CRITICAL REVIEW ON TEACHER'S BELIEF ABOUT TEACHING READING STRATEGIES AND THEIR CLASSROOM PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY OF VIET BA HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

There are four English skills that should be mastered by students, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Among those four English skills, reading is mainly discussed in every field. It means that reading becomes a universal habit inspite of the language used in reading text. As one of English skills, reading is admitted as an essential skill for English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL). Some teachers believe that reading is an important skill to master because if students are able to master reading, as readers they will make progress and attain greater development in their academic atmosphere. Reading involves brain activity as the information that is read will be stored in the brain. By strengthening this skill, it is possible that students will gain greater knowledge in their academic life. Moreover, English is used in many areas outside of academic like in politics, economics, technology, tourism, culture and science. Therefore English is not only a means but also a key to access and asses many sophisticated achievement yield by many countries in the world.

Key words: *ESL/EFL, reading skill, teacher's belief*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a universal activity. It is a favorable activity in the world for children up to adult people. Children learn to read by the age of five or six, and some even earlier. With the exception of a small number of people with learning disabilities, reading is a skill that is taken for granted (Brown, 2004:185). Reading is part of human communication process where thoughts are transmitted trough the medium of the written word. The author translates his thoughts to a written form, and the reader translates this form back to thought. (Wallen, 1972:7)

There are many theories related to reading. Some theories exist to explain what is involved when we read, and much we know about reading and lietracy comes from research on first language (L1) learners. According to Murcia (2001:185) that in reading, an individual constructs meaning through transaction with written text that has been created by symbols that represent language. The transaction involves the reader's

acting on interpreting the text, and the interpretation is influenced by the reader's past experiences, language background, and cultural framework, as well as the reader's purpose for reading (Hundelson, 1994:130).

Reading skills involve two skills namely recognition and comprehension skills. Each step in the reading process requires a different type of skill. In the text the translation of writing to langauge is called *recognition*, and the translation of langauge to thought is called *comprehension*. The child develop skills in recognition as he learns to find relationships between written symbols and language symbols. For comprehension, the child develops skill in comprehension as he learns to understand what he has recognized. (Wallen, 1972:9)

Comprehension in reading is an active process involving at least three interrelated factors: 1) the individual's knowledge of the linguistic code; 2) cognitive skills of various types, and 3) the individual's knowledge of the world. We can see how relevant contextual information can play an important role in comprehension, especially at lower levels of proficiency, where extralinguistic cues and advance organizers can activate appropriate schemata to close gaps in comprehension caused by an imperfect knowledge of the code. (Omaggio, 1986: 121)

When the students have reading lessons, some of them experienced lack of reading strategies in their study. It may happen because some of them do not come from English speaking country. In this study, the subjects are high school students from Vietnam. In Vietnam, English is taught and learned in a non-native environment so reading is not only a means of gaining knowledge but also a means by which a further study takes place. According to Carrel (1984:1) that for many students, reading is by far the most important of the four macro skills, particularly in English as a Second or Foreign Language. This is also experienced by students of Viet Ba High School since reading skill offers them a wide range of interesting information as well as a variety of English expression and structures which are of great usefulness for developing other language skills.

Research into reading has found that effective readers are aware of the strategies they use and that they use strategies flexibly and efficiently (Garner 1987; Presley, Beard EL, Dinary and Bound, 1992). Researchers believed that this strategy could be taught to ineffective language learners so that they can become more successful in

language learning. Oxford (1990:1) states that language learning strategies"….are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self directed movement, which is essential for developing communicative competence". Therefore teachers should consider teaching students effective reading strategies, especially showing them how to utilize the skill and knowledge that they bring from their first language in order to cope with reading as a second language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Reading types

Reading is a common activity which is done by many people with different purposes. There are three models of reading, namely:

a.   *Bottom-up model*

According to Nunan (1991) reading is viewed as "the process of meaning interpretation" in which "the language is translated from one form of symbolic representation to another". It was also understood as the process of recognizing the printed letters and words and building up a meaning from the smallest textual units at the bottom (letters and words) to larger units at the top (phrases, clauses, intersentential linkage) (Rivers 1964, 1968; Plaister 1968; Yorio 1971). In other words, in the bottom up model the readers begin with the written text (the bottom) and construct meaning from letters, words, phrases, and sentences found within and then processed the text in a linear fashion. This model views the readers as the passive role because the basis bottom-up processing is the linguistic knowledge of the reader.

b. *Top-down model*

This model emphasizes the reconstruction of meaning rather than decoding of form, the interaction between the reader and the text rather than the graphic forms of the printed pages. According to Ur (1996:138) reading means reading and understanding while according to Anderson (1999:1) reading is not a passive process but an active fluent process which involves the readers and the reading material in building meaning.

c. *Interactive model*

According to Hayes (1991:7) in interactive models, different processes are thought to be responsible for providing information that is shared with other processes. The information obtained from each type of processing is combined is combined to determine the most appropriate interpretation of printed pages. In short, the interactive model can maximize the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of bottom-up and top-down models.

2. Types of Reading Performance

Brown (2004:189) stated that in the case of reading, variety of performance is derived more from the variety of overt types of performance, as follows:

a. Perceptive

In keeping with the set of categories specified for listening comprehension, similar specifications are offerred here, except with some differing terminology to capture the uniqueness of reading. Perceptive reading tasks involve attending to the components of larger of streches of discourse: letters, words, punctuation, and other graphemic symbols. Bottom up processing is implied.

b. Selective

This category is largely an artifact of assessment formats. In order to ascertain one's reading recognition of lexical, grammatical, or discourse features of language within a very short stretch of language, certain typical tasks are used: picture-cued tasks, matching, true/false, multiple-choice, etc. Stimuli include sentences, brief paragraphs, and simple charts and graphs. Brief responses are intended as well. A combination of bottom-up and top-down processing may be used.

c. Interactive

It included among interactive reading types are streches of language of several paragraphs to one page or more in which the reader must, in a psycholinguistic sense, interact with the text. That is, reading is a process of negotiating meaning; the reader brings to the text a set of schemata for understanding it, and intake is the product of that interaction. Typical genres that lend themselves to interactive reading are anecdotes, short narratives and

descriptions, excerpts from longer texts, questionnaires, memos, announcements, directions, recipes, and the like. The focus of an interactive task is to identify relevant features length with objective of retaining the information that is processed.

d. Extensive

Extensive reading, applies to texts of more than a page, up to and including professional articles, essays, technical reports, short stories, and books. (It should be noted that reading research commonly refers to 'extensive reading' as longer stretches of discourse, such as long articles and books that are usually read outside a classroom hour. Here that definition is massaged a little in order to encompass any text longer than a page).

3. Characteristics of effective readers

Research shows that an effective reader knows how to use reading strategies that work for himself/herself. Wassman and Rinsky (1993:5) said that an effective reader needs an understanding of the reading process and an understanding of how to go about reading different types of printed information. Therefore, a second or foreign learner can practice techniques that will help to succeed in becoming an effective reader. There are two points to be an effective reader namely: willingness to change reading habits that limit the learner's reading ability and willingness to practice. Other factors contribute to be an effective second or foreign language readers are: organize properly for reading and study, improve concentration, and maintain confidence.

4. Teaching reading skills

Barmford and Day (1998:124-141) stated that there are at least for distinctive approaches to the teaching of foreign or second language reading: grammar-translation, comprehension questions, skills and strategies, and extensive reading.

5. Reading strategies

Language learning strategies have been classified by many scholars (Wenden and Rubin 1987; O'Malley et al.1985; Oxford 1990, Stern 1992; Ellis 1994). According to Stern, there are 5 main language learning strategies: management and planning

strategies, cognitive strategies, communicative experimental strategies, interpersonal strategies and affective strategies.

Phillips (1984) has developed a five-stage plan for reading instruction that can be used either in the classroom, in individualiazed instructional settings, or in computer-adaptive instruction. The five stages she identifies are:

a. Preteaching/Preparation Stage.

This stage includes:

1) Brainstorming to generate ideas that have a high probability of occurrence in the text.

2) Looking at visuals, headliness, titles, charts, or other contextula aids that are provided with the text.

3) Predicting or hypothesizing on the basis of the title or first line of a text what significance it might have or what might come next.

b. Skimming/Scanning Stage

Some practices needed are:

1) Getting the gist of short readings, paragraphs, or other graphic material.

2) Identifying topic sentences and main ideas.

3) Selecting the best paraphrase from multiple-choice options of the main idea of a text or of the conclusion.

4) Matching subtitles with paragraphs.

5) Filling in charts or forms with the key concepts.

6) Creating titles or headlines for passages.

7) Making global judgements or reacting in some global fashion to a reading passage.

c. Decoding/Intensive Reading Stage

This stage is most necessary when students are learning to read rather than reading to learn. Decoding involves guessing from context the meaning unknown words or phrases and may be needed at the word, intrasentential, intersentential, or discourse level.

d. Comprehension Stage

Comprehension checks of various sorts are mader to determine if students have achieved their reading purpose. Phillips feels that reading comprehension

exercises should (a) not confound the reading skill with other skills, such as writing, listening, or speaking if they are to be considered pure tests of reading comprehension; and (b) reading comprehension checks should project the reader through several phases of the reading process.

e. Transferable/Integrating Skills

In this final stage of teaching reading, Phillips maintains that exercises should be used that help students go beyond the confines of the specific passage to enhance reading skills and effective reading strategies.

6. Strategies in teaching second language reading

Brown (1990:3) provides strategies that can help students read more quickly and effectively: previewing, predicting, skimming and scanning, guessing from context, and paraphrasing.

Another scholar, Murcia (2001) said current reseacrh generally views reading as an interactive, sociocognitive process (Bernhardt, 1991), involving a text, a reader, and a social context within which the activity of reading takes place. Murcia (2001:54) wrote that within the complex process of reading, six general component skills and knowledge areas have been identified (Grabe: 1991:379) as follows:

a. Automatic recognition skills, it is a virtually unconscious ability, ideally requiring little mental processing to recognize text, especially for word identification.

b. Vocabulary and structural knowledge, it is a sound understanding of langauge structure and a large recognition vocabulary.

c. Formal discourse structure knowledge, it is an understanding of how texts are organized and how information is put together into various genres of text (e.g. a report, a letter, a narrative).

d. Content/world background knowledge, it is prior knowledge of text-related information and a shared understanding of the cultural information involved in a text.

e. Synthesis and evaluation skills/strategies, it is the ability to read and compare information from multiple sources, to think critically about what one reads, and to decide what information is relevant or useful for one's purpose.

f. Metacognitive knowledge and skills monitoring, it is an awareness of one's mental processes and the ability to reflect on what one is doing and the strategies one is employing while reading.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical framework about reading models, becoming an effective reader as a second or foreign language reader, and reading strategies will help teachers to set up their own belief about teaching reading to high school students.

1. Teacher's belief and classroom practice

Beliefs are often known as our attitudes, values, judgments, axioms, and opinion. Belief affects not only how people behave but also why they perceive (or pay attention to) in their environment. When people believe something is true, they perceive information supporting that belief. Beliefs alter expectations. People perceive what they expect to perceive (Tara, 1996). Beliefs are formed early; remain relatively stable; and are resistant to change (Eisenhart, Shrum, Harding, and Cuthbert, 1998; Pajares, 1992). Reading's teacher will know their own belief before they teach in the classroom because they are going to apply what they believe into practice. Some of them believe that the techniques used by readers to read the text effectively; what readers used to understand thoroughly about what they are treading; and the strategies readers used to understand different kinds of reading texts and these strategies help readers do reading comprehension tasks with the best result.

2. The role of teacher's beliefs in language learning and teaching

Johnson (1994:439) said that research on teacher's belief consists of three basic assumptions: 1) teachers' belief influence their perception and judgment; 2) teachers' belief play role in how information on teaching is translated into classroom practice; 3) understanding teachers' belief is essential to improve teaching practices and teacher education programs. Because teachers' belief are central to the instructional strategies they implement, beliefs become one of foremost factors in driving their actions in the class and contributing to the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Fenstermacher, 1979; Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1983; Stalling and Stipek, 1986). Therefore it is important to have an understanding of teachers' belief systems, in order to begin to identify and understand the variables that mediate the differences between teachers'

thinking and practice (Abelson, 1979; Garner, 1987). In this study, generally teachers were aware of reading strategies, their content and importance. Most of the teachers in this study shared the same concept adopted from Brantmeier (2002:1) that the comprehension processes that readers use in order to make sense of what they read.

3. The role of teachers' belief in teaching reading strategies

Teachers' beliefs are related to students' learning to something that the teacher does in the classroom. According to Borg (1999) teachers' decision in teaching are influenced by a set of complex and conflicting cognitions about language, learning in general, L2 learning and students. In this study some teachers believe that to help students overcome the challenges in reading, it is important to help them build up their own reading strategies. The teachers in this study believe that metacognitive awareness, cognitive awareness, social/affective awareness, will help them set up their believe in teaching reading strategies to high school students.

CONCLUSION

The factors influence teachers' belief underlying their actual classroom practices are:

1. Teaching context: consists of the amount of time, the physical condition of reading class, the level of students, etc. The teachers reported that limited time caused them a lot of difficulties.
2. Teachers' professional experience: the younger teachers will fully aware of the necessity of teaching reading strategies to students but the older teachers did not teach their students reading strategies.
3. Students' low level of motivation: some students were low motivated so that there are two teachers who did not want to teach reading strategies.
4. Materials and curriculum: the materials do not provide appropriate strategies to apply for specific purposes.

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