Pedagogical Model for Explicit Teaching of Reading Comprehension to English Language Learners

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension instruction is considered one of the major challenges that most English language teachers and students encounter. Therefore, providing a systematic, explicit, and flexible model to teaching reading comprehension strategies could help resolve some of these challenges and increase the possibility of teaching reading comprehension, particularly in language learners' classrooms. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to provide a model to teach reading comprehension strategies in language learning classrooms. The proposed instructional model is divided into three systematic phases through which strategies are taught before reading, during reading, and after reading. Each phase is explained and elaborated using recommended models for teachers. Finally, suggested considerations to consolidate this model are provided.

Keywords: *Pedagogical Model, Reading Comprehension, English Language Learners, Explicit Teaching, Reading Strategies*

1. Introduction

Despite the fact that comprehension is the essence of reading, many English language learners are not equipped appropriately to comprehend what they read (Durkin (1978); Ghuma (2011); Keene & Zimmermann (1997); Pressley (2006). Hence, providing flexible and explicit comprehension strategy instruction could have the potential of being an effective approach to develop text reading comprehension, particularly to language learning readers (Yang, 2006: 314-315). According to the National Reading Panel (2000), "The idea behind explicit instruction of text comprehension is that comprehension can be improved by teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies or to reason strategically when they encounter barriers to comprehension when reading" (P: 3-4). Thus, cognitive, metacognitive, and sometimes linguistic factors are all influence reading comprehension strategies which are often defined as conscious processes, tactics, and techniques that are used by readers to understand what they read (Brantmeier (2002); Cohen (1998); McNamara (2007). Consequently, providing a systematic and flexible instructional framework could help English language teachers to create effective and engaging reading comprehension instructions that would meet students' needs. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to introduce a model to explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies. The proposed reading comprehension strategies instructional model is divided into three phases (i.e., pre-, during, and post-reading). These phases are systematically arranged, function independently, and follow one another to complete the understanding function of reading. Most strategies that are used in these phases are common, frequently used, and proved success in teaching comprehension under different learning conditions and to different types of learners (Cubukcu (2008); Duke & Pearson (2008); Ness (2011); Yang (2006).

2. Instructional Framework Strategies

The following strategies are selected to be used as an instructional framework model to explicitly teach reading comprehension: activating prior knowledge, determining the purpose, questioning, predicting, connecting, inferring, using graphic organizers, comparing/contrasting, determining cause/effect, sequencing, classifying,
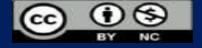
summarizing, synthesizing, retelling, determining big ideas, and visualizing. The main purpose for selecting these strategies is that they are affirmed by many models and approaches in teaching reading comprehension (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris (2008); Almasi, Palincsar & Brown; Pressley (1992).

2.1 Rationale of Using some Strategies in the Reading Comprehension Instruction Framework

The main rationale of using some comprehension strategies to explicitly teach comprehension in language learning classrooms is that they are informed by the major reading theories including schema (Carr &Thompson (1989); Yusuf (2011), transactional (Pressley (2006), motivation (Taboada & Buehl 2012), engagement (Harvey & Goudvis(2007) ; McElhone, (2012), and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, (1978). Also, these strategies are highlighted by most reading comprehension approaches and models including reciprocal teaching (Palincsar (1982); Westby (2011), metacognitive (Carrell, Pharis, & Liberto (1989); Maasum & Maarof, (2012), and cognitive (Alavi & Ganjabi (2008); Yang (2006). Moreover, there is a consensus among researchers that these strategies are mostly used by competent and skillful readers and are proved to develop the comprehension achievements of poor and nonstrategic readers (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris (2008); Block & Pressley (2002); Duke & Pearson (2008). Finally, these strategies can provide a systematic organization to the reading lesson in which they can be used before the reading starts, during the reading, and after the reading process.

2.2 Pre-Reading Comprehension Strategies

This is the first phase in the comprehension strategies instructional model. In this stage, teachers are encouraged to prepare students to read by activating their prior knowledge and proposing introductory strategies. By doing so, students are able to think about what they are going to read. Therefore, the main purposes of the pre-reading phase are: 1. Increase students' interest of the reading text, 2. Provide some facilitating strategies to help students understand what the text is about, 3. Activate the students' prior knowledge about the text, 4. Motivate the students to interact and react to the text, and 5. Help the students to think about what they are going to read. In order to meet these goals, the following strategies are suggested to be taught before reading the text:

2.2.1 Activating Prior Knowledge: The main purpose of activating students' prior knowledge is to help the students build meaning about what they are planning to read (Cooper, Kiger, Robinson, & Slansky, (2012). Activating prior knowledge assists students maintain the recall of the information. By applying this strategy, teachers can use different types of information relevant to what the students read in order to prepare them to understand the reading text.

Examples of Ways to Activate Students' Prior Knowledge

-Teachers ask students to think about important ideas that can help them understand what they read.

-Teachers provide an overview of what general ideas that might be presented in the text and might be familiar to students.

-Teachers give students an opportunity to talk in groups or with peers about the topic under discussion.

-It is recommended also that teachers show their students a short video, a picture, or any entertaining aids about the general idea in the reading text (Cohen & Cowen, 2008).

2.2.2 Determining the Purpose: One of the major strategies that prepare students to become successful readers is their knowledge of the purpose of what and why they read. Teaching students to consciously think about the purpose of what they read helps to facilitate their understanding of the text (Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 2006). It is worth noting that when teaching determining the purpose teachers usually question their students about the text.

Examples to Teach Students to Distinguish the Purpose of Reading

In order to trigger the students' abilities of extracting the purpose of their reading, teachers can ask several guiding questions as:

-Can you think why are you going to read this text?

-Can you identify the purpose-s for reading this text-book?

-What are the most important and what are the less important purposes?

-What evidence-s do you think help you determine what is-are important?

2.2.3 Questioning: Through questioning, students are encouraged to think about the author-s and the content-s of what they are planning to read. Teachers play an important role in posing questions that help students elicit general understanding of the

text when they start reading. Teachers are encouraged to train their students of how to ask questions about the reading piece and the author. This way, students will be motivated to delve deeper into what they are reading seeking for responses to question asked by their teachers or/and by their peers.

Examples of Questions that are recommended to be asked by Teachers before Reading the Text

-What do you think the text will be about?
-What else do you think will happen later?
-What do you think the text will remind you of?
-What do you think this happens?
-What do you think will happen next?

2.2.4 Predicting: The students' abilities to make thoughtful guesses of what they are reading (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Predicting is usually supported by the students' prior knowledge about the topic or the purpose of the reading. Teachers are recommended to use many clues in the text, story, or book to make the prediction more powerful. These clues can include pictures, title-s, sub title-s, and sometimes keywords that are usually in the text.

Examples of teachers' predicting scenario

-After providing a short introduction about a picture that might appear in the text or a cover of story, the teachers can guess what the general idea of the reading or the text.
-After reading the title of the text or the book, teachers can guess the general idea of the text or the book.
-After reading the first sentence in the text, teachers can tell or predict what the whole text might be about.

2.2.5 Connecting: Through connecting strategy, readers use different types of knowledge to support their understanding of what they read (Moss). There are three ways through which students can use connecting strategy: 1. text-to-text connection; readers employ their previous knowledge of a text they read and connect it to a text they are reading, 2. self-to text and 3. Text-to-self; readers tend to connect the knowledge they have or ideas from the world around them to the text they are reading or vice versa.

Examples of teachers' use of connection

-Is anything in the text reminds you of another text you have read? (text-to-text connection)
-Is anything in the text reminds you of anything in your life? What is it? (text-to-world-self)

-Is anything around you or in your life reminds you of anything in the text? (World-self-to-text)

2.2.6 Inferring: The reader's ability to construct meaning out of the text (Keene & Zimmermann). Inferring is considered one of the most important comprehension strategies because it shows the critical and mental abilities of the student. Teachers are recommended to introduce this strategy after building the students prior knowledge about the text. This is because inferring requires the reader's use of prior knowledge to infer the text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

Examples of teachers' use of inferring

-Based on your reading to the first part of this passage/text, do you agree with the author? -Why, What not?
-What clues helped you decide?

2.3 During-Reading Comprehension Strategies

This process starts after the preparation phase and when reading the text takes place. The main purposes of during reading phase are: 1. providing clear description of the text, 2. improving the comprehension of the text, 3. providing students with tools to answer questions about the text, and 4. helping students to go through the text independently. The following strategies are recommended in order to meet these goals:

2.3.1 Question-s Generation and Answering: One of the critical measurements of students' understanding is their ability to ask and answer questions about what they read. Initially, many questions that students are encouraged to answer are posed before reading the text (i.e., in the first phase). Similar to pre-reading strategies, students in this phase are also encouraged to ask questions and think of answers after they finish reading. In this phase, teachers are recommended to monitor and record students' questions, help students focus their questions on the main idea of the text, and encourage students to discuss questions with their peers.

Examples of teachers' question-s generating and answering

-From this statement we can tell that the village will have enough water for farming. But villagers will face the wild animals' problem again.
Do you think the problem will be solved?
Why do you think so?
Why do not you think so?

2.3.2 Using Graphic/Semantic Organizers: The main purpose of using graphic and semantic organizers while reading the text is to provide students with means to portray

relationships, concepts, and ideas in flowcharts, story maps, and Venn diagrams. Using either diagram skillfully helps students track the central ideas of what they are reading (Scraper & Scraper, 2006).

Examples of teachers' graphic and semantic organizers

-Figure 1. Shows some examples some diagrams that teachers may use during reading to help students label the main ideas.

Figure. 1:Venn Diagrams
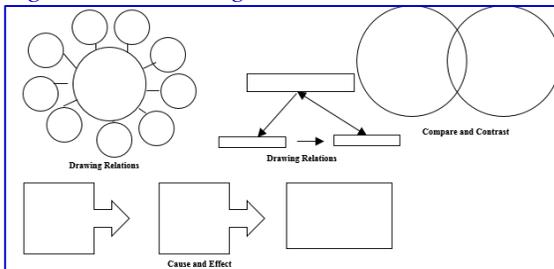
2.3.3 Comparing/Contrasting: The ability to determine what things are similar and what things are different in a text (Cohen & Cowen, 2008). Teachers play a very essential part in teaching this strategy in which they can ask students when they start reading the text to determine the similarities and differences between two characters, two ideas, or two pieces of information that they think are relevant to the text. Also, teachers can encourage students to use some types of graphic organizers to visualize their ideas.

Examples of teachers' comparing/contrasting

-Now, and based on the information in the text I drew this diagramed Figure. 2 to compare and contrast cats and dogs:

Figure 2: Comparing and contrasting dogs and cats:
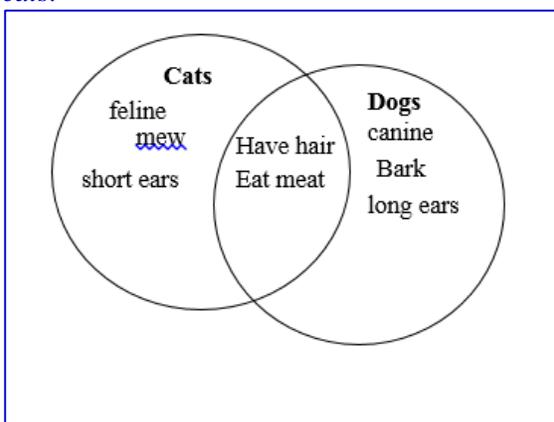
2.3.4 Determining Cause/Effect: When explaining the text teachers may find relations between ideas. These relations sometimes can easily be explained through showing the consequences of something and what factors contribute to such consequences (Buehl, 2009:27). In many cases, cause/effect strategies can be very helpful to explain and facilitate the understanding of expository texts. In demonstrating this strategy, teachers can use graphic organizers to help students show what causes specific effects in the text they read.

Examples of teachers' use of cause/effect

-Teachers have multiple ways to model cause/effect relationships. For example, they can give an example to demonstrate this relationship from the text they are reading (The man used his magic power 'cause' to kill the giant 'effect').

Or, it might be demonstrated though Venn diagram, see Figure. 3:

Figure 3: Cause/effect relationship
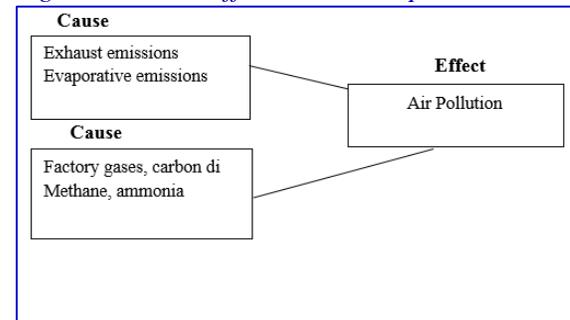
2.3.5 Sequencing: The reader's ability to organize the ideas of the text in a logical or/and chronological order (McLaughlin, 2012). Teachers may use any text to practice sequencing. They can ask students "can you tell what ideas come first in this text/story?" Teachers can use numbers to demonstrate how to order certain ideas or events in a text. Graphic organizers can also be used to demonstrate what ideas come first.

Examples of teachers' sequencing

-After we read this story/text, can you think of what happened first, what happened after that? What happened between these events? And what happened at the end?. You can use first, second, third…etc. or you can list the events using numbers 1, 2, 3…etc.

2.3.6 Classifying: In some texts, different ideas belong to different classes or/and categories. In order to make these ideas easy to understand and logically grouped, classifying could be used. Classifying is to put ideas that share the same or relevant characteristics in the same groups (Klingner, Vaughn, & Boardman, 2007). This strategy is central to help students understand the relationship between ideas in the text they read. There are many ways that can be used by teachers to enhance classifying strategy such ways as art works, visualization, and graphic organizers.

Examples of teachers' classifying

-Now, we came across different ideas about some animals, can you classify them into different groups?. Ok, I will give you one group as an example (dove, falcon, kook, goose, duck) are classified as birds.

-We can also use Venn diagrams to classify things according to shared common characteristics, see Figure. 4.

Figure 4: Classifying proper nouns
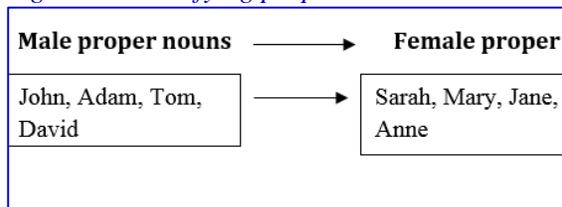
2.4 After Reading Strategies

After finishing reading the text, teachers are encouraged to use different strategies, skills, and activities in order to scaffold and promote their students' understanding. The main aims of the post-reading phase are: 1. Assisting students to make use of the knowledge they learned from the text they read and practice text comprehension strategies, 2. Encouraging students to integrate the knowledge they learned from the reading text to their world and prior knowledge, 3. Monitoring, supporting, and rewarding students' use of strategies to demonstrate understanding of the text. Thus, the following strategies are central to accomplish these goals:

2.4.1 Summarizing: It is considered the major post-reading strategy because it portrays the overall students' knowledge of the reading text (Wormeli, 2005: 26). Summarizing means providing a short and rich form of the original (Zimny, 2008). Specifically, in demonstrating comprehension, summarizing is to use the original text in a concise version without changing its main idea. Summarizing can be orally or in a written format depending on the teacher's purpose and/or the class needs. Graphic organizers, determining big ideas, and paraphrasing are considered very supportive strategies to summarizing.

Example-s of teachers' use of summarizing
-Here is a summary of the story that we read (*The Giving Tree* by Silverstien): a tree loves a boy who used to play and sometimes ask the tree for help. The boy grew up and kept asking the tree to give him different things and the tree gave the man everything he asked. Finally, the boy became an old man who needed a place to rest; the tree offered a place for him to rest and was happy.

2.4.2 Synthesizing: It is considered one of most complex reading comprehension strategies (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). It means the use of information learned from the text with pre-existing information (i.e., reader's prior knowledge) to construct a whole meaning of the text (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997). When introducing

synthesizing, teachers are recommended to show the students how to integrate a summary of the reading text into their prior knowledge about the same topic.

Example-s of teachers' use of synthesizing
-Here is a synthesis of the story that we read (*The Giving Tree* by Silverstien): The tree gave the boy everything he wanted from his youth until he became an old man to express its love. The tree gave the boy everything she has but at the end of the story she told him I have nothing for you but you can use my trunk to have a rest for you entire life. This shows how honest the tree was although she gave everything she has proved to the boy she did not stop giving him although she has nothing except her trunk.

2.4.3 Retelling: The ability to repeat the major ideas in a text (Hoyt, 1999). Retelling is highly recommended when teaching narrative texts such as stories and novels (Klingner, Vaughn, & Boardman, 2007). Retelling has different shared elements with summarizing, synthesizing, and determining big idea. Teachers are recommended to combine all these four strategies after finishing teaching them individually in order to facilitate the students' overall comprehension of the text (Sadler, 2006).

Example-s of teachers' retelling
-Ok, after we finished reading *The Giving Tree,* I will model to you how to retell it. Retelling can be orally or in a written format. It is concerned with saying the story again using your own words. For example, *The Giving Tree* is a story about a tree and a boy who loved each other and the tree kept giving the boy everything she has to express her love and make the boy happy until he 'the boy' got old.

2.4.4 Determining Big Ideas: Big ideas refer to the important ideas in the text (Moreillon, 2007). Teaching students how to elicit the important ideas in a text is very important to the understanding of the text. Big ideas differ from one text to another and there are no straightforward ways to follow in order to make eliciting big ideas an easy task. However, teachers might use many techniques such as showing the keywords of the text, checking titles, subtitles, and topic sentences. These elements could be very helpful in determining what the important ideas in a text are. Finally, using the illustrations or pictures; some texts usually come with pictures or illustrations which might provide hints to the major concerns and ideas of the text.
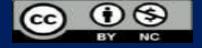
Example-s of teachers' use of determining big ideas

-Big ideas tell us the most important ideas in a text or story. For example, in the story that we read earlier *The Giving Tree* the most important ideas are love, constant giving, selfishness, sacrifice, and happiness.

2.4.5 Visualizing/Mental Imaging:
The reader's ability of constructing a mental image of the main ideas in the text (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997).   The major techniques that teachers can use to develop students' visualization of text are through think-aloud and modeling while reading and then scaffolding the students' uses of visualization. Moreover, teachers may also encourage students to use simple artistic skills to reflect on what they mentally construct.

Example-s of teachers' use of visualizing/mental imaging

-I drew this picture at home; it visualizes the main points of this story *The Giving Tree*. It demonstrates the relationship between the boy and the tree.

-Now, after I modeled visualization, here are some pens, crayons, markers, and blank sheets. I want you to work in groups and visualize some other ideas that you think are important in this story.

2.4.6 Questioning:
Asking more questions after the end of reading text might help students understand better (McNamara, 2007). Questioning has no end, particularly when the major goal is seeking for comprehension.

Example-s of teachers' use of after-reading questioning

-What was the main idea of the text?
-Why do you think this idea is important?
-What some of the problems in this text?
-Do you agree with the author? Why? Why not?

2.4.7 Connecting:
When students finish reading they can also use connecting strategy to scaffold their understanding of the text. Similar to the use of connecting in pre-reading strategy, connecting after reading strategy can be through 1. Text-to-self; readers can connect the text to things happen in their life or their real world. 2. Self-to-text; it can be through connecting ideas the readers experience to ideas in the text they are reading. 3. Text-to-text; this can be through connecting the general idea of the text to a text that the students had read in a different course.

Example-s of teachers' connecting

-Ok, after we finish reading this text can you show how the ideas in this text might be relevant to things in your life or things you read in any other school materials?

2.4.8 Monitoring:
The readers' ability to determine their understanding of the text (McNamara, 2007). Readers can monitor their understanding while they are reading and after they finish the reading of the text.

Example-s of teachers' monitoring

-When we monitor our comprehension or understanding of a text we can use different techniques such as asking questions, highlighting ideas, or writing notes about specific ideas in the text. We can also question the author about some ideas that we disagree with.

3. General Considerations for the Comprehension Strategies Instructional Framework

Using some strategies to teach reading comprehension might not contribute to accomplish the purposes of this model. Therefore, many other factors should be considered in consolidating the purposes of reading comprehension strategy model. These factors include teacher's direct instruction, explicit instruction, modeling, guided practice, motivating, engaging, and scaffolding (Blachowicz & Ogle (2008); Paris, Lipson, & Wixson (1983); Pressley (2006).

3.1 Direct Instruction: It involves teaching the strategies independently (i.e., each strategy in isolation from other strategies) and then combining complementary strategies (i.e., strategies that help to facilitate understanding other strategies). The direct instruction involves the definition of the strategy and providing an example to demonstrate its uses. Moreover, time management and step-by-step technique are highlighted (Lenski & Lewis, 2008).

3.2 Explicit Instruction: It focuses on the uses of different approaches to explain and demonstrate strategy instruction (Aghaie & Zhang, 2012). One of the most common approaches that teachers may use in this level is think-aloud. Through think-aloud, teachers can explain out loud what their thoughts say about specific strategies.

3.3 Modeling: It is the teachers' ability to explicitly demonstrate the use of the strategy. Modeling can also include some aspects from direct and explicit instruction by which teachers can first introduce the strategy, explain it, and model how to use it (Watson & Bradley, 2009).

3.4 Guided Practice: It highlights the reciprocal practice of the strategy between the teachers and their students. Guided practice is considered the first step towards teachers' release of responsibility. Also, teachers can provide feedback and encourage students' use of different strategies.

3.5 Motivating: It is considered very important aspect of strategy learning and comprehension development. Providing different opportunities to students to work together and supporting their efforts increase their contentment and attitudes and hence contribute to their motivation in comprehension strategy learning.

3.6 Engaging: Teachers are encouraged to provide multiple chances to their students to involve in different tasks and activities. This type of involvement increases the chances to the students' active engagement which afterwards leads to active learning and interaction (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004).

3.7 Scaffolding: It is the ways through which teachers help their students resolve some learning problems. In teaching comprehension strategies, teachers are considered the key-success for the students' learning (Block & Parris, 2008). Scaffolding can be through the direct assistance of teachers or competent students. Teachers can release responsibility by preparing competent students to scaffold the learning of their peers.

4. Conclusion

Explicit reading comprehension instruction did not receive the attention of many teachers and practitioners, particularly in the English language learning context. This was because attempts to provide flexible and explicit models to teach reading comprehension to English language learners were very limited and not straightforwardly stated. Therefore, this paper aims to provide an explicit instructional model to teach reading comprehension strategies. The strategies that are used in this model are based on approaches and methods proposed to teach reading comprehension in different learning context. However, the strategies are systematically reorganized into three phases before reading, during reading and after reading to provide more effective consequences to reading comprehension instruction. In order to consolidate the use of reading comprehension strategy instruction model, some important learning considerations are suggested.

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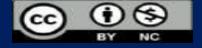
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