

## Two Approaches to Teaching Reading: A Classroom-Based Study

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The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of teaching EFL reading on the progress of students in academic reading classes of a university preparation course. Two approaches were investigated: a "traditional" and a "text-strategic" approach. The same text book was used as the basis for both treatments, and a matched groups pretest/posttest design was used. The study looked at pretest/posttest gain scores for the sample as a whole and for each group, and compared the performances of the groups.

Although the sample was small, and - as expected in a classroom-based study - the full range of variables could not be controlled for, the results of the study indicate that a "text-strategic" approach to the teaching of reading in a foreign language may be superior to the more "traditional" approach. It is suggested that classroom-based studies such as this, though their findings must be tentative, have a useful role

### RATIONALE

Full-time classroom teachers generally find their time fully utilized in confronting the everyday challenges of their work. At the same time, however, the conscientious professional keeps in touch with the methodological literature and with new developments in materials. In my own case, in recent years, I have become aware that this has resulted in gradual changes in attitude and approach to teaching reading to advanced students in a university preparation course, without my having at any point stopped to examine my position, either previously or currently held. There have, in fact, been great changes in approaches to the teaching of reading in a non-native language in the recent past. The emphasis has shifted from what is referred to in this article, for want of a more precise definition, as the "traditional" approach (eg Finocchiaro 1958; Lado 1964; Rivers 1968; Allen and Valette 1972) which concentrated on the comprehension of individual passages through the use of exercises which looked at 'bits' or discrete points of which the text was built, in the belief that written text is the sum of its individual parts. In contrast, the recent trend is to exploit the generalizable features of text as these have been made clearer for use through research in psycholinguistics, first language reading developments and discourse analysis (eg Goodman 1967; Halliday and Hasan 1976; van Dijk 1977; Kintsch and van Dijk 1978; Just and Carpenter 1980; de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981), in order to help learners develop skills for approaching *any* text. I shall refer here to this as the "text-strategic" approach, a term of my own devising for convenience in referring to these contrasting approaches.

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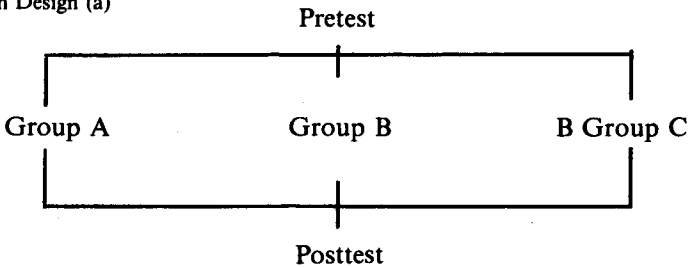
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This article describes a small-scale, classroom-based study conducted to investigate whether there was any evidence to justify an intuitive preference for a text-strategic approach over a traditional approach, insofar as this could be measured in terms of student progress.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

The study took place within the normal constraints of a teaching programme, and may therefore be described as *ex post facto* (Hatch and Farhady 1982). However, within those constraints a fair amount of flexibility was possible, as was the advance construction of a research design which offered a reasonable degree of control. I used a pretest/posttest design with matched groups, as shown in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1: Research Design (a)



The same teacher (T1) taught two groups using a different approach for each (Approach 1 = traditional; Approach 2 = text-strategic), while a second teacher (T2) taught the third group by one of the approaches (traditional), thus providing a control for that Approach (Fig. 2). A more satisfactory design would have provided for a control over the other approach also, but the practical programme constraints made this impossible.

Fig. 2: Research Design (b)

	Approach 1 - traditional	Approach 2 - text-strategic
Teacher 1 (Hamp-Lyons)	Group A	Group B
Teacher 2 (Proulx)	Group C	

The hypotheses under investigation were:

- (i) that the sample as a whole would progress (ie that the mean score of the group as a whole would be higher on the posttest than on the pretest); and
- (ii) that the text-strategic treatment group (i.e. Approach 2) would make greater gain scores (i.e. amount of improvement from pretest to posttest) than would the traditional treatment group.

## THE SAMPLE

The pretest sample consisted of all students enrolled in Spring Semester, 1982, in the Level 7 (university preparation) course of WESL Institute, Western Illinois University. Enrolment in this course required a TOEFL score of 500-550 (approximately equivalent to an ELTS band of 7) or graduation from WESL Level 6. The course lasted one semester (16 weeks) and met ten hours a week concurrently with a limited number of university credit courses. The academic reading module of the course met two hours a week (once at 08.00 and once at 09.00, the times of the lesson being therefore eliminated as an intervening variable), giving a total of 32 hours for the module, between pretest and posttest.

The subjects in the pretest sample were 24 non-native speakers of English, nine of whom were graduate students and fifteen who were freshman undergraduates. There were fifteen males and nine females. Native languages were:

Bahasa Malaysia	13
Korean	3
Chinese	3
Thai	2
Japanese	2
Vietnamese	1
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	N = 24
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## THE PRETEST

The 24 subjects were administered a cloze pretest before group assignments were made. The cloze test consisted of six tests arranged in order of increasing length and difficulty. Passage length varied between 350 and 500 words. Fifty blanks of equal length were inserted in each test, using fifth-word deletion. At least one complete sentence appeared before the first blank, and for the more difficult passages extensive introductory and concluding unmutated text was given. The texts were selected from S.R.A. materials (S.R.A 1970) after confirming their levels of difficulty using the Fry Readability Scale (Fry 1963). The selection of passages was carried out with the variety of cultures represented in the sample in mind. The passages chosen were considered to be as far as possible culturally neutral for the cultures represented by the sample, to avoid any possibility that members of one culture group might have an advantage over another in their performance on the test. The students were allowed two hours to complete the test, without dictionaries or any other aids, and they were instructed to fill every blank, guessing if necessary. The tests were scored using exact word replacement; spelling errors were accepted if they were not meaning-reducing. The mean score on the pretest was 86.0 (total possible 300.0).