

Teachers' Cognition about Teaching Reading Strategies and Their Classroom Practices

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Abstract: This study was conducted on the basis that teaching students reading strategies is an important duty of the language teachers since language strategies can help students monitor and take charge of their own learning. Besides, helping students understand good language learning strategies can be considered to be appreciated characteristics of a good language teacher. This study employed mix methods study with thirty experienced EFL teachers in Bandung. The data were collected by distributing questionnaires to thirty experienced EFL teachers in Bandung. Semi structured and unstructured interviews conducted with four experienced EFL teachers and non-participant observation with video and audio recording with three of them in a model junior high school SMPN I Margahayu Bandung as the main participants. The data analysis was done based on the questionnaires, transcription of observation and interview. The types of language learning strategies (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) were used to analyze the data. The findings show that the majority of the respondents viewed reading strategies as techniques to comprehend printed materials effectively. Moreover, these were seen as essential skills that readers use to enhance their own reading to achieve desired goals and objectives. Teaching reading strategies is thus considered important to overcome kinds of challenges in reading, to make them apply different strategies and the most important is it can help students to build their own reading strategies. Meanwhile, in the use of reading strategies in teaching and learning process, most of teachers believe that teaching all reading strategies (metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies) is a must but in fact, the practice illustrates that only some were taught. Metacognitive strategies mostly used in the classroom were directed attention, functional planning, advanced organizers, selective attention. They considered that these techniques particularly directed attention is most effective since it can make the students to manage the time wisely in National Examination. However, cognitive reading strategies mostly they used were imagery, elaboration, transfer, inferencing and translation as. Meanwhile, social reading strategies mostly applied were questions for clarification and cooperation for students to have opportunities to work with one another to solve the problems.

1 INTRODUCTION

Research into reading has found that effective readers are aware of the strategies they use flexibly and efficiently (Garner, 1987; Presley, Beard El, Dinary and Brown, 1992). Furthermore, researchers believed that reading strategies could be taught to make the students more successful in language learning. As it is said by Lessard-Clouston (1997:3) that teaching students learning strategies is an important duty of the language teachers since language strategies can help students monitor and take charge of their own learning. In addition, he emphasizes that helping students understand good language learning

strategies and training them to develop and use such good language learning strategies can be considered to be appreciated characteristics of a good language teacher.

Furthermore, Harste and Burke (1997) notes that teachers make decisions about classroom instruction in light of theoretical beliefs they hold about teaching and learning. Also teachers' beliefs influence their goals, procedures, materials, classroom interaction patterns, their roles, their students, and the school they work in. Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (2001) affirmed that teachers possess the assumptions about language and language learning, and that these provide the basis for a particular approach to

language instruction. Moreover, Borg (2006:275) notes that language teaching can be seen as a process which is defined by dynamic interactions among cognition, context and experience.

The study of language teachers' cognition has made a significant contribution to our understandings of how teachers learn, what teachers do, and the cognitive bases for their actions (Borg, 2003: 271). Researchers have paid more attention to the study of teachers' cognition about teaching, learning, learners, and the impact it has on teaching practices, activities, and learning outcomes (Tillman, 2000; Shavelson, and Stern, 1981; Burns, 2009; Eisenhart et al., 1998; Fang, 1996; Richardson, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Reynold, 1992). Moreover, the impact of teachers' cognition on their teaching is being studied across disciplines and educational setting as diverse as general education, mathematics (Ernest, 1989; Shuck, 1997; Karaagac and Threlfall, 2004; Raymond, 1997), second or foreign language learning (Farrell and Patricia, 2005), reading (Beach, 1994), and chemistry (Brisco, 1991). It has been studied in pre-service and in-service contexts, different educational levels: primary, secondary and tertiary level.

2 RESEARCH QUESTION, PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANT OF THE STUDY

Based on the description in session 1, the researcher processes the questions to be investigated which are formulated as follows:

- What are teachers' cognition about reading strategies and teaching reading strategies in a model junior high school?
- To what extent do their classroom practices reflect their cognition?

Then, the purpose of the study is as follows:

- To investigate teachers' cognition about reading strategies and teaching reading strategies in junior high School?
- To examine the extent to which their cognition are reflected in their classroom practices.

The findings of this study may provide information about what teachers' cognition about reading strategies and teaching reading strategies in a Model Junior High School in Bandung and to what extent do their classroom practices reflect their cognition. From professional aspect, this study is expected to give contribution to the field of teaching and learning about reading. Then, from practical aspect, the findings are expected to have some

practical implications in future instruction to offer the theoretical basis for the application of teaching reading strategies in the classroom.

3 METHODS

There were thirty experienced EFL teachers who participated in the study. The majority of these teachers came from junior high schools in Bandung West Java. They have been teaching English more than ten years. The main participants of this research were four English teachers at one model junior high school in Bandung. The average teaching experience of the main participants was 18.1 years. The participating teachers in this study did not, as stated by Cohen, Manion, and Marrison (2007, p. 104), "represent the wider population" of secondary EFL teachers in Indonesia, so that the findings from this study were not applicable for any generalization to be made as they presented the particular perspectives of these participating teachers.

The quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Questionnaires were for the collection of quantitative data, while interview and observation were for collection of qualitative data. The qualitative data was imperative since it could enrich the study as a whole and additionally, functioned as a way to crosscheck and validate the data collected.

The answers to the questionnaire items which included checklist and five-point Likert-type scale items were assigned in numerical values. Descriptive statistics (percentages and mean scores,) were formulated to summarize and present that data. Frequency and descriptive statistics, tables, and figures were constructed to display results with respect to the research questions of this study.

The researcher constructed the questionnaire regarding teaching reading strategies using the framework of O'Malley and Chamot (1990) that there are three major types of strategies, named as metacognitive, cognitive, and social/ affective, as a guideline in organizing questionnaire.

There were two types of interviews used in this study: the semi-structured interview and unstructured interview or informal conversational interview (Patton, 2002, p. 342). All the interviews in this study were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia.

The unstructured interviews were conducted with four EFL teachers who had indicated willingness to give more information about their personal practices.

Another method for data collection used in this study was class observation. This instrument was used to find out teachers classroom practices in

teaching reading strategies to their students. The researcher observed teaching learning activities in the classroom and did not take part in any classroom activities. Frankel and Wallen (1996: 452) states that the researcher makes no effort whatsoever to manipulate variables or to control the activities of individuals, but simply observes and records what happens as things naturally occur.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Teachers' Knowledge about the Meaning of Reading Strategies

The data from questionnaires showed that from thirty experienced EFL teachers the majority of respondents see reading strategies as a technique to comprehend the text. In addition, reading strategies were seen as strategies to enhance reading ability particularly the ability to tackle the reading task. These assumptions in line with some theories that reading strategies are specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task used by students to enhance their own learning (Scarcella and Oxford, 1992:63). The successful people are good strategy users; they know how to use a variety of goal-specific tactics, to execute them in a planned sequence, and to monitor their use (Weinstein and Mayer, 1985; Weinstein and Underwood, 1985; Gettinger and Seibert 2002; Adams and Hamm, 1994; Henley, Ramsey and algozzine, 1996 cited in Cubukcu, 2007).

4.2 Teachers' Knowledge about the Importance of Reading Strategies

The data from questionnaire with regard to the importance of teaching reading strategies distributed to the participants indicate that all respondents in this study acknowledged the importance of teaching reading strategies to students is to enhance their reading skills. This is because if students were just reading every word from the text, it seemed that they would not be able to improve their own reading. However these beliefs also support some theories that the appropriate use of reading strategies leads to effective reading. Experts note that the goal of academic reading instruction should be to develop strategic reading abilities in order to make each student a strategic reader (Carrell and Carson, 1997; Grabe and Stoller, 2002). Additionally, Janzen and Stoller (1998) also note that the students who learn to

apply the strategies become autonomous and self-regulated readers.

4.3 Teachers' Knowledge about the Appropriate Reading Strategies should be Taught

4.3.1 Metacognitive Reading Strategies

Data from questionnaires distributed to thirty participants showed that they strongly agreed that all kinds of metacognitive reading strategies should be taught to the students. The data from interview with four teachers as main respondents in this study supports the gained data from questionnaires. The data described that two teachers in this study reported that by asking students to preview the headings, illustrations and the text before reading is relevant to do. They further explained that the students, therefore, were prepared for the coming text. Then they asked students to skim the text, read the comprehension questions to know what to focus on before reading in details, scan for key words or skip unnecessary words.

According to these two teachers, these activities are very important to form the essential reading skills for the students. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classified these activities as metacognitive strategies and they were named advanced organizers, directed attention and selective attention respectively.

The other two teachers reported also by asking the students to preview the text and brainstorm some words relating to the reading text is helpful. They believed that by doing so, they could elicit students' background knowledge about the text. These activities could be categorized as advanced organizers and functional planning (O'Malley and Chamot: 1990).

Thus, to conclude the results of this part, the majority of the respondents believe that mostly metacognitive reading strategies that should be applied are advance organizers, directed attention, and selective attention since all of teachers were always aware about UN (National Examination).

4.3.2 Cognitive Reading Strategies

All four teachers as main respondents in this study reported using the strategies such as elaboration, transfer, inference, translation, repetition, summarizing, grouping, translation and imagery that O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classified as cognitive strategies. Mostly, all respondents agreed that elaboration is the best cognitive reading strategy to be

taught because to guess the meaning from the context, students need background knowledge to elicit new information from the text.

By transfer, some teachers implied that by using grammatical rules to identify word forms can make students easy to understand gist of the text they read. Meanwhile, by inference, they assumed that students not only to understand the words but also to be able to convey the words in a different way and relate new information to old information.

All teachers also argued that by using repetition strategy that the students imitate a language model is helpful to comprehend the reading material (Teacher A). Another strategy reported to be used in the post-reading was summarizing. Four teachers shared the idea that it was very important for students to know how to synthesize new information gained through reading.

4.3.3 Social/Affective Reading Strategies

Data from the interview indicated that four teachers usually used pair work or group work in reading activities. According to teachers, some students may be shy to speak and afraid of making mistakes in front of the class so “peer”, whole class, groups, and pair discussion should be encouraged to minimize their anxiety. What is more, this strategy was thought to be effective since “it creates opportunities for students to work together to solve a task or get feedback (Teacher A)

Only one teacher indicated that need of teaching self-talk to students to reduce anxiety, especially for low level students. Thus, to summarize this section, all respondents believed that all social strategies are important to be taught. Question for clarification, cooperation and self-talk should be taught since pair work and group work are good examples of social strategy.

4.3.4 Teachers’ Actual Classroom Practices in Teaching Reading Strategies

4.3.4.1 Metacognitive Reading Strategies Instruction used by Teachers

According to O’Malley and Chamot (1990:119), metacognitive strategies can be divided into 3 stages: planning, monitoring and evaluation. Table 4.6 shows the use of metacognitive strategies by three teachers (Teacher 2, 3 and 4) in ninety minutes.

Two teachers introduced metacognitive strategies with such activities as skimming, scanning, brainstorming and picture word association. This can

be seen in classes of teacher 2 and 4 where most strategies were introduced.

Table 1: The use of metacognitive reading strategies in the classroom.

Teachers	Advance organizer	Directed attention	Functional planning	Selective attention	Self-management	Self-monitoring	Self-evaluation
2	V	V		V			
3	V	V		V			
4	V	V	V				

As table 1 shows metacognitive strategies were taught quite frequently. Three teachers focused on advance organizers, directed attention and selective attention. In class of teacher 2 and 3, directed attention strategy was used from five to ten minutes. These teachers asked students to ignore some irrelevant distracters in the reading texts as new words or structures to pay attention to the learning tasks.

Furthermore, teacher 4 directed her focus not only on advance organizers, directed attention and selective attention strategies but also functional planning. When being asked why they chose to do these strategies, teachers explained they used these strategies to prepare students for the reading material. Advance organizers; for example, was thought to be effective for learners to get the main ideas before reading.

In the classes of teachers 2 and 3, teachers taught students to read comprehension questions before reading and highlighted the key words in the questions.

Although in the interview, all four teachers believed all metacognitive strategies are effective in helping students improve their reading skill; however, in their real classroom practices, only some strategies were taught: directed attention, functional planning, advanced organizers, selective attention. In unstructured interview conducted after the observation, one teacher explained that she did not need extra effort to let the students understand about how to use the strategies since mostly students have high English proficiency level, so the explanation given by teachers were easy to be understood by the students. She further explained that the most important of metacognitive reading strategies that students should master is directed attention, for the

reason that again she focused on the effectiveness of time in answering tasks at national examination.

4.3.4.2 Cognitive Strategies Instruction used by Teachers

Table 2 reflects cognitive strategies used by three teachers in their classroom. In fact, the researcher observed that most teachers used imagery strategy to teach reading. This strategy was seen in such activities as using pictures in the reading texts or real objects to help students understand or remember new words or new information. The students seemed to be excited when their teachers used this strategy. However, teachers only asked students to carry out activities without explaining clearly to the students the purposes of doing these.

All three teachers said they liked to teach students how to elaborate, transfer inference or translation but as we can see from the table, only one teacher (Teacher 2) used resourcing and summarizing strategies. To explain this, teacher 2 said that she focused much on the content of the text and that their students lacked prior knowledge. Besides, she also focused on how the students can summarize then memorize the information in the text. In addition, by using these strategies she expected that the students can answer the questions regarding the text using their own sentences without looking at the text. Again, resourcing and summarizing were liked by only one teacher.

Two other teachers did not teach students how to resource and summarize. They just teach the students how to use available information to guess the meaning of new items students found in the text, encouraged students to use prior knowledge then related into the content of the text and asked them to use previous linguistic knowledge or students' prior skill to assist comprehension of the text.

Table 2: The use of cognitive reading strategies in the real classroom.

Teachers	Resourcing	Repetition	Grouping	Deduction	Imagery	Auditory representation	Keyword method	Elaboration	Transfer	Inferencing	Note taking	Summarizing	Recombination	Translation
2	√				√			√	√	√		√		√
3					√			√	√	√				√
4					√			√	√	√				√

Three teachers used translation strategy in the reading lesson. One teacher (Teacher 2) asked students to translate the whole text into their mother tongue to make sure that students could understand the text. Other two teachers (Teacher 3 and 4) encouraged students to translate just the unfamiliar words or items the students found in the text not a whole of the text. To elaborate this, the researcher observed that in the classroom, the teachers always concerned on speed reading and the strategy which can support the students easy to answer the comprehension task.

4.3.4.3 Social/Affective Strategies Instruction used by Teachers

It was very easy to realize that in three classes observed, there were two classes in which teachers used the pair-work, group-work very often (Teacher 3 and 4). However, in classes of teachers 2, pair work and group work was rare. Data from unstructured interview conducted after classroom observation was done, she explained that she wanted their students to speak out their answers in chorus (whole class) to get their attention to the lesson.

Pair-work and group-work are mainly students' interactions with one or several students. This is a common feature in classes of teacher 3 and 4. It could be seen in the interview that three teachers liked to use the mixture of working between students: pair-work, group-work, whole-class work and individual work.

According to table 3, all three teachers taught students question for clarification. It was a strategy to elicit explanation from teachers or other students to get the correct answer for the reading tasks. Self-talk was preferred by one teacher. The teacher taught students to use self-talk "as the method to reduce their inner anxiety" (Teacher 2).

Table 3: The use of social/affective reading strategies in classroom.

Teachers	Question for clarification	Cooperation	Self talk
2	√	√	√
3	√	√	
4	√	√	

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated teachers' cognition about teaching reading strategies and their classroom practices that focused on thirty experienced EFL teachers in Bandung and four experienced EFL teachers in a model school as formerly it was a Fledgling International Standard School (RSBI) in Bandung as main respondents in this study. The purposes are to identify teachers' knowledge with regard to definition and importance of reading strategies, importance of teaching reading strategies and their actual classroom practices.

The findings showed that the majority of the respondents viewed reading strategies as techniques to comprehend printed materials effectively. Moreover, these were seen as essential skills that readers use to enhance their own reading to achieve desired goals and objectives.

Meanwhile, in the use of reading strategies in teaching and learning process, most of teachers believe of teaching all reading strategies (metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies) is a must but in fact, the practice illustrates that only some were taught. Metacognitive strategies mostly used in the classroom were directed attention, functional planning, advanced organizers, selective attention. They considered that these techniques particularly directed attention is most effective since it can make the students to manage the time wisely in National Examination. However, cognitive reading strategies mostly they used were imagery, elaboration, transfer, inferencing and translation. Meanwhile, social reading strategies mostly applied were questions for clarification and cooperation for students to have opportunities to work with one another to solve the problems or to check their answers and felt free to ask for clarification to the teacher or their peers also they felt confident in expressing the idea.

Then, the way teachers think about, understand, and value instruction influences their classroom practices. However, in this study, teachers' classroom practices did not always correspond to their cognition. To some extent, their classroom practices were based on their cognition and theories. To other extent, their cognition were not reflected. The cognition of the teachers in this study were affected by a variety of external (teaching context, materials and curriculum, students' motivation) and internal factors (teachers' ability, teachers' training, teachers' view).

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