

IMPLEMENTATION OF SKIMMING AND SCANNING TECHNIQUES IN TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION

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I. The rationale of the study

Informal interviews with examinees after the exam and the test scores show that the reading comprehension part is the most difficult for most students. The reason is that the students cannot tackle the reading texts within the time limit in the exam because they are not familiar with the bottom-up processing and top-down processing skills and strategies for the intensive reading. The major reading problems observed in reading classes by the researcher are as follows:

First, the students have unproductive reading habits such as using a finger or a pencil to follow word by word and line by line with little reliance on close scrutiny of titles, illustrations, charts; reading aloud to get information, moving lips instead of running eyes quickly through written materials and writing many Vietnamese translations between the lines or in the margins.

Second, the students usually translate every sentence in texts into Vietnamese in the hope that knowing the meaning of every word will mean they arrive at a meaningful total. Therefore, they rely on using dictionaries for word meaning.

Third, the students tend to focus attention on forms and details, the trees rather than meanings and main ideas, the forest. Not surprisingly, the way of reading seems to lead to little progress.

The above weaknesses and problems can be seen in a reading class for most of the students at University of Economics, HCM.

As a teacher, the researcher has found the students' poor reading comprehension is also affected by the methods which the teachers have been applying in their teaching of reading skills.

II. Literature Review

According to Nunan (1999), there are different types of reading: *receptive reading*, which is the rapid, automatic reading that we do when we read narratives; *reflective reading*, in which we pause often and reflect on what we have read; *skim reading*, in which we read rapidly to establish in a general way what a text is about; and *scanning*, or searching for specific information. Grellet (1981:12) also discussed four main ways that one can read a given text. These are *skimming*, *scanning*, *extensive reading* and *intensive reading*. She pointed out that these different ways to approach reading are not mutually exclusive, but may in fact be done in succession when approaching a given text. She identified three main types of strategy: sensitizing, improving reading speed, and going from skimming to scanning. The first strategy is subcategorized into making inferences, understanding relations with the sentence and linking sentences and ideas and the third includes predicting, previewing, anticipation, skimming and scanning.

Nuttall has stated that **skimming** means glancing rapidly through a text to determine its gist and **scanning** means glancing rapidly through a text to search for a specific piece of information. Aebersold & Field (1997:76) have given a more detailed definition of skimming and scanning. *Skimming* is defined as a quick, superficial reading of a text in order to get the gist of it. Although there is some question about exactly what readers do when they skim, it does appear to be a strategy for getting clues to the main ideas, divisions, points, or steps in an argument. *Scanning* involves three steps: determine what key words to look for, look quickly through the text for those words, then read the sentences around them to see if they provide the information being sought. Scanning is useful in prereading stage to build knowledge. Another possible prereading use of scanning is to check predictions that students make about the content of the text to be read. Scanning is also a useful strategy after having read a text as well. Both skimming and scanning, according to Grellet (1981), are specific reading techniques necessary for quick and efficient reading. When skimming, we go through the reading material quickly in order to get the gist of it, to know how it is organized, or to get an idea of the tone or the intention of

the writer. When scanning, we only try to locate the specific information and often we do not even follow the linearity of the passage to do so. We simply let our eyes wander over the text until we find what we are looking for, whether it is a name, a date, or a less specific piece of information. Skimming is therefore a more thorough activity which requires an overall view of the text and implies a definite reading competence. Scanning, on the contrary, is far more limited since it only means retrieving what information is relevant to our purpose. Yet it is usual to make use of these two activities together when reading a given text. In actual reading performance, it is difficult to distinguish skimming and scanning because scanning inevitably involves some skimming and skimming must embrace some scanning (Nunan, 1999).

Grellet (1981), Williams (1984), and Nuttall (1996) give instructions on teaching skimming and scanning strategies. The teacher needs to help the students develop successful reading strategies. There are some students in a class who have not acquired the techniques of successful reading and are plodding through texts word by word. The teacher's task is to help them process linguistic information more efficiently and build up confidence which is the key to fluent reading. Most people accept that we can at least identify certain strategies which readers can make conscious use of when reading difficult texts. Probably the best way to acquire these is simply to read and reread. However, there is evidence that strategy training helps. Nuttall (1996) also states that scanning and skimming are important techniques and emphasizes that certain kinds of practice seem to help students read more effectively.

Teachers need to be aware of reading strategies in order to facilitate students' reading, regardless of the approach they choose to use in the classroom. Current thinking on the teaching of second language reading strategies suggests (Richards, 2002:22):

- *The teaching of strategies should be contextualized.*
- *Strategies should be taught explicitly through direct explanation, modeling, and feedback.*
- *There should be a constant recycling of strategies over the next texts and tasks.*
- *Strategies should be taught over a long period of time.*

According to Richards (1989:20), the students are encouraged to choose one appropriate strategy of the four given below:

- *Strategy A: Read the text, read the comprehension questions, then go back and skim for answers. This is the most detailed way of reading the text.*
- *Strategy B: Read the questions, read the text carefully to find the answers, then go back and check the answers against the questions.*
- *Strategy C: Skim the text, read the questions then scan for the answers.*
- *Strategy D: Read the questions and skim for the answers. This is the fastest strategy.*

The students should be encouraged to practice skimming and scanning the text. Skimming and scanning effectively will prevent the students from inefficient reading habits such as reading word by word, reading aloud, moving lips, translating, reading for form and details. Skimming and scanning are two very useful techniques. The advantages of skimming are that the students can predict the purpose of the passage, the main topic and possibly some supporting ideas. Skimming requires a superficial reading, not an in-depth reading. The students can be trained to skim the passage by giving them a few minutes to look through the text, having them close the book and saying what they learn. The advantage of scanning is that the students can extract certain specific information without reading through the whole text and scanning is especially useful when the students deal with schedules, tables, charts and graphs.

Nunan (1999:251) points out that "skimming and scanning both involve fairly rapid superficial reading and both are aimed at searching, rather than deep processing of the text or reflection upon the content of the text". Nuttall (1996) argues that scanning and skimming do not remove the need for careful reading, but they enable the reader to select parts of the text, that are worth spending time on. Skimming to get a top-down view is valuable as a way of approaching difficult texts. Readers can often produce a reasonable hypothesis about the text after

skimming it, by using a top-down approach. This means that a lesson can start on a positive note “ What do we know about this text? So what do you think its message is likely to be?” instead of starting with negative factors such as unfamiliar vocabulary. It is also a good strategy, for students must learn to utilize their resources of common sense, general knowledge and experience. A global impression and a rough idea of the kind of text facilitate detailed work on the text. It is a good strategy to set a task requiring the reader to look at the text in a top-down way.

Teachers should not insist too strongly on students’ understanding every word, but rather encourage them to go for the overall meaning of a text because smaller sense units are combined into bigger coherent ones and the whole is much faster to read. Students should be encouraged to improve skimming so that they can get the gist or the main ideas of the text quickly without paying attention to non-essential information. They should be made aware that they do not need to understand all the words in order to understand the meaning of the text. ESL and EFL students must be consistently encouraged to break the word-by-word reading habit, which interferes with comprehension.

In short, mastering reading skills and strategies can lead to the least time-consuming and the most effective reading. The teacher should help the students to increase reading speed by training them to employ useful and efficient reading strategies such as skimming and scanning.

III. Procedures

1. The materials

The teacher (the researcher) selected passages from a variety of sources which would be covered during the semester. To choose suitable reading texts for the purpose of the research, the researcher should consider text type, text difficulty, text topic and text length (Nuttall, 1996). The strategy training procedure used in this study consisted of two reading strategies: skimming and scanning.

2. The training procedures

On the first day of the research, the questionnaires were administered to all the subjects to check their habits of reading English texts in ten minutes, and then they were given the reading comprehension pre-test. The researcher should make the best use of the results of the pretest by pointing out to the students which areas they are weak and need to improve. During twelve weeks, the students were taught how to skim and scan the English reading texts. When the subjects finished the training, they were given the post-test to measure if they make any progress in applying skimming and scanning strategies in reading comprehension.

Prior to the training, the teacher and the class had general discussion about strategic learning and strategic reading. In the discussion, reading strategies and strategic reading were defined. The teacher explained why learning and practicing effective strategies in reading texts is important. Through this discussion, the subjects were informed of the following points: first, strategies help to improve reading comprehension; second, strategies also help to enhance efficiency in reading. In addition, the teacher clearly and explicitly explained the specific procedure of the training method and its benefits.

At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher conducted pre-reading activities in order to activate the students’ background knowledge related to the topic and content of the reading passage.

The teacher trained the students how to skim for the main ideas and how to scan for details by teaching them the effective methods to approach the text. The strategy training procedure used in this study was adapted from the teaching approaches of Nuttall (1996), Grellet (1981), and Heaton (1989) as follows:

+Skim for the main ideas:

After examining the title or headings, the students can be asked to read the first and last paragraph of the text to determine the main ideas of the text. Alternatively, they can read the first paragraph in its entirety and the first sentence of each subsequent paragraph before determining the main ideas. To provide the students with practice in skimming, the students must be given only a few minutes to accomplish this task, otherwise, they will read the article rather than skim it.

The teacher asks the students to highlight or underline the main points of the text and the answers to a set of questions posed to them just before reading. The students can be asked to read the text section by section, stopping at the end of each section to discuss the main ideas up to that point.

In tests of skimming, the teacher instructs the students to glance through the text and to note the broad gist of the contents. They are then given a small number of questions concerning only the major points and general outline of the text. Sometimes at the end of skimming the students are allowed a few minutes to jot down any notes they wish to make but they are not usually allowed to refer back to the text.

The teacher should have the students work under time pressure while they are practicing skimming. The questions must not ask for subtle comprehension, otherwise, they cannot answer them by skimming. The teacher can simply ask the students what a text is about, or she can give specific questions. The students can be asked to skim the text for the answers to simple global questions. For example:

1. Supply a text and several titles.

Task: which title fits the text best? (the titles must not differ in subtle ways, or careful reading would be needed).

2. Supply a text and a list of topics.

Task: which topics are dealt with in this text?

3. Supply a text and several figures (photographs, diagrams, etc.).

Task: Which figures illustrate the text?

4. Match main ideas with paragraphs: The teacher could list the main idea of each paragraph (or groups of paragraphs) on the board, which should be presented in scrambled order.

+ *Scan for details:*

After examining the title and headings, the students can be asked to scan for important information. The teacher can generate a list of questions that will help the students discover the easily identifiable information quickly such as names of countries, times or dates, names of people. The students can scan the entire article for an answer or be directed to specific paragraphs for the information. To ensure that the students scan rather than read, scanning exercises should be completed quickly under timed conditions.

To read for specific purposes, the teacher can encourage the students to read selectively by posing a number of questions to the students that they should consider while reading or by creating grids or tables that the students complete while reading.

In scanning tests, the questions are given to the students before they begin to read the text, thus directing them to read the text for specific information.

Tasks for scanning should be delivered orally, so that the teacher can force the pace. It is not scanning unless it is done fast. The teacher can ask students to scan for a single word or a fact in a text. For instance:

1. Look at paragraph 2 and find out where she lived.
2. In what paragraph is topic x mentioned?
3. How many times does the word "this" occur?
4. Sequence events: The students could be given a list of events that were described in the text and asked to sequence them.

When the class finished reading and did the reading tasks assigned by the teacher, the teacher discussed the answers with the students and asked them to explain the reasons for the answers or how they approached the text. The teacher should emphasize the strategies involved in determining the correct answer to each question and also analyse the incorrect answers. To draw the students' attention to what they are reading, the teacher should advise them to highlight or underline the information or the clues in the text which help them to choose the correct answers.

All lessons were focused on skimming and scanning strategies, however, the teacher sometimes modeled other strategies, which are also important in comprehending a text, when they are relevant to the passage: understanding rhetorical structures, guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from context, predicting... The teacher also encouraged students to use the strategies outside the classroom so that training could be transferred to other reading tasks.

IV. Data analysis

Data from the tests:

The results of the pre-test and the post-test of group 1 (high level group), group 2 (intermediate level group) and group 3 (low level group) will be shown in the table below.

The difference of progress based on the average scores of each group from the pre/post-test

	Pre-test (a)	Post-test (b)	Difference (b-a)
Group 1	78.3%	81.6%	3.30%
Group 2	54.7%	64.2%	9.50%
Group 3	33.3%	56.0%	22.70%

The results suggest that although the high proficiency group gained scores from the post-test, the improvement is not meaningful: it indicates that the improvement can happen by chance.

The intermediate proficiency group made progress in their reading comprehension since their post-test scores were higher than their pre-test scores.

Compared with the pretest scores, the low proficiency students' total reading comprehension scores from the post-test administered after the reading strategy training appear to be improved.

To sum up, the low reading proficiency group benefits most from the reading strategy training, followed by the intermediate reading proficiency group. The results also indicate that although the students in high reading proficiency group benefited from the training, the benefit was the least of the three groups.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

The findings suggest that strategies can be taught, which will help EFL students improve their reading comprehension ability. Moreover, teachers should be aware that one of the most important goals of teaching reading is to help our students develop as strategic and independent readers. Several suggestions for EFL reading teachers can be made on the basis of the findings of the study. EFL readers, particularly less capable EFL readers, should be given intensive and direct strategy training for a long period. As Gaskins (1994) claims, teaching of strategies without direct explanation and explicit teacher modeling for a short period would not have a long-term effect on students and effectively help them develop as strategic readers. In conclusion, further research on the reading strategy training for proficiency readers should be done to help them to become more proficiency readers. In addition, more research should be implemented in the reading speed in relation to strategy training which also contributes to the success of the reading process in a foreign language.

To sum up, the application of teaching of reading strategies in the reading program for the students of all levels at University of Economics, HCM may be recommended.

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