

Reading for Science and Technology in a Foreign Language: Students' Evaluation of Formal Instruction on Reading Strategies

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Research has shown that explicit teaching of reading strategies in L2 improves the learners' reading proficiency in that language. This study investigates science students' evaluation of the impact of learning and using five reading strategies in L2 on performing academic tasks required in that language for subject courses. The instruction was carried out through a mandatory English course, and the reading strategies considered were: identifying topic sentences, understanding paragraph cohesion, understanding paragraph development, dealing with unknown words, and locating information in texts quickly. The results indicated that the students considered receiving formal instruction on these strategies to be helpful in performing the academic tasks required in English in their fields of specialisation. At the same time, they found this learning experience interesting and enjoyable.

INTRODUCTION

Reading ability in a foreign or a second language is viewed by researchers in two different ways. The first asserts that reading ability in L2 is determined by the proficiency in that language; that is, the language skills develop from the lower word skill to the higher level cognitive skills (Macnamara 1970; Clark 1979; Cziko 1980, Laufer and Sim 1982). The second emphasises that the higher level cognitive strategies in L1 can be transferred to L2 and work simultaneously with lower level strategies; in other words, cognitive processes will operate smoothly as the language proficiency develops (Goodman 1913; Coady 1919; Cummins 1980; Hudson 1982; Benedetto 1984). This means that since L1 reading proficiency can be enhanced by providing formal instruction on the top level text organisation (Bartlett 1918; Geva 1983; Mosenthal 1984; Reutzel 1985), L2 reading ability can also be facilitated by the same type of instruction. In fact, many studies have demonstrated that reading comprehension in L2 can be improved by explicit teaching of the different reading strategies (Hosenfeld 1984; Carrell 1985; Hamp-Lyons 1985; Lee 1986; Barnett 1988; Diptoadi 1991; Spinelli and Sisken 1992; Swaffar 1992; Zhicheng 1992; Mustafa 1995; and Rusciollelli 1995).

In addition to enhancing the students' reading proficiency, formal instruction in these strategies has been proved to assist in improving their writing ability. For example, Johns (1988) and Rusciollelli (1995) showed how summary writing can

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