

EXPOSING LEARNERS WITH LEARNING STRATEGIES IN STRATEGY TRAINING: ONE OF THE WAYS FOR IMPROVING THEIR STUDY SKILL

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Abstract

Recognizing our own learning strategies is an effective way to help ourselves to self evaluate for what we have done in our own learning. One among other factors leading to a successful learning is due to the effective learning strategies. However, not all learners are aware of what they have been doing in learning, or they even sometimes do not know how to learn. If this is the problem, learning strategy training can be very beneficial for the learners with this problem. Why should be through strategy training? The answer might lie on the fact that strategy is quite amenable to change, and by nature, teachable as well as learnable (Oxford, 1990). In addition, Nuswantara (2008) also found out that the successful learners (i.e. in learning English) were triggered by the courage of using various learning strategies, the more varied the learners are willing to try out, the broader the chance for success. Training is the way that can be selected to present to the learners' various strategies that they can choose and at the same time employ when learning is taken place. Moreover, by means of training, learners are made aware of the strategy, and they can mend their own strategy, as a result, they become more self - directed rather than dependent.

This article attempts to frame out from the perspective of how to bring reading strategies that are applicable for handling various reading content texts to the learners, and present the result of a one-group experimental study. Thus, training is prepared for college learners who are inevitably deal with various English content textbooks and the final aim of the training is to improve learners' study skills. Then, one group experimental study using correlated sample provides some evidences supporting the effectiveness of the training.

Specifying on reading strategies, SQ3R that is joined with other learning strategies involving writing activity, annotating a text and paraphrasing/summarizing is exposed to the learners. The effectiveness is assessed by means of reading comprehension test that assesses the ability of the learners to perceive information from a text they read. One group experimental study is aimed to measure the effectiveness of the treatment. Finally, the end product of the study is to give a support to the idea of strategy training for improving the quality of how to learn.

Key words: Learning Strategy, Strategy Training, SQ3R, Annotating a Text, Paraphrasing, Summarizing, Effectiveness.

Referring back to the idea of fostering self-directed learning, the idea is quite sounding although in practice it is still far from satisfying result. It cannot be

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denied that many of our learners are still accustomed with being spoon fed. And it seems we, teachers, feel much safer to provide everything learners need for their learning. However, it should have already been realized that learning does not only take place inside the class where teachers are around ready for assisting their learners. There should be any courage to change either from the sides of teachers or learners, or even both. Attitude and behavior like this make learning more difficult so a change should be carried out. Then, what sort of change that can be carried out might be the question to all teachers or educational practitioners. The answer is to help learners to rely more on themselves and train them for using better strategies. Thus, encouraging learners for self direction should not any longer be postponed so that they could gradually gain greater confidence, involvement, and proficiency.

This article is going to focus on encouraging learners for self-directed learning particularly by means of improving their study skill as well as their reading skill. As it is compulsory for learners especially for those who study in colleges to have good reading skills, these learners should acquire as well as learn how to read so that they can easily handle any references they need for accomplishing every task given. Moreover, it cannot be denied that they will always deal with accomplishing final project or thesis in which they are finally forced to read various books and references, while at the same time the lecturers' assistants are no longer as easily accessible as when they were inside the class.

Learning Strategy Defined

By definition, learning strategies can be understood as steps taken by learners to enhance their own learning. These are especially important because they can be used as tools for active, self-directed involvement for developing their competence. And as it is also stated by Oxford (1990:1) that appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater confidence.

In practice, it might be not easy for learners to justify whether their strategies that have so far been employed appropriate or inappropriate. Because for some learners, they can pronounce their learning strategies consciously, but

many others will not deny that they use strategies unintentionally, and because they use them over times then the strategies are like an automatic machine that is ready to run as soon as we put one click on the button. If this is the case, then learners will neglect the importance of learning strategies to gain improved quality of learning. Learning strategies should not be instinctively, unthinkingly, and uncritically employed. They are actually assessable as well as modifiable; then one of the ways is through a reflection which can show whether they are already employed appropriately or inappropriately. Making learners aware of how they study is still important, since strategies that are effectively employed can help learners to gain a successful learning. This might be the role of the teachers or other educational practitioners to make them aware of their own learning strategies. Strategy assessment and training might be necessary to help them become more aware of the strategies they are using and to evaluate the utility of those strategies. This is, once again, due to the fact that even the best learners can improve their strategy use through such training.

Improving Study Skills by Learning How to Read

For many people, reading can sometimes be very complicated since it very often requires certain skills so that reading can become an activity for restoring input from written text. Especially, reading academic texts is not easy since they do not only focus on the concrete aspects of the text, the facts, and what is easily visible on the page. Therefore, for those whose reading skills are still less than excellent, academic reading can become overwhelmingly difficult. Dr. King (no date) states that there are four variables to be considered so that reading can become more successful: the reader, the text, the strategies, and the goal. Characteristics of the reader include reading skills, interest in the topic, physical factors such as sleepiness or hunger. The text varies in type (novel, science, play, psychology, etc.) and difficulty. Some reading is easy and moves along quickly, while other reading is quite dense and perhaps even tedious, packed with information. The next factor is the strategies employed by the reader. There are reasons that make reading strategies important: First, strategies create a plan of

attack, meaning that by means of strategies, then, readers can solve any reading problems by themselves. Second, strategies help readers to learn HOW to understand. If they know HOW to understand, then they are more likely TO understand. Finally, strategies help readers realize HOW they are thinking so that they can think more deeply and more consciously. For these reasons then this article puts the focus on the elaboration of the reading strategies that can be easily accessed by learners for the betterment of their reading skills.

Some Techniques are Suggested for Learning How to Read

This article attempts to present some feasible reading strategies that can be designed for training learners for learning how to read. The selected strategies include SQ3R that is done together with Annotating a text or paraphrasing/summarizing text to help learner reciting. The strategies are quite teachable as well as learnable so that learners can take the benefit of trying them and using them for improving their present strategies.

SQ3R, Strategy for Understanding Textbook

This strategy can help learners tackle the college reading assignments systematically. There are various strategies of this type, actually, such as PQ3R, PQ4R, SQ4R, SQ3R as they are developed by Francis P. Robinson. All of them have in common previewing, reading purposefully, and reviewing. By virtue, they are similar in the ways that they let the learners learn the information while they are reading the assignment rather than saving up the “learning” part for the night before the test.

As it is cited by Milan (1988: 403) that many students make the mistake of “studying” like this: they read the assignment from beginning to end just to get it done, and rather than reviewing immediately, they put whatever information they learned out of their mind. Then the night before the test, they have to learn everything all over again (or perhaps more commonly, they have to learn everything for the first time). If the book contains sixteen chapters and that the average midterm exam probably covers half of that number, it is no wonder that

students feel panicky about learning the essential information of eight chapters in a few hours. This will not be efficient for improving their grades; instead they need to set aside some hours efficiently for their study.

SQ3R can be used as one of the many effectiveness of studying as nowadays many textbooks have been written in standard format. Say, the chapter begins with an overview or outline of the information contained in it. In the body of the chapter the relative importance of the topic discussed is shown graphically by the use of varying typefaces and type sizes. For example, main heads are printed in large boldface capital letters, whereas subheads may be printed in smaller letters or in italicized type. In addition, most textbooks contain a large number of charts, graphs, tables, illustrations, and maps that break up the page, and more important, help explain, interpret, and reinforce important concepts. In many textbook writers end each chapter with a summary, questions for review, a practice test, or a combination of these. All these devices are there to make the study time easier. SQ3R is developed in order to make use of the already available standard textbooks.

Henceforth, SQ3R is designed for helping learners to retain better primary source content information using reading and study strategies. This process involves the following steps:

1. **S stands for survey** in which through this activity, learners have to pre-read the primary source text by skimming headings, bold-faced type, and captions. Learners make predictions about main idea and content.
2. **Q stands for Question that is an activity where the** learners turn headings into questions to answer while reading.
3. **R stands for Read** in which Learners have to read the text and record the answer to each self-generated question.
4. **R stands for Recite** (or “Rite”- or “write”), this time, Learners have to try to answer each question from memory.

5. **R stands for Review** referring final activity that will let learners check to see if they can answer all the questions from memory one more time. If not, they review their questions and answers.

In other words, SQ3R is a useful technique for extracting the maximum amount of benefit from one's reading time. It helps readers to organize the structure of a subject in their mind. It also helps them to set study goals and to separate important information from irrelevant data. Eventually, the use of SQ3R can significantly improve the quality of study time.

Procedures of SQ3R Practice

During the first stage, Survey, learners need to pay attention to the following parts of chapters of the textbook:

- The chapter title
- The chapter outline
- The introduction
- The main head and subhead titles
- The chapter summary
- Review questions or questions for discussion

While surveying the text, learners need to notice the various kinds of the typefaces that are used for heads, subheads, and third-level heads. Say for instance:

<p>SLEEP AND DREAMING (main head is printed in boldface capitals)</p> <p>Sleep (subhead is printed in boldface regular letters)</p> <p><i>Stages of Sleep</i> (third level heads are printed in italics)</p>
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These typefaces indicate the relative importance of the subjects, and for the learners, this can be used for outlining their reading, and for the following study stages- Question, Read, and Recite. In the next stage, Question, learners can start making questions based on the typefaces of the text that they have recognize along with the survey stage. In this stage, learners can raise some questions like

What is sleep?; How do psychologists define sleep?; What is dreaming?; Why do we dream?. For the next step, learners have to read through the first paragraph after the main head, “**SLEEP AND DREAMING,**” in this section the author has defined the term like this: “Sleep is a state of altered consciousness characterized by its own distinctive patterns of brain activity.” Before going on to the next section, learners have to recite or write the definition to themselves. For technical or scientific terms it is probably a good idea to learn the author’s definition and not to change it into their own words. When finish with this section, the same procedure can be applied and followed by the next one. Along with reading through the next sections, similar information might be encountered. However, there is no need to dwell on information the learners already know. As soon as learners reach the heads or subheads sections, they should follow the above procedure, turning them into questions, reading to find the answer and then reciting the important information by themselves. The final step in the SQ3R method is *Review* - to look over the chapter once more, or to read over the outline or introduction quickly, to study the main points in each section, to read the summary, and to answer all the questions for discussion or to review the author. The review can be done each by reviewing all the accumulated chapters learners have already learned, so that they do not have to spend the whole night for preparing the exam.

In practice, SQ3R can be joined with other strategies or techniques to make it more prolific. During the stage of Recite (or “Rite”), this activity can be done with writing activities like annotating a text and summarizing. Both techniques require learners’ active involvement by making some notes on the important points encountered in the reading text. And, both strategies are useful for helping learner to recite or to store new information from the textbook in their memory.

Annotating A Text

Before joining this strategy with SQ3R, it is necessary to understand the basic idea of this technique. Annotating a text is an effective strategy to promote

active and critical reading skills; this strategy provides a number of useful clues that learners can use to remember different elements of writer's craft when reading and annotating a text. According to Porter-O'Donnell (in Hall, 2008), annotation of the text provides a "*visible record of the thoughts that emerge while making sense of the reading*. It is usually done during reading, and at the same time readers start writing literature and separate these responses into categories. They typically identify categories such as making predictions, asking questions, stating opinions, study of the author's craft, making connections, reflecting on content or the reading process. In his article Donnell suggested how to make annotation marks, as the following:

DURING READING (Adapted from Porter-O'Donnell)

Mark in the text:

Characters (who) ○

When (setting) □

Where (setting) □

Vocabulary

_____ Important information

Write in the margins:

Summarize

Make predictions

Formulate opinions

Make connections

Ask questions

Analyze the author's craft

Write reflections/reactions/comments

Look for patterns/repetitions

By writing what a reader is reading there is an attempt from the reader to make a dialog with the text and as a result there is a connection between the reader and the text. This annotating then will help readers to slow down reading so that reading becomes a process to comprehension, in addition, writing during reading will help readers for active reading as well as improving their writing skill. In order to reach this ideal, then reader should receive a kind of training so that they become aware of what should be annotated and how to write the annotation.

A practice of making annotation can help learners to slow down reading without bothering understanding, As soon as learners can get used with such a technique or strategy, it can be inserted in one of the SQ3R activity, namely in Reciting activity. Instead of doing the recitation orally, it can be done through writing.

Paraphrasing and Summarizing

Like annotation, this technique can also be joined with *SQ3R* in the stage of *Reciting*. Before finding out how to join both techniques, it is also necessary to understand how this technique works. When paraphrasing, someone else's words are put into our own words. The original words are restated without changing the meaning. At the same vein, summarizing is done by condensing the original so that only the essential information is conveyed. Although paraphrasing and summarizing go together, actually one leads to the other. In other words, when there is an attempt to make a good summary, it should be done by means of paraphrasing that is by putting some of the ideas from the original into own words. There are some techniques for paraphrasing need to be considered including substituting synonyms, changing the order of ideas within sentences, combining ideas, omitting supporting or unimportant ideas.

Like paraphrasing, there are some useful steps need to be considered in order to produce a good summary. Firstly, by reading through the passage; secondly, checking the meaning of the unknown words; then, underlining the important words, phrases, and sentences; and copying the underlined material onto a sheet of paper, studying the material, rewriting using one's own words, connecting ideas in sentences, finally, rewriting the summary on another sheet of paper, and then checking the accuracy.

Exactly like annotation a text, paraphrasing and summarizing can be joined in the way that SQ3R should go through the stage of reciting. By making a

summary, learners are actually trying to digest new information from what they read and then try to keep it in their mind.

Preparing the Training

One main point to date why strategy training becomes important is that learners need to learn, and teachers need to learn how to facilitate the process. Although learning is certainly part of the human condition, conscious skill in self-directed learning and in strategy use must be sharpened through training. Then, the general goal of such trainings is to help make learning more meaningful, thus strategy training should be highly practical and useful rather than abstract and theoretical.

This article puts forward a one-time strategy training type as it only involves learning and practicing two strategies with actual reading tasks. This kind of training gives learners information on the value of the strategy, when it can be used, how to use it, and how to evaluate the success of the strategy.

The suggested steps for training is set as the following:

1. Determine the learners' need and time availability.
2. Tryout the first strategy: Annotating A Text
 - Instruction for Annotating Practice
 1. A text (i.e. for beginner readers, fiction text is recommended) is given and learners have to read as the first reading. This first reading will give a clear sense of the key concept and the relevant details of the texts.
 2. Learners read the text for the second time, this time they can start focusing on a paragraph, or learners can divide the text into chunks. Before start reading, they have to choose a focus or framework for the highlighting. (e.g. main ideas only, or with supporting details, or definitions and examples and the like).
 3. During the second reading they should mark the piece for surface meaning (vocabulary, who, what,etc). They can use annolighting or highlighting with color pens for marking. The highlight should only go to the information.
 4. They should write an explanation for anything which they have underlined or highlighted. The explanation should be written along

the margins or using sticky paper. It can be in the form of summary, predictions, opinion, questions, and so on).

3. Tryout the second strategy: paraphrasing/summarizing

1. Giving paraphrasing steps:

- i. Substitute synonyms for a key word or words in the original.
- ii. Change the order of ideas within sentences.
- iii. Combine ideas.
- iv. Omit supporting or unimportant ideas.

2. giving summarizing steps:

- Read through the passage twice so that a good understanding of the content can be achieved. Some of the unfamiliar words in this stage need to be checked for the meaning.
- Underline important words, phrase, and sentences.
- Copy the underlined material onto a sheet of paper.
- Study the material.
- Condense or rewrite the material using our own words as much as possible.
- Insert transitional words or phrases if necessary to show the relationship between ideas.
- Rewrite the summary on another sheet of paper. Finally, check to see that the summary is accurate and does not introduce our own ideas or opinion.

4. Tryout the third strategy: SQ3R

SQ3R is a five-step study plan to help learners construct meaning while reading. It uses the elements of questioning, predicting, setting a purpose for reading, and monitoring for confusion.

- Instruction for SQ3R includes the following procedures:

1. **Survey**

At the first stage, learners are given a text, and they have to glance over headings and first sentence in paragraphs. Before they start reading, they have to think about the title: “What do I know?” “What do I want to know?” Then they start reading the first paragraph through the last paragraph or summary.

2. **Question**

At this stage, learners have to turn the title into a question and also write down any questions that come to mind during the survey. Then, they can turn headings into questions, and turn subheadings, illustrations, and graphic aids into questions. They have to write down unfamiliar vocabulary words and determine their meaning.

3. **Read Actively**

The next stage is to read and search for answers to questions. Then they have to respond to questions and use context clues for unfamiliar words. They also have to react to unclear passages, confusing terms, and questionable statements by generating additional questions.

4. **Recite**

In reciting stage, learners have to look away from the answers and the book to recall what was read. They can recite answers to questions aloud or in writing. In writing, they can use annotation a text or paraphrasing/summarizing text. Finally they need to reread text for unanswered questions.

5. **Review**

At this final stage, learners look over answers and all parts of the chapter to organize information, and then summarize the information learned by drawing flow charts, writing a summary, participating in a group discussion.

4. Evaluate the Strategy training by inviting learners' own comment about their strategy use. Thus, this self assessment should provide self monitoring and self evaluating for the success of the training
5. Finally, the result of the evaluation should become data for making a necessary revision.

Assessing the Effectiveness of the Training

A one group pretest-posttest has been conducted to see how the dependent variable, the ability to understand content English text is measured before and after a treatment, strategy training is given to a group of learners. This experimental research requires one group consisting of 20 learners coming from different engineering departments in ITS. They currently belong to the English class that is designed for academic purpose. This compulsory subject is offered to all learners of semester one or two. This experimental extends in a relatively short period of time so that extraneous variables such as maturity, attitude change, and so on (Borg & Gall, 1979: 538-540) may not affect the reliability of the dependent variable involved in this study. The dependent variable, the ability of learners to perceive English content texts, is measured in order to see the effectiveness of treatment in this case strategy training in the attempt to improve understanding on the reading English content texts.

A pretest on reading comprehension is designed to assess the ability of the learners to recall any information from the text they have just read. Before the test is administered, learners are given four texts to read. As soon as they are ready for the test, they are given a set of questions. The questions require information that is basically based on the texts they have just read. The next stage is to give them training on how to use annotation, using paraphrasing and summarizing technique, and SQ3R, and joined strategies. Finally, the same texts and tests with the same procedure are administered. In the test, the learners are required to bring in the theories they get during training to handle the test.

20 learners were involved in the study. In order to reach the expected direction, a hypothesis is formulated. *Null Hypothesis* is accepted when there is no significant difference before and after treatment on the other pole, it is rejected when there is a significant difference. When it is rejected it is implied that a strategy training can significantly gain better reading comprehension after it is treated to a group of learners. From the computation of the collected data, it is found out that the critical value for t for the 5 percent level and 19 df in a directional test is 0.389. Since the calculated value for t , 0.152, is lower it means that the average score of reading comprehension after treatment is higher, so that the result is in predicted direction. In short, the treatment, strategy training can be considered effective to help learners gaining better reading and understanding.

Summary

In the attempt to help learners to gain better reading comprehension particularly on reading their content textbooks, this article offers an insights for strategy training. SQ3R that is modified with the involvement of other strategies or techniques like annotating a text and paraphrasing/summarizing is proposed to be one of the strategies that is exposed and trained to the learners for improving their reading skills. Improvement of reading skill will be simultaneously followed by learning skill betterment. In other words, an attempt for improving learners' reading skill will at the same time enhance the quality of their learning. Moreover, the training that is given to them can help them increase the awareness towards

their self direction and autonomy so that they become ready to autonomous learners who do not rely their learning on their teachers' control. For further studies, a reflection might be necessarily carried out to trace back each learner's experience in handling reading text and the strategies they have employe. Moreover, it is also important to present other types of strategies to the learners so that learners have more experiences with more varied strategies. Finally, the effect of the extraneous variables should be taken into account by having longer time of observation.

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