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ENHANCING STUDENTS' COMPREHENSION OF EXPOSITORY TEXTS THROUGH EFFECTIVE SUMMARIZATION STRATEGIES

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Abstract: This study investigates the impact of summarization techniques on students' comprehension of expository texts, a critical skill for academic success. Expository texts often present challenges due to their information density and complex structures, making effective comprehension essential. The research highlights the cognitive processes involved in summarization, including decoding, synthesis, and inference, which contribute to better retention and understanding. Participants, second-year English major students, engaged in summarization training, allowing them to focus on identifying main ideas while filtering out extraneous details. Results indicate significant improvements in comprehension, particularly for students struggling with dense material. The study identifies common challenges faced by students in summarizing expository texts, such as information overload and language proficiency, and suggests strategies to overcome these obstacles. Findings support the notion that teaching summarization as a reading strategy enhances students' metacognitive awareness and engagement with texts. Overall, the research underscores the importance of summarization in developing proficient reading skills and suggests implications for instructional practices in education.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an interactive process between the reader and the text, requiring both a solid grasp of language and familiarity with the vocabulary and topic (Grabe, 1997). Comprehending text is fundamental for academic achievement, and expository texts—found in sources like textbooks and reports—are especially challenging due to their information density. Mastering these texts requires students to effectively distill complex ideas, making comprehension a critical skill for success in subjects that rely heavily on factual understanding.

Comprehending expository text requires various cognitive skills, such as decoding, synthesis, and inference. Success in understanding these texts hinges on students' abilities to recall detailed information accurately, emphasizing selective attention and memory retrieval.

Summarizing helps readers distill core concepts, enhancing retention and understanding. By organizing content into manageable parts, students can engage more actively with the text, which strengthens comprehension. Jones (2006) states that summarizing is a crucial skill for reading comprehension, enabling students to become proficient readers. Summarizing involves removing unnecessary details to capture the core message of the text. Initially, students may list everything they recall, finding it challenging due to their lack of skill in identifying key ideas. Distinguishing main ideas requires complex cognitive processing, as students must evaluate which information is essential or not. Often, students either include too much or too little detail. However, once they learn to focus on just the important points, they can grasp the main idea of the text.

Kragler (2005) emphasizes that summarizing is challenging for students due to its complexity, as it requires advanced processing skills. It's not a skill that students can master simply by observing a single demonstration; it requires continuous teaching and reinforcement across all subjects. Fortenberry (2006) further notes that summarizing is an activity that students engage in daily across all content areas.

Summarization serves as an effective instructional strategy for teachers and has been shown to enhance reading comprehension (Pearson & Fielding, 1991). Summarization involves cognitive and psycholinguistic skills, including working memory, language processing, and information synthesis. This high-level cognitive activity requires critical thinking and metacognitive awareness, as students monitor comprehension and reframe ideas.

Readers actively participate in the comprehension process by creating a text-based representation of what they are reading, particularly regarding the connection between summarization and comprehension. Summarizing promotes active reading and reduces

passive reading, thereby positively impacting comprehension (Rinehart, Stahl & Erickson, 1986).

Training in summarization strategies is particularly impactful, as it positively transfers to various measures, including standardized reading comprehension assessments. Several factors contribute to these transfer effects. First, summarization training enhances students' awareness of the organization of ideas within a text and the connections between distinct concepts (Baumann, 1984). Second, it promotes greater attention to the text and improved metacognitive control over reading processes, which is especially beneficial for struggling readers who tend to be less attentive than proficient readers (Pressley, 2000). Finally, summarization requires students to employ other essential cognitive strategies for effective comprehension, such as questioning, predicting, rereading, verification, and activating prior knowledge (Brown & Day, 1983).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study seeks to show that summarizing expository content enhances comprehension, particularly for students struggling with dense material. Summarization promotes retention by encouraging students to focus on main ideas and disregard less relevant details.

The study examines how summarizing impacts comprehension, considering both cognitive and psycholinguistic aspects. The research addresses common student challenges, such as isolating key points and managing information overload, and proposes an experimental framework to test summarization's effectiveness in improving comprehension.

Challenges for Students in Summarizing Expository Texts:

- Difficulty with Text Structure. Expository texts are often organized by cause-effect, comparison-contrast, or problem-solution patterns, which can be confusing. Recognizing these structures is crucial for understanding main ideas.

- Information Overload. Students often struggle with identifying central ideas amid excessive detail, which can lead to unfocused summaries. This reduces summarization's effectiveness as a comprehension aid.

- Lack of Prior Knowledge. Limited background knowledge on a topic makes comprehension and summary difficult, as familiarity with the subject helps in distinguishing main ideas.

- Language Proficiency. Non-native English speakers may face additional challenges, such as limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, which can impair their ability to interpret and condense information accurately.

Strategies to Overcome Challenges:

- Teaching Text Structure Recognition. Explicit instruction on expository structures, such as sequencing and cause-effect, helps students navigate and summarize content effectively.

- Selective Highlighting Practice. Encouraging students to underline or highlight critical information aids them in differentiating essential details, resulting in more focused summaries.

- Building Background Knowledge. Pre-reading activities, like discussing related vocabulary or concepts, activate prior knowledge and improve students' ability to recognize key points.

- Language Support. Vocabulary lists and definitions help non-native speakers grasp complex ideas, easing language-related comprehension barriers.

Hypothesis research: Summarization enhances expository text comprehension more than traditional methods.

The participants were second-year bachelor's students majoring in English at Termiz State Pedagogical Institute. At the outset of the research experiment, students completed a questionnaire covering five areas: personal information, reading habits, reading strategies, self-assessment of English comprehension, and vocabulary usage within contexts. This initial assessment allowed the researcher to understand students' backgrounds and analyze their application of reading comprehension strategies. Following this, students underwent a pre-test to gauge their comprehension skills.

Two groups of students with comparable comprehension levels were chosen for the experiment, which was structured as follows:

- Experimental Groups: Two groups were assigned to read a selected expository text and then independently compose summaries based on their understanding of the material.

- Control Groups: Two additional groups served as controls. These students read the same passage and then responded to comprehension questions designed by the researcher.

Passages from "Reading for the Real World, Second Edition" were provided to the first group, who then composed summaries that captured the main ideas within a set timeframe. Initially, they encountered challenges with summarizing; however, after working through three or four passages, their writing speed improved as they became more adept at identifying central ideas and logically connecting them. The coherence and cohesion of their summaries improved as well. Summaries were evaluated in two stages: initially, the instructor reviewed them, offering constructive feedback aimed at motivating rather than discouraging students. Once they gained confidence in summarizing, students participated in peer evaluations, exchanging their work for feedback.

The same passages were provided to the second group, accompanied by a set of comprehension questions. Within a specified time, students answered these questions. Though scanning for answers was challenging for the first few passages, they managed subsequent ones with greater ease. Their answers were reviewed in two ways: the instructor shared correct answers for self-checking, and occasionally, students exchanged answer sheets to conduct peer assessments.

All groups completed pre- and post-test assessments to measure the impact of summarization on reading comprehension.

Scores from comprehension tests and summaries were assessed for accuracy, detail inclusion, and coherence, with pre- and post-test comparisons measuring comprehension gains.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS.

Results indicate that summarization is an effective strategy for enhancing comprehension, especially with support for text structure recognition and main idea focus. The study's findings demonstrated that teaching summarization as a reading strategy effectively enhances students' reading comprehension. Additionally, the summarization training applied here, as previous studies also observed, positively influences both reading and study habits. Results indicated that summarization training significantly improved students' recall of primary information in study tasks but had limited impact on minor details. This suggests that students were trained to focus on key points while disregarding less essential information, as confirmed by the quality of their study notes. It was also hypothesized that summarization training might enhance students' attentiveness during reading, thus improving comprehension; this was partially supported by findings showing that the experimental group spent notably more time preparing for tests than the control group. Path analysis further suggested that summarization training indirectly increased major information recall by promoting extended preparation time.

The summarization training notably directed students' focus toward key information (as shown by their notes), which in turn contributed to both increased preparation time and better recall of critical details from the text. Additionally, the training enhanced students' ability to summarize short paragraphs, though its effectiveness varied with paragraph types. The training was most impactful on paragraphs where the main idea was explicitly stated. Overall, this study supports earlier research on the value of strategy instruction in reading comprehension, aligning with findings that teaching learning strategies can significantly boost students' proficiency across multiple skills (Chamot & Küpper, 1989; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Raymond, 1993; Wenden, 1992).

Statistical tests determine the significance of improvements across groups. Higher comprehension scores in experimental groups would support the effectiveness of summarization.

Surveys or interviews gathered student perspectives on summarization challenges and benefits, providing insight into engagement and confidence in handling expository texts.Comprehension scores were analyzed, and summaries were assessed for main idea accuracy, logical flow, and relevance.

The study examines how memory, language processing, and cognitive load influence students' summarization abilities, offering a psycholinguistic perspective on summarization's impact.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to assess the impact of teaching a key reading strategy on students' reading comprehension, focusing on its cognitive effects. Findings indicate that providing students with instruction in reading comprehension strategies can significantly enhance their ability to comprehend texts.

The ultimate goal of strategy instruction is to cultivate learners who are autonomous, able to manage their learning processes without reliance on teachers or classrooms. Thus, incorporating language learning strategies is essential for developing self-regulated learning (Wenden, 1998).

Winograd and Bridge (1986) argue that guiding students through reading strategies, such as summarization, can enhance comprehension by encouraging focused attention on the text. Additionally, they suggest that teaching critical strategies not only equips students with skills for becoming more proficient readers but also boosts motivation and fosters a sense of control over their learning. Supporting this, Vandergrift (2003) emphasizes that while teachers initially provide strong guidance, this support should gradually be removed so that students learn to handle the process independently, eventually making it an automatic, self-directed activity.

In summary, writing a summary or practicing summarization aids students in understanding a text by requiring them to identify the main information before summarizing. This process naturally enhances their comprehension of the content. Studies have shown that implementing summarizing activities effectively encourages active student participation in reading lessons. Therefore, summarization can serve as an alternative strategy to improve text comprehension.

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