EXPLICIT STRATEGY-INSTRUCTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS IN READING COMPREHENSION IN A PRIMARY ESL CLASSROOM

SAW BENG HONG

INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR

2012
EXPLICIT STRATEGY-INSTRUCTION
AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF
HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS
IN READING COMPREHENSION
IN A PRIMARY ESL CLASSROOM

SAW BENG HONG

RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND
LINGUISTICS UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER IN LINGUISTICS

2012
UNIVERSITI MALAYA

ORIGINAL LITERARY WORK DECLARATION

Name of Candidate: SAW BENG HONG (I.C/Passport No: 591031-08-5690)

Registration/Matric No.: TGC 070039

Name of Degree: MASTER IN LINGUISTICS


EXPLICIT STRATEGY-INSTRUCTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS IN READING COMPREHENSION

Field of Study: READING

I do solemnly and sincerely declare that:

(1) I am the sole author/writer of this Work;
(2) This Work is original;
(3) Any use of any work in which copyright exists was done by way of fair dealing and for permitted purposes and any excerpt or extract from, or reference to or reproduction of any copyright work has been disclosed expressly and sufficiently and the title of the Work and its authorship have been acknowledged in this Work;
(4) I do not have any actual knowledge nor do I ought reasonably to know that the making of this work constitutes an infringement or any copyright work;
(5) I hereby assign all and every rights in the copyright to this Work to the University of Malaya (“UM”), who henceforth shall be owner of the copyright in this Work and that any reproduction or use in any form or by any means whatsoever is prohibited without the written consent of UM having been first had and obtained;
(6) I am fully aware that if in the course of making this Work I have infringed any copyright whether intentionally or otherwise, I may be subject to legal action or any other action as may be determined by UM.

Candidate’s Signature  Date

Subscribed and solemnly declared before,

Witness’s Signature  Date

Name: DR. EVELYN KHOR

Designation: SUPERVISOR
Abstract

Effective reading instruction in the early grades is the key to creating strong, competent readers. Hence, explicit strategy-instruction can be seen as a powerful student-centred approach to develop good learners to engage in divergent thinking. This study was conducted to look into the efficacy of explicit strategy-instruction in reading to develop the higher-order thinking skills in a year-four primary classroom. The focus of the study was on higher-order thinking skills such as predicting, inferencing and personal response. The materials used were from children’s year-four textbooks and literature books supplied by the Curriculum Development Centre of Malaysia. This was carried out to ensure adherence to curriculum guidelines as well as for ease and effectiveness of implementation in the language classroom. Collection of data was through interviews, questionnaires, participant observation, written responses as well as results of pre and post intervention reading tests. The Critical Reading Inventory test was administered to measure participants’ critical reading ability pre and post intervention of explicit strategy-instruction. Reading lessons were purposely tailored to create opportunities to enable participants to apply strategies taught. The gains in critical reading ability were assessed based on pre and post reading tests. Results from interviews, questionnaires, participants’ written responses, reading tests revealed that participants critical reading ability did improve in a significant way post intervention of explicit strategy-instruction. To conclude the study is a discussion on the limitations of the study, implications of the study, implications of the study to teachers and also implications for future research.
Abstrak

Acknowledgements

It has taken me a while in completing this report and finally I have accomplished it but only with the love and understanding of all those beautiful people around me. First, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Evelyn Khor, for her constant guidance and advice. My sincere gratitude to my family for their patience and support without which my research would not have been possible.
# Table of Contents

Original Literary Work Declaration           ii  
Abstract                                     iii 
Abstrak                                      iv 
Acknowledgements                             v 
Table of Contents                            vi 
List of Figures                              x 
List of Tables                               xi 
List of Diagrams                             xii 
List of Appendices                           xiii 

Chapter 1: Introduction                      1  
1.1 Overview                                 1 
1.2 Reading Comprehension                   2 
1.3 Higher-Order Thinking in Relation to Reading Comprehension  4 
1.4 Explicit Strategy-Instruction Involving Higher-Order Thinking Skills in Real Reading  6 
1.5 Background to the Study                 7 
1.6 Statement of the Problem                10 
1.7 Research Objective                      11 
1.8 Research Questions                      11 
1.9 Purpose of the Study                   12 
1.10 Significance of the Study              12 
1.11 Limitations of the Study               13 

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature      14  
2.1 Introduction                            14 
2.2 Cognitive Learning                      15 
2.3 Past Studies                            16 
2.4 Use of Questioning Strategies in Reading Comprehension  19 
2.5 Teachers’ Knowledge of Higher-Order Thinking Skills  22 
2.6 Classroom Practice in Building Higher-Order Thinking Skills  27 
2.7 Conclusion                             29 

Chapter 3: Methodology                      30  
3.1 Introduction                            30 
3.2 The Research Approach                   31
3.3 The Research Setting
3.4 The Participants
3.5 Ethical Considerations
3.6 Critical Reading Inventory
3.7 Measures Used in Critical Reading Inventory
3.8 Scoring in Critical Reading Inventory
   3.8.1 Text-Based Items
   3.8.2 Inference Items
   3.8.3 Critical Response Items
3.9 Follow-Up Questions
3.10 Pre-Intervention Stage - Critical Reading Test
   3.10.1 Administering the Critical Reading Inventory
   3.10.2 Graded Word List
   3.10.3 Critical Reading Inventory Test
3.11 Nuttall’s Reading Taxonomy ….
3.12 The Reading Comprehension Test
3.13 The Process of Explicit Strategy-Instruction
   3.13.1 Explicit Strategy-Instruction in Reading Comprehension
   3.13.2 Pre Reading
   3.13.3 While Reading
   3.13.4 Post Reading
3.14 Summary of Activities During Explicit Strategy-Instruction of the Stories
   3.14.1 Text 1 - Yusuf
   3.14.2 Text 2 - Elves and the Shoemaker
   3.14.3 Text 3 - Grasshopper in Trouble
   3.14.4 Text 4 - Devi and the Stranger
   3.14.5 Text 5 - The Perfect Present
   3.14.6 Text 6 - The Frog
   3.14.7 Text 7 - Raven Boy
3.15 Post-Intervention Stage Reading Tests
   3.15.1 The Critical Reading Inventory
   3.15.2 Reading Comprehension Test
3.16 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures
3.17 Participant Observation
Chapter 3: Data Collection Methods

3.18 Interviews
   3.18.1 Interview with Participants’ Parents
   3.18.2 Interview with Participants

3.19 Participants’ Questionnaire

3.20 Teachers’ Questionnaire

3.21 Students’ Response During Explicit Strategy-Instruction of Reading Comprehension Lessons

3.22 Data Analysis

3.23 Summary

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Findings from Interviews
   4.2.1 Interview with Participants’ Parents
      4.2.1.1 Language of Communication
      4.2.1.2 Participants’ Leisure Activities
      4.2.1.3 Participants’ Inquisitiveness
   4.2.2 Interview with Participants
      4.2.2.1 Reading as a Pastime
      4.2.2.2 Reading Preference
      4.2.2.3 Ability to Read Independently
      4.2.2.4 Guidance in Reading
      4.2.2.5 Asking Questions as a Reading Strategy
   4.2.3 Feedback from Interview

4.3 Findings from Questionnaires to Participants’ Parents
   4.3.1 Reading Preference
   4.3.2 Reading Habits
   4.3.3 Higher-Order Thinking and Reading Skills

4.4 Findings on Teacher’s Perception of HOT skills
   4.4.1 Encouraging Teacher-Student Dialogue
   4.4.2 Encouraging the Use of Open-Ended Questions - ‘why’, ‘how’
   4.4.3 Encouraging Students to Give Their Opinion
   4.4.4 Using Questions which Encourage HOT skills
   4.4.5 Encourage Students to Evaluate What They Have Read
   4.4.6 Employing the Use of Wait Time
4.4.7 Use of Divergent Thinking Terminology 70
4.4.8 Findings From Teacher’s Questionnaire 71
4.5 Results of Pre Intervention Critical Reading Inventory Test Scores 73
4.6 Results of Pre Intervention Reading Comprehension Test 74
4.7 Participants’ Response to Higher-Thinking Questions in Reading Tests 75
4.8 Explicit Strategy-Instruction Intervention to Develop HOT skills 77
  4.8.1 Predicting 77
  4.8.2 Inferencing 80
  4.8.3 Critically Responding to Text 86
  4.8.4 Synthesizing of Strategies 89
4.9 Findings of CRI Test Post Explicit-Strategy Instruction 91
4.10 Findings of Reading Comprehension Test Post Explicit-Strategy Instruction 93
4.11 Comparison of CRI Tests Pre and Post Explicit-Strategy Instruction 94
4.12 Comparison of Reading Comprehension Tests Pre and Post Explicit-Strategy Instruction 96

Chapter 5: Conclusion 99
  5.1 Introduction 99
  5.2 Summary and Discussion of Findings 100
  5.3 Classroom Observation 101
  5.4 Limitations of the Study 105
  5.5 Implications for Teaching 106
  5.6 Implications of the Study 109
  5.7 Implications for Future Research 111
  5.8 Conclusion 113

References 114
Appendices 120
List of Figures

Figure 3.1 Framework to study the impact of explicit strategy-instruction during reading comprehension lessons 31

Figure 3.2 Use of CRI and Nuttall’s Reading Taxonomy in the Preparation of Tests and Tasks 34

Figure 3.3 Reading tests at pre intervention stage 37

Figure 3.4 Pre intervention stage - administering the CRI One-to-one session 39

Figure 3.5 Summary of explicit strategy-instruction during reading comprehension lessons 44

Figure 3.6 Steps in explicit strategy-instruction during pre reading 45

Figure 4.1 Results of pre explicit-strategy instruction Critical Reading Inventory test scores 95

Figure 4.2 Results of post explicit-strategy instruction Critical Reading Inventory test scores 95

Figure 4.3 Results of pre explicit strategy-instruction reading comprehension test scores 96

Figure 4.4 Results of post explicit strategy-instruction reading comprehension test scores 97
List of Tables

Table 3.1 Question Types in Critical Reading Inventory . 35
Table 3.2 Types of pre intervention CRI questions 40
Table 3.3 Rationale and summary of texts used in explicit strategy-instruction . 43
Table 4.1 Reading habits of parents 65
Table 4.2 Parents’ perceptions regarding higher-order thinking in reading 66
Table 4.3 Breakdown of questions in the pre Critical Reading Inventory 73
Table 4.4 Results of pre intervention Critical Reading Inventory 74
Table 4.5 Breakdown of questions for the pre reading comprehension test . 74
Table 4.6 Results of pre intervention reading comprehension test . 75
Table 4.7 Breakdown of questions in the post Critical Reading Inventory 91
Table 4.8 Results of CRI pre and post explicit-strategy instruction 92
Table 4.9 Breakdown of questions for reading comprehension test 93
Table 4.10 Pre and post intervention reading comprehension test scores 94
List of Diagrams

Diagram 4.1 Participants’ language of communication at home 57

Diagram 4.2 Participants’ activities during their free time 58

Diagram 4.3 Parents responses as to whether their children ask questions when in doubt 59

Diagram 4.4 Participants’ preference in reading 61

Diagram 4.5 Participants’ ability to read independently 61

Diagram 4.6 Parental guidance in reading 62

Diagram 4.7 Questioning as a reading strategy 62

Diagram 4.8 Reading preference of participants’ parents 64
List of Appendices

Appendix A (Word List) 120
Appendix B (The Baker) 121
Appendix C (Scoring Comprehension Questions) 123
Appendix D (Nuttall Reading Framework for Questions) 125
Appendix E (Yusuf) 126
Appendix F (Stories and Tasks) 128
  Appendix F (i) (Yusuf) 129
  Appendix F (ii) (The Elves and the Shoemaker) 140
  Appendix F (iii) (Grasshopper in Trouble) 142
  Appendix F (iv) (Devi) 143
  Appendix F (v) (The Perfect Present) 147
  Appendix F (vi) (The Three Sons) 149
  Appendix F (vii) (The Raven Boy) 156
Appendix G (Word List) 164
Appendix H (Fish) 165
Appendix I (Just Draw) 167
Appendix J (Interview with Participants’ Parents) 171
Appendix K (Interview with Participants) 172
Appendix L (Questionnaire) 173
Appendix M (Classroom Practice) 177
Appendix N (Pre-Intervention CRI – Baker) 178
Appendix O (Pre-Intervention Reading Comprehension Test – Yusuf) 179
Appendix P (Post-test CRI – Fish) 180
Appendix Q (Intervention Reading Comprehension – Just Draw) 181
Appendix R (T tests) 182