



The Impact of Direct Strategies on ESP University Students' Achievement in Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

Reading is one of foreign language receptive skills, that plays a great role in people lives. It is not a simple skill, it is related to understanding and comprehending the text. Many studies assert that EFL learners face difficulties in reading comprehension skill, so that teachers have to use the appropriate teaching strategies to improve this skill. Direct strategies are those strategies that require students to recover information and develop their reading skill because such strategies require the use of variety of tasks and strategies (memory, cognitive and compensation strategies). The present study aims at finding out the impact of direct strategies on M.A ESP university students achievement in reading comprehension. The following null hypothesis will be examined: there is no statistically significant difference between the achievement of students who are taught reading comprehension by direct strategies and those who are not. Two groups were chosen from M.A ESP students- History Department/ college of education for women/ university of Baghdad, during the academic year (2023-2024). One was chosen as the experimental group (Hadeeth Group), the other one was chosen to be the control group (Islamic Group). Both groups were pre and post tested. T-test for two independent samples is used, it is found that there is a statistically significant difference in the experimental group achievement than the control group because of direct strategies influence. At the end, conclusions based on the results of the study are presented.

Keywords: Compensational Strategies, Direct Strategies, ESP Students, Reading Comprehension, University Students'



اثر الاستراتيجيات المباشرة على تحصيل طلاب الجامعة الدارسين اللغة الانكليزية لاغراض خاصة في الاستيعاب القرائي

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المستخلص :

القراءة هي إحدى مهارات الاستقبال اللغوية الأجنبية التي تلعب دوراً كبيراً في حياة الناس. إنها ليست مهارة بسيطة، بل إنها مرتبطة بفهم النص واستيعابه. تؤكد العديد من الدراسات أن متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية يواجهون صعوبات في مهارة الاستيعاب القرائي، لذلك يجب على الاساتذة استخدام استراتيجيات التدريس المناسبة لتحسين هذه المهارة. الاستراتيجيات المباشرة هي تلك الاستراتيجيات التي تتطلب من الطلاب استرجاع المعلومات وتطوير مهارة الاستيعاب القرائي لديهم لأن مثل هذه الاستراتيجيات تتطلب استخدام مجموعة متنوعة من المهام والاستراتيجيات (استراتيجيات الذاكرة والإدراك والتعويض). تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى معرفة تأثير الاستراتيجيات المباشرة على تحصيل طلاب الماجستير في الجامعة الدارسين اللغة الإنكليزية لأغراض خاصة في الاستيعاب القرائي. تم فرض الفرضية الصفرية التالية: لا يوجد فرق ذو دلالة إحصائية بين تحصيل الطلاب الذين يتم تدريسهم فهم الاستيعاب القرائي بالاستراتيجيات المباشرة والطلاب الذين لا يتم تدريسهم بها. تم اختيار مجموعتين من طلاب ماجستير الدارسين اللغة الإنكليزية لأغراض خاصة - قسم التاريخ / كلية التربية للبنات / جامعة بغداد، خلال العام الدراسي (٢٠٢٣-٢٠٢٤). تم اختيار مجموعة تجريبية (مجموعة الحديث)، ومجموعة ضابطة (مجموعة الإسلامي)، وتم اختبار المجموعتين قبلياً وبعدياً. وتم استخدام الاختبار التائي لعينتين مستقلتين، ووجد أن هناك فرقاً دالاً إحصائياً في تحصيل المجموعة التجريبية عن المجموعة الضابطة، بسبب تأثير الاستراتيجيات المباشرة. وفي النهاية تم تقديم الخاتمة والتوصيات والاستنتاجات بناءً على نتائج الدراسة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ستراتيجيات التعويض، الاستراتيجيات المباشرة، الطلاب الدارسين اللغة الإنكليزية لأغراض خاصة، الاستيعاب القرائي، طلاب الجامعة

1. Introduction

Reading is one of the four essential skills, and it is the most important one to master to ensure success where reading in English is required as well as enable learners to make great development in all other areas of learning (Nunan, 2003). Reading is a skill that every learner should know; learners may read the text to feel enjoyed, to gain information and to be familiar with subjects in order to improve their knowledge of the language (Abu Abeeleh, Al-Ghazo & Al-Sobh, 2021). EFL learners face difficulties in reading comprehension skills, one of which is students' limited vocabulary in synonyms, antonyms and words with connotations. Students' low vocabularies influence their ability to read and write (Ahmed & Ahmed,2023)1.

Another problem faced by EFL learners in reading skills is that they cannot get the correct meaning from the text because they have a problem reading fluently; they spend much more time reading than understanding the text (Çam & Baştuğ ,2022). Furthermore, learners may face another problem in interpreting, analyzing, and understanding a text or story because they may rely on a translating program to get the meaning rather than relying on their information and prior knowledge (Suwanaroa,2021).

Swan (1975) stated that some students' failure in comprehension can be due to their defective reading habits. Although they may speak and write EFL very well, they are poor at comprehension in EFL and their mother tongue language. Comprehension problems may also negatively influence students' educational performance (Whalon, 2004).

In order to use direct strategies, students must be able to understand the language, expand their vocabulary, speak more fluently, and feel comfortable responding to the variety of tasks and activities that lead to accurate communication.

The researcher intends to investigate empirically the impact of direct strategies on the achievement of ESP university students in reading comprehension.

This study is limited to M.A ESP students- History Department/College of Education for Women/University of Baghdad during the academic year (2023-2024).

It is hoped that this study may help ESP learners overcome their problems in reading skill in particular and other skills in general so that students can read and understand what they read better and get information from the text from printed material with ease. Moreover, this study can be useful for both reading and comprehension because reading without comprehension is

useless. Direct strategies consist of different strategies: memory, cognitive and compensational strategies, in which these strategies enable students to interact directly with the text; working in pairs and groups may help them summarize, make inferences, and develop a deep understanding of what they read to help them later become better readers.

The present study tries to answer the following questions:

1. Does the use of direct strategies affect the reading comprehension achievement of ESP university students?
2. How did ESP students' scores in reading comprehension change before and after implementing direct strategies?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Key Words

2.1.1 Direct Strategies

Oxford (1990, p.11) asserted that direct strategies involve “direct learning and use of subject matter”. Direct strategies are divided into three groups (memory, cognitive and compensation), all of which “require mental processing of the language” (Oxford,1990, p.37).

In addition, direct strategies are “those that involve directly using the target language. They require mental processing of the language, and they can be divided into three main categories: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies” (Firharmawan et al., 2023, p. 357).

2.1.2 ESP

ESP is defined by Richards & Schmidt (2002) as the English language learning program or course that focuses on particular group of learners specific needs.

Agustina (2014.) added that ESP “an approach to language teaching in which content and method applied based on the learner’s need of learning”.

2.1.3 Reading Comprehension

Reading Comprehension is defined as “the process of extracting and integrating information from a written text in English while applying readers' background knowledge and knowledge of English language” (Koda, 2005, as cited in Abu Abeeleh, Al-Ghazo & Al-Sobh, 2021, p.7).

Also, it is defined as an “active cognitive process which involves reasoning to construct meaning from a written text and understanding it effectively and comprehensively” (Nakamoto, Lindsey, & Manis, 2008, as cited in Abdelhalim, 2017, p.38).

2.2 Background

Language learning strategies are tools, methods and techniques used to enhance students learning and help them engage actively in the learning process. These strategies appeared during the period of 1970 and continue to be used till present, in which they make learning easier, effective and enjoyable. Language learning strategies refer to “the processes and actions deployed by language learners to learn or use a language more effectively” (Rose 2015: 421 as cited in Teng, 2023: 147). Furthermore, it is defined as the strategies that make learning easier, effective and efficient by using goal-directed actions with learners to develop their achievement or language proficiency (Mitchell, Myles and Marsden, 2019). O’Malley and Chamot (1990) added that learning strategies represent the actions learners produce to understand and remember the new information they have learned. Language learning strategies are classified by many authors in various ways, such as Rubin (1975), O’Malley & Chamot (1990), and Oxford (1990) (as cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990). Rubin (1987) identified two main types of strategies: cognitive and metacognitive strategies (as cited in Hardan, 2013). These main types are divided into subtypes. Cognitive strategies include 6 learning strategies such as “clarification/ verification, guessing/ inferencing, deductive reasoning, practice, memorization, monitoring”. Metacognitive strategies include “planning, prioritizing, setting goals and self-management” (Hardan, 2013, p.1719).

Direct strategies are the ones that have a direct impact on students' learning. Oxford (1990) distinguished between two categories of learning strategies: direct strategies and indirect strategies. Memory, cognitive, and compensatory are the three categories of direct strategies; metacognitive, affective, and social are the three categories of indirect strategies. This classification is based on O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) categorization (as cited in He et al., 2014). O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) classification includes metacognitive strategies, “e.g. selective attention”, cognitive strategies, e.g. inferencing,” and social/ affective strategies ‘e.g. question for clarification” (Ellis, 2008, p.707).

Additionally, Dörnyei (2001) noted that students can also learn communication strategies to overcome their limited L2 proficiency difficulties in communication. Ellis (1994) supported that communication strategies enable learners to negotiate meaning and exchange through conversations. Direct strategies include memory, cognitive, and compensatory strategies. Memory strategies are used to help students retain and recall information; cognitive strategies are used to help learners use different means to produce new language and compensation strategies are used to enable learners to use the language regardless of their gaps in understanding (Vanniarajan, 1990).

2.3 Related Works

A. Kamalina (2016)

The study entitled “The Use of Direct Strategies in Reading Comprehension: A Descriptive Study at Senior High School Al-Falah Abu Lam U Aceh Besar”. It aims at knowing students' use of the direct strategies at SMA Islam Al-Falah Abu Lam U in reading comprehension. An observation, questionnaire and interview are used to achieve the aim of the study, i.e., a descriptive qualitative method is used. The results show that many cognitive strategies used by SMA Islam Al-Falah Abu Lam U in reading comprehension such as translation word by word, dictionary use, translation meaningfully, and many others. The current study differs from this study in all its tools, samples and results.

B. Kurdi (2022)

The title of this study is “The Impact of Direct Strategies on EFL Iraqi Pupils Literacy Development”. The aim of this study is to find out the Direct Strategy's effect on Iraqi EFL preparatory school pupils' literacy development in reading comprehension and whether the experimental and control groups differ significantly in the post-literacy test. The sample consists of 60 students were chosen randomly from Al-Hikma preparatory school -scientific branch, in Salah al din Governorate. Pre-posttest design is used to achieve the aim of the study. The results of this study proved to have a great effect on students' literacy development in reading comprehension in favour of the experimental group, which was taught by direct strategies than a control group, which was taught in a traditional way. The current study agrees with this study in its design and results that have a great effect on M.A ESP students' reading comprehension but it differs in its sample, city, and tools.

3. The Analytical Part

3.1 Methodology of the Study

3.1.1 The Experimental Design

The researcher has chosen a “pretest-posttest nonequivalent groups design”, as shown in Table 1.

Table (1)

The Experimental Design

Groups	Pretest	Independent Variables	Posttest
Experimental	Reading Comprehension	Direct Strategies	Reading Comprehension
Control	Reading Comprehension	The conventional Teaching	Reading Comprehension

Two groups are selected as the experimental and control groups. The experimental group (Hadeeth Group) are taught reading comprehension by direct strategies, whereas the control group (Islamic Group) are taught reading comprehension by the lecture method. Both of them are administered to pre-posttests. The two groups' mean scores are then compared to see whether there is any significant difference or not.

3.1.2 Participants

The population of the current study consists of (28) ESP M.A students in both specializations (Islamic and Hadeeth) / first course at the Department of History, College of Education for University of Baghdad, during the academic year 2023–2024. There are 14 students in the Islamic group and 14 in the Hadeeth group. According to the department timetable, the lecture times for both groups are standardized as two hours each Monday. Each group has an hour.

The study's sample is chosen randomly from the population above. Eight students from the two groups make up the study's pilot sample, and the rest are picked to represent the sample. There are 20 students overall: eight in the Islamic group and thirteen in the Hadeeth group. The Islamic group is assigned as the control group, while the Hadeeth group is assigned as the experimental group.

Pretest scores are used to equalize the experimental and control groups. By using T-test formula for two independent samples, it is found that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups. The results show that the experimental mean score is (11.40), the standard deviation is (3.565), and the control group mean score is (11.30), with the standard deviation being (3.466). The T-test calculated value is (0.064), which is less than the tabulated value (2.101), at a level of significance (0.05) and degree of freedom (18) (see Table 2).

Table (2)

Pre-test score for Sample Equivalence

Pretest Scores	Groups	N	Mean	S.D	df	Calculated t-value	Tabulated t-value
	E	10	11.40	3.565	18	0.064	2.101
	C	10	11.30	3.466			

3.1.3 Research Instruments

The study instruction began on October 23rd, 2023, continued for six weeks, and finished on November 27th, 2023. The researcher instructed both groups. Direct strategies were used to teach reading comprehension to the experimental group, whereas the lecture

method was used to teach the control group. Every Monday, one hour is allotted for each group lecture. Three passages (A Free Flight to Dubai, Technology Today, and Conferences and Visits) were selected from their required textbook *Academic Skills: Reading, Writing, and Study Skills / Level 2 Student's Book by Sarah Philpot*. Experimental group lesson objectives are stated as follows:

1. To encourage interaction amongst classmates by fostering cooperative learning among students who are working in pairs or groups.
2. Skimming and scanning the material will make it much easier to review and remember any new words.
3. To infer the meaning of new words from their context and match words with pictures.
4. Acquire knowledge on various topics concerned with travel, technology and education.
5. Enable students to read the text aloud and ask and answer questions using full sentences.

3.1.4 Research Procedures 1. Warm up

These procedures were used by the researcher to instruct the experimental group (Hadeeth group):

1. Warm up

Students were introduced to direct strategies used in teaching the three passages. Throughout the warm-up phase, students were clearly instructed to read, understand, interact, participate, and ask and answer questions with the researcher's assistance. This made the passages' contents easier for them to understand.

2. Presentation

- The researcher asks the students to work in groups or pairs; if they choose to work in groups, there will be four groups; three of them will have three students each, while the fourth group will have four.
- The researcher teaches the three passages using direct strategies (memory, cognitive and compensation strategies) and begins teaching the passages by using different visual aids: Laptop, PowerPoints, Data Show, CD, Pictures, images, whiteboard and electronic dictionaries downloaded on their mobiles. This encourages students to communicate, discuss, be actively involved in learning, and improve their reading skill so that they can retain material, infer meaning from context, ask and answer questions, take notes, and summarize.

3. Feed back

It is preferable that students get feedback from their colleagues in the same group or other groups or from the teacher who provides them with feedback,

asking them how they feel about the way they taught the passages and if anything was confusing.

The researcher used the lecture method to instruct and teach the same material to the control group.

3.1.5 The Test

The test of this study consists of two passages chosen from Academic Skills: Reading, Writing, and Study Skills / Level 3 **Students Book**. By Sarah Philpot and Lesley Curnick (2007). The passages entitled (Lessons from Curitiba, p.21) and (A New Capital, p.22) respectively. Each passage is followed by three questions, each with five items. In the two passages, the first question asks students to carefully read the material and respond to the following questions. The second question is a true/false question, and the third asks them to choose the correct answer for each of the following. There are a total of 30 items throughout the test. Each item in each question receives one mark, making a total of 30 points for all 30 items. The correct items receive 1, and the incorrect items receive 0 with the remaining items.

The validity of the test is ensured by exposing the passages to a jury of language and linguistics specialists. Students take the test after it has been approved by them. The test of the study was given to a pilot sample of 8 students who were randomly selected from the two groups (experimental and groups) on October 16th, 2023. After analyzing the test items, it was determined that two full hours were required to answer all of the questions. The item difficulty ranges from 0.25 to 0.70, and the discrimination power spans from 0.26 to 0.71. For them, test items are clear.

Alpha Cronbach is used to determine the test reliability of the current study. As a result, the test reliability coefficient is 0.91. The experimental and control groups were pretested on October 19th, 2023, to establish equality. Both groups were post-tested on November 16th, 2023.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Results' Presentation

Since the sample is ten participants for each group, the normal distribution of data should be tested to select suitable statistics, parametric or nonparametric.

The normality distribution of pre-post for both experimental and control groups was tested. Since the Shapiro-Wilk levels of significance are all higher than 0.05, this indicates that the data follow the normal distribution. Accordingly, the parametric statistics, t-test for two independent variables and pair-sample t-test are used to find out the results, see Table (3).

Table (3)
Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Pre-E	.153	10	.200*	.933	10	.476
Post-E	.105	10	.200*	.968	10	.871
Pre-C	.146	10	.200*	.925	10	.404
Post-C	.186	10	.200*	.938	10	.530

To achieve the study aims, the following two steps are conducted;

A. Comparison between Control Group and Experimental Group in the post-test

Posttest scores are used to equalize the experimental and control groups. By using T-test formula for two independent samples, it is found that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The experimental group's mean score is (24.10), with a standard deviation of (3.604), while the mean score of the control group is (11.50), with a standard deviation of (3.100). The computed value of the t-test is (8.381), at a level of significance of 0.05 and a degree of freedom (18), which is higher than the tabulated value of 2.101. This proves the earlier null hypothesis is rejected (see Table 4).

Table (4)

Comparison between Control Group and Experimental Group in the post-test

Posttest Scores	Groups	N	Mean	S.D	df	Calculated t-value	Tabulated t-value
	E	10	24.10	3.604	18	8.381	2.101
	C	10	11.50	3.100			

B. Comparison between Pre and Post Test Experimental Group Paired Sample

The experimental group's mean score is (12.70), and the standard deviation is (4.270) in the pre-posttest paired sample; this shows the great influence of direct strategies on students' reading comprehension achievement. The t-calculated value is found to be (9.405), and the t-tabulated value is (2.262) at the level of significance 0.05 (see Table 5).

Table (5)
Comparison between Pre and Post Test Experimental Group Paired Sample

Pair 1	Groups	N	Mean	S.D	df	Calculated t-value	Tabulated t-value
Pre Post-test Scores	E	10	12.70	4.270	9	9.405	2.262

3.2.2 Interpretation of Results

The results of the present study reveal that

1. The computed t-value was higher than the tabulated value in Table 3 above in the post-test. This indicates that the use of direct strategies is more beneficial to ESP learners than conventional teaching.
2. Experimental group reading comprehension achievement is developed by the use of a variety of direct strategies, such as memory, cognitive, and compensational strategies, more than control group achievement.
3. The comparison between the experimental group's pre-posttests proved that the calculated t-value was much greater than the tabulated t-value, which indicates that the direct method was fruitful for them. See Table

4. Conclusion

The researcher's conclusions stated the following:

1. To answer question 1, the use of direct strategies proved to have a great influence on ESP university students' reading comprehension achievement, as Table 3 clearly shows.
2. The answer to question 2 is clearly presented in Table 4; ESP students' scores in reading comprehension have very much changed before and after the implementation of direct strategies. This indicates that direct strategies enabled students to understand the texts by skimming, making inferences, summarizing, reading aloud, and answering questions using different visual aids; this helps them overcome their problems and improve their reading comprehension skills.

5. Recommendations of the Study

Professors at Iraqi colleges who teach ESP students in M.A. and PhD programs are advised to use direct strategies with their students in order to teach all the skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Additionally, Iraqi college professors in English departments are recommended to use direct strategies in their teaching subjects, such as *methods of teaching, phonetics and phonology, listening and speaking, reading comprehension and writing*, and so forth.

6. Suggestions of the Study

This section is optional. The researcher suggests the following studies:

1. The Impact of Direct Strategies on University Students' Achievement in productive skills.
2. The Effect of Direct Strategies on Students' Performance in pronunciation.
3. Investigating Direct Strategy's Influence on University Students' Achievement in EFL Skills.

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