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عنوان پایان‌نامه: بررسی تاثیر استراتژی خودارزیابی به عنوان یک استراتژی زایشی بر درک مطلب زبان آموزان سطح متوسط ایرانی

کلیدواژه‌ها: استراتژی، خود ارزیابی، درک مطلب، فراگیر سطح متوسط زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی.

هدف از این تحقیق بررسی تاثیر استراتژی خودارزیابی بر درک مطلب زبان آموزان سطح متوسط ایرانی و رابطه‌ی بین جنسیت و استراتژی مذکور بود. برای انجام این تحقیق شصت نفر زبان آموز زن و مرد بر اساس نمره‌ی آزمون تافل انتخاب شدند. این افراد به دو گروه مساوی آزمایشی و شاهد تقسیم شدند. قبل از تدریس استراتژی یک پیش آزمون از هر دو گروه گرفته شد تا از یکسان بودن توانایی آنها در درک مطلب اطمینان حاصل شود. بعد از آن استراتژی تنها به گروه آزمایشی آموزش داده شد ولی گروه کنترل آموزش خاصی دریافت نکرد. در پایان از هر دو گروه یک پس آزمون گرفته شد. نمرات به دست آمده از این آزمون به کمک $t\text{-test}$ مورد بررسی قرار گرفت که نتیجه‌ی آن نشان داد زبان آموزان گروه آزمایش عملکرد بهتری نسبت به گروه کنترل در پس آزمون داشتند. همچنین نتایج حاصل از تحلیل آماری فرضیه‌ی دوم نشان داد که بعد از یادگیری و استفاده از این استراتژی مردها عملکرد بهتری نسبت به زن‌ها داشتند.

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To

- My Father's Dear Memory,

- My Mother's Tender Love and Support

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of self-questioning strategy as a generative learning strategy on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance. Secondly, it explored whether there is any difference between males and females' reading comprehension performance through applying the self-questioning strategy. The participants in this study were seventy five male and female undergraduate students at Garmsar Payame Noor University and Sabzevar Tarbiat Moallem University – majoring in English course. Out of the total seventy five students, only sixty three students met the criterion of scoring between two standard deviations above and two standard deviations below the mean of the TOEFL test and were chosen as intermediate participants. The selected students were pre-tested on a reading comprehension test to ensure that there is no significant difference in their reading comprehension abilities. Three other students were excluded in this phase. Sixty students – thirty in Garmsar Payame Noor University and thirty in Sabzevar Tarbiat Moallem University – were selected and assigned to two groups of the experimental and control, respectively. The selection of groups as the experimental and control was in random. Both groups were given the same texts taught by the researcher during five sessions. In the control group, learners were allowed to use their own self-preferred strategies. But the experimental group was taught how to apply the self-questioning strategy. Then, both groups were post-tested on achievement of the instructed texts. The results revealed that the use of self-questioning did have a significant effect on the readers' comprehension performance and learners in the experimental group outperformed learners in the control group. Also, as far as the gender variable was considered, the gender differences favoring male learners were evident in the current study. In other words, males made the most use of the self-questioning strategy.

Key words: strategy, self-questioning, comprehension, intermediate EFL learner.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Overview

In the last few years, significant changes have occurred in the field of foreign language teaching. Views have changed with regard to both what should be taught – the linguistic content of syllabuses – and how we should teach – the techniques and procedures needed to transform this content into language skills. Thus, although oral proficiency is still accorded priority in most general purpose language programs, at least in the early stages, there is no longer any strong conviction that the learners should spend a long time on mastering the spoken form of the language before being exposed to its written form. *Reading* has come to play a much greater part in the program.

Reading is one of the most important skills for second/foreign language learners. It is not something that every individual learns to do. An enormous amount of time, money, and effort is spent today on teaching reading around the world. In fact, it could be said that more time is spent on teaching reading than any other skill. Furthermore, reading skills are important for being academically successful. Reading is a non-exhaustive skill, because it is intimately a part of our daily existence (Nunan, 1991). It enables the learners to work at their own pace and to increase their world knowledge. It also helps them to consolidate their knowledge of the language.

Reading is considered as an interactive skill through which learners construct meaning out of the written text through interactions between printed pages and their prior experience and knowledge of the world (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). The reader's role in the process of meaning construction out of the text is so crucial that Widdowson (1979) maintains that the meaning does not reside in the text, but rather any text has potential for meaning. In other words, this is the reader who uses the text potential to construct meaning out of the text.

In language learning the word reading is used to refer to two entirely different processes. First, helping the students establish the sound symbol relationship – the relationships between sounds and their graphemic representations. This is done at the very beginning levels of language learning. Second, reading for comprehension, reading to get meaning or to recreate the writer's meaning which is common in higher levels of language acquisition (Chastain, 1988).

There are some important reasons that indicate that reading is an important factor in learning. According to Chastain (1988), one major advantage of reading is that speed of reading, that is an important psychological and cognitive variable in learning a complex and new skill, can be controlled by language learners. A second benefit of reading is that learners can read in their own privacy. This is another important psychological variable for learners who are worried about reciting in front of other learners.

In foreign language learning, reading is a means of getting information from different sources including scientific and literacy books, magazines, newspapers, and journals as well as the internet. In countries where English is taught as a foreign language, reading is often considered the chief goal of learners but in most intermediate and advanced ESL programs, reading and writing together are the central activities (Celce-Murcia, 1991).

In terms of Stern's (1983) categorization, English is taught as a *foreign* and not as a *second* language in Iran. Because of lack of sufficient exposure to spoken English in Iran, Iranian people rely mostly on written English to learn it. Indeed, they try to learn more vocabulary and grammar to comprehend the passages they read.

Most researchers believe that using reading strategies such as note-taking, visualization, prediction, inferring, summarization, etc. increase student's comprehension. One of the newest reading strategies is self-questioning strategy which is also called by other names as question generation and questioning. In this strategy students are taught how to

pose and answer questions about a text while reading to comprehend it better. Chin (2002) believes that student-generated questions contain substantial educational potential in directing students' learning and guiding their construction of knowledge. He asserts that students' questions, especially those posed at a higher cognitive level, can promote conceptual talks that pertain to important concepts, thereby leading to enhanced learning. These questions can, not only bring about more meaningful learning on the part of the students, but also provide useful information and feedback for the teacher about students' thinking, puzzlement, and the status of their understanding, and thus act as a window to the students' minds. As such, Schmidt (1993) believes that questions raised by students activate their prior knowledge, focus their learning efforts, and help them elaborate on their knowledge.

1.2 Views of Reading

Here, different views expressed so far in relation to reading process will be presented and discussed, in order to understand the complex activity of reading.

1.2.1 Bottom-up View of Reading

In this view, as Celce-Murcia (1991) says, reading takes place through a process of matching sounds and letters; or, stated in terms of more sophisticated terminology. According to her, reading is considered a process of manipulating phoneme-grapheme relationships.

1.2.2 Top-down View of Reading

The top-down view of reading is the "psycholinguistic theory about reading" (Goodman, Smith, as cited in Celce-Murcia, 1991, p.196). In this newer model, a quite active role is given to the readers: they predict meaning as they read, they comprehend large chunks of text at a time, they do not attend to separate letters, rather they match what they already know

with the meaning they derive from the text. In this view, reading is a matter of reconstructing meaning using only partly the graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic systems of the language. Successful reading is being able to guess what the author will say next by verifying predictions related to one's past experience and knowledge of the language. Inevitably, this model took on the nickname of 'top-down reading' since it stresses comprehension of larger units of meaning.

1.2.3 Interactive Model of Reading

During the 1980s, an alternative model of reading was proposed that puts together the two views, bottom-up and top-down. The result is called an 'interactive' (Perfetti, Rumelhart, & Stanovich, as cited in Celce-Murcia, 1991) model of reading. It stresses the interaction of all meaning gathering activities which take place during reading.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

According to Rivers (1968), reading is the most important activity in any language class. Reading can be considered as a source of information. In addition, it is not only a pleasurable activity but also a means of extending and expanding one's knowledge of language.

Comprehension – the process of “active and intentional thinking in which meaning is constructed through interactions between the text and the reader” – is said to be the outcome of reading (McGriff, 2001). Among some purposes which are considered for reading, reading for comprehension is the primary and the most important purpose in which such factors as raising students' awareness of main ideas in a text and exploring the organization of a text are essential.

Moreover, according to McGriff (2001), it seems that one of the major objectives of any formal educational system, especially language educational systems at the university

level, is to enable learners to construct meaning out of written texts. Generally speaking, the learners are expected to improve their ability to comprehend and recall texts that they read. The more learners engage themselves with the reading text, the more they are able to relate the content of the text to their own world experience, and the more they would comprehend and recall the reading material.

Furthermore, in agreement with King (1992, p. 303), and the model of generative learning proposed by Wittrock (1974, 1983, 1990, & 1992), there are a couple of “generative study strategies” in the realm of reading comprehension. Some of these strategies are as follow:

Summarization: Developing a written summary of paragraphs, passages, and longer pieces of discourse, in which key concepts or events are included but less important details are left out.

Visualization: Being able to generate mental images while reading. The converting of words on the page into pictures in the mind (Tomlinson, 1998, p. 265). Paivio (1979, p. 470) refers to the concept of visualization as *imagery* and defines it as “a verbally evoked visual representation of objects and events.”

Self-questioning/Question generation: Readers ask questions about the text and the author’s intentions and seek information to clarify and extend their thinking before, during and after reading. It is an important reading comprehension strategy in which learners ask and answer high level questions about a reading text in order to comprehend and recall it better.

On the one hand, based on Aliakbari and Mashhadalvar’s (2006) belief, comprehension and questioning are traditionally connected and as they believe, student-generated question strategy engages students in “a continued process of determining the value, relevance, and practical application of new materials” and helps them enter in an important process of relating prior knowledge leading to better comprehension. Furthermore,

this strategy is, according to National Reading Panel (2000), the most effective strategy to teach improving in reading comprehension, but its usage in reading of English texts by EFL students is somehow a neglected issue in the literature of reading comprehension.

On the other hand, based on Celce-Murcia (1991) assertion reading is often the chief objective of learners in countries where English is taught as a foreign language. Therefore, in such settings, reading is of greatest importance and it is relatively viewed as the aim of language teaching and language programs in all levels of education, so it is expected that EFL learners and English teachers to get familiar with the efficient reading techniques.

Iran is among those countries where English is taught as a foreign language, as Hassany (1995) suggests, the main objective of teaching English in Iran is comprehension. Then, because of inevitable dependence of Iranian EFL learners on reading comprehension skill, and its importance in language learning settings, investigation about reading skill and reading strategies is justifiable. However, investigating all reading strategies is not the concern of this study. Considering the influential role that is played by self-questioning/question generation strategy on reading comprehension, it seems to be an issue which needs and deserves to be investigated.

The aim of this thesis was to study the self-questioning strategy as a generative learning strategy, and to investigate its impact on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Questions are critical cognitive tools for learning. According to Singer & Donlan (1982, p. 169) "they select appropriate information from the text." Moreover, they focus the readers' attention on this significant aspect of the text and increase the potential for learning (Anderson, Anderson & Biddle, & Singer, as cited in Davey & McBride, 1986).

Chin (2002) believes that questions are “psychological tools for thinking”, that help students to scaffold ideas (p. 59). She believes that questioning and answering are important for learning.

Question and Answer format is frequently used in teaching-learning situations. Of course, traditionally, the teacher asks questions and the students are supposed to answer. This format, in which the teachers always take the initiative, gives students a “passive, reactive role, fosters dependency, and removes a sense of responsibility, initiative and a kind of energy. Students just follow along; they answer when and as they are asked” (Dillon, 1982, p. 160). There are some disadvantages for teacher – or text – initiated questions:

The first disadvantage is that, they restrict the students’ learning, as explained by Frase (cited in Singer & Donlan, 1982). The second one is that, “... where teachers ask pre-posed questions and students read to answer them, comprehension tends to narrow because students are likely to focus only on the passages related to the pre-posed questions” (p. 180). The third weakness of pre-posed questions, by the text or by the teacher, is that “students read to satisfy the teacher’s purposes not their own” (p. 171), which may result in loss of interest in learning. Miciano (2002) claims that when the ultimate goal of education is to make students independent learners then the students must learn to take responsibility for their own learning; that is, they must be trained to take the initiative by asking questions themselves. Since “constructing questions involves decisions on what information is question-worthy” (Frase & Schwartz, as cited in Miciano, 2002, p. 674), self-questioning “places the responsibility for learning on the students, increases attention, and allows students to take corrective action” (Harris & Sipay, as cited in Gillespie, 1990, p. 253).

Self-questioning strategy is the strategy which effective readers use to draw on existing knowledge, to investigate a text as it is read, to analyze the beliefs and motives behind the author’s surface meaning, and to monitor comprehension. The significance of

focusing on self-questioning strategy lies on the fact that little empirical research has been done in this area, and none has been concerned with the analysis of the impact of its usage on Iranian EFL students. It is, therefore, hoped that this study would be of use both from the theoretical and pedagogical points of view.

Theoretically, it will enhance our understanding and extend our views of what we read, because according to Wong (1987), self-questioning activates the reader's background knowledge, helps students monitor their own comprehension, invokes higher-order comprehension processes, such as inferring answers from text already read, or priming the student to notice them in later text, and improves retention.

Pedagogically, this study will hopefully be of teaching and testing significance for learners as well as for teachers and syllabus designers. This study may enhance the learners' awareness of the advantages of using this strategy when they read a text. According to Chin and Osborne (2008), student-generated questions help teachers to prompt reflective thought and student engagement. As Chin (2002) states, questioning not only helps students learn but also guides teachers in their work. It may also trigger the teachers' insights to instruct students to pay attention to the strategy as a beneficial generative learning strategy to improve their reading skill.

This study may also be beneficial for syllabus writers or course designers and give them insights that help them to improve and modify the textbooks used for teaching self-questioning as reading comprehension strategy.

The testing implications of the study can be beneficial for test developers too, so that their awareness of the possible influential impact of self-questioning will lead them to include in their test items elements that tap the asking and answering ability in the testees. The inclusion of items in tests which require testees to use their asking and answering ability can be one more outcome of the study.