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EXPLICIT STRATEGY INSTRUCTION AND EXTENSIVE ACADEMIC READING: REEXAMINING THE JUST-IN-TIME MODEL FOR AUTONOMOUS LEARNERS

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Abstract. *The current trend for extensive reading strategy instruction is through curricular integration with teacher modeling over time. Autonomous learners, however, cannot benefit from this form of ongoing strategy instruction. This article presents a two-hour workshop model for explicit, academic reading strategy instruction as just-in-time learning designed for 23 undergraduate EFL students participating in a five-week research intensive study-abroad program. Workshop activities presented a series of metacognitive, cognitive, and memory strategies. Participants' reported key learning points, including awareness raising of reading strategies, annotation, and reverse outlines. The findings offer evidence that there is significant value in just-in-time learning for explicit reading strategy instruction. Recommendations are made for workshop adaptation and future research.*

Key words: *explicit strategy instruction, extensive reading, EAP, just-in-time learning, L2 strategy instruction, autonomous language learner*

1. INTRODUCTION

Second language reading strategy instruction evolved in the late 1980s, as researchers and teachers shifted their understanding of reading instruction from teaching texts to teaching readers (Haas and Flower 1988; Hamp-Lyons 1985). With this shift came a focus on extensive reading, generally defined as a language teaching and learning process which involves either longer texts or large amounts of material selected by the learner with the goal of general understanding (Susser and Robb 1990). Findings from a recent meta-analysis on the effects of extensive reading instruction suggest that extensive reading improves learners' language proficiency and, by extension, highlights the value of including extensive reading instruction within second and foreign language programs (Nakanishi 2015).

Following this shift from teaching texts to that of decoding and comprehension strategies, strategy instruction has become an increasingly integrated part of the ESL/EFL curriculum, with textbooks using skill-based approaches and incorporating skill-building activities for students to practice analyzing textual features, rhetorical structures, and cultural elements. This curricular evolution stems from the persuasive argument that effective strategy instruction must be integrated into courses and modeled over an extended period of time (see Jolley 1985; Susser and Robb 1990). However, we must be cognizant of contextual constraints, such as limited teacher-student contact, which may not allow for sustained strategy instruction, but which nonetheless place significant

demands on student learning. In this case, a workshop targeting strategy instruction to improve learners' meta- and direct strategy use (e.g., use of extensive reading strategies) may offer value through a just-in-time model (Johns 2015). To this end, the following paper describes a just-in-time workshop on extensive reading strategies for ESL learners conducting academic research and the participants' perceived practicality of the workshop's content.

2. Strategy Instruction

The argument for explicit strategy instruction, whether integrated throughout a course or delivered in a workshop format, is that "knowing that" (declarative knowledge) precedes "knowing how" (procedural knowledge) (Baker and Brown 1984). By extension, exposing learners to a variety of strategies and giving them the opportunity to work with the strategies and to determine whether a particular strategy is useful (thereby increasing their awareness), necessarily comes before regular, integrated use. Talebi (2013) summarized that "strategies oriented instruction is a learning-based approach whose goal is to create autonomy in learning and increases proficiency" (435). In essence, strategy instruction provides learners' tools to add to their future tool boxes as autonomous learners

2.1. Reading strategies

Many factors come into play when determining an L2 reader's strategy use. Effective, strategic readers are those who can self-monitor their reading process, using linguistic, cognitive, and contextual clues (Koda 2005). Research findings show that learners can transfer reading strategies from their L1 to their L2 (Koda 1988, 2007), but that L2 proficiency can impede strategy transfer if learners' L2 proficiency levels are significantly below their L1 (Clarke 1980). Further, while Swan (2008) contends that explicit reading strategy instruction may not be necessary because of L1 transfer, Oxford (2011) poses that strategy transfer from the learner's L1 to L2 will not be automatic if specific conditions are not met; these conditions include a high degree of metalinguistic awareness (e.g., noticing linguistic details in both languages), as well as an L1 and L2 from similar language families.

As for reading strategy instruction, research findings generally indicate that explicit strategy instruction in reading leads to increased comprehension and language proficiency development (see Carrell, Pharis, and Liberto 1989; Strauss and Robb 1990), but that the methodology used for strategy instruction can impact overall effectiveness (Barnett 1988). Singhal (2001) outlined six criteria for effective strategy instruction in extensive reading, including: dedicated instructional time for modeling; a needs analysis to determine learner's current strategy use; cross-context strategy presentation to facilitate transfer; systematic instruction over time; opportunities for practice; and student modeling of successful strategies. The criteria reflect optimal conditions for integrating reading strategy instruction into an extended language course or program. However, the specific learning context may dictate the approach used for strategy instruction, as is the case with those programs where there is minimal direct instructional contact or which emphasize learner autonomy and self-directed learning opportunities.

For those learners not currently enrolled in a formal language course, but who are expected to complete demanding language tasks, using a just-in-time model offers an alternative to traditional reading strategy instruction. While these learners cannot benefit from extended strategy instruction over time, a just-in-time model presents information (e.g., explicit reading strategies) that is immediately relevant and applicable to their current needs in an abbreviated format (see Johns 2015). In this case, the question is whether there is value in offering explicit strategy instruction for extensive reading via a one-time workshop presentation, where students are exposed to modeling, practice, guided self-reflection, and peer dialogue on strategy use.

3. OBJECTIVES

In this paper, I present a practical model for just-in-time learning which is focused on explicit strategy instruction targeting extensive reading strategies for academic research. The paper is based on the development, delivery, and learner feedback of an extensive reading strategies workshop for 23 visiting, junior and senior international agricultural sciences students from China and South Korea. Participants were high-achieving undergraduate students, who had competitively applied for and been selected to come to a large research university in the U.S.A. to take part in a five-week mentorship with research faculty. The mentorship involved lab work and extensive academic reading in English, culminating in a research project with an oral presentation component; the overarching goal of the program being to expose promising international undergraduate students to rigorous academic research.

4. WORKSHOP DESIGN

4.1. Workshop materials

The workshop used two texts: *Harvard Report* (Academic Skills Center 2001), and *Interrogating Texts: 6 Reading Habits to Develop in Your First Year at Harvard* (Gilroy 2011). The first reading consisted of paragraph text type of approximately 250 words at the Advanced-Mid level on the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) scale. The second reading was a mixed text type which consisted of both paragraph and bulleted text of approximately 1,400 words written at the Advanced-High level. Both readings were chosen because the content addressed academic reading strategies, serving to reinforce workshop content and recycle workshop vocabulary.

4.2. Sequence

Prior to the workshop, participants completed a needs analysis survey regarding their self-assessed strengths and areas of difficulty using English. Within the needs analysis, participants were told this information would be used to design a workshop on extensive reading strategies. Open-ended student responses in narrative form also served to verify current proficiency levels through student writing samples. The needs analysis revealed that participants had a range of perceived strengths. Thirteen participants indicated reading was their main strength in English. When asked to describe the primary challenge with extensive reading, if any, twelve participants indicated vocabulary was challenging

and eight indicated that complex sentence structure was problematic. Based on their responses, participants were pre-grouped into groups of 4-5 to ensure a stronger L2 reader was anchored within each group.

As mentioned above, just-in-time learning exposes learners to essential skills that are immediately applicable. Recognizing the critical timing element, the extensive reading workshop was delivered at the end of the first week. The timing of the workshop meant that students had an initial exposure to the research requirements of the program and could therefore scaffold workshop strategies to their self-study.

Similar to timing the delivery, the workshop's design was also based on theoretical considerations. In keeping with the theory that strategy transfer occurs when learners have the opportunity to practice, the workshop was designed as a series of top-down and bottom-up processing activities (Oxford 2011), divided between cognitive, memory, and metacognitive strategies. The two-hour reading workshop consisted of the following elements:

1. Cognitive Strategies: schema activation through vocabulary and content prediction, skimming and scanning, note taking, annotation, summarizing, reverse outlining
2. Memory Strategies: creating associations through contextualization, creating summary images and sentences, identifying key vocabulary
3. Metacognitive Strategies: self-evaluation

4.3. Activities

Learners participated in four guided pre-, during-, and post-reading activities, along with self-monitoring at the middle and end of the workshop. Hands-on activities allowed for individual practice followed by small group discussion about each activity's purpose and outcomes. During activity 1, learners read the *Harvard Report* and completed guided group discussion on their current pre-, during-, and post-reading strategies. For activity 2, learners worked through pre-reading activities using *Interrogating Texts*, practicing schema activation, prediction, and skimming and scanning using only the title, introductory paragraph, and subtitles. During activity 3, each group completed a jigsaw reading (i.e., each group member read one section) of *Interrogating Texts*, and practiced annotation (or coding) strategies with teacher modeling and pair work to assist with scaffolding. While reading, learners practiced asking questions and contextualizing ideas in the margins. Groups worked collaboratively to identify unknown vocabulary. Activity 4 consisted of post-reading strategy modeling, with learners practicing reverse outlines, one sentence summaries, image summaries (i.e., sketching a key idea in the margins), contextualizing main ideas, and identifying 3-5 key vocabulary words.

The workshop did not focus on grammar explicitly due to time constraints and given the fact that fewer learners had expressed challenges with complex grammar in the needs analysis survey. However, participants received a self-guided grammar handout modeling the process to break down several complex sentences found in the reading texts.

Participants engaged in three separate metacognitive activities focused on awareness raising and self-evaluation. The group discussion following the first activity asked students to share their current reading strategies and to identify novel strategies used by other group members. At the halfway point of the workshop, participants were asked to anonymously write down on a note card: 1) the most important thing they had learned so far, 2) one question they had related to reading strategies, and 3) their biggest problem area when reading in English. The workshop facilitator collected the note cards and

briefly discussed student questions as a group. The final metacognitive activity asked learners to identify their key takeaways on the workshop feedback survey. See Table 1 for a complete overview of activities and their corresponding strategy focus.

Table 1 Workshop activity and strategy overview

Workshop	Reading Stage			Strategy Focus		
Sequence	Pre-	During-	Post-	Metacognitive	Cognitive	Memory
Activity #1	X	X	X	Self-evaluation of current practice		
Activity #2	X				Schema Activation	
	X				Vocabulary Brainstorm	
	X				Skim and Scan	
Feedback				Self-evaluation of workshop learning		
Activity #3		X			Coding	Linking Ideas
		X			Asking Questions	
		X			Unknown words	
Activity #4			X		Reverse Outline	Sentence Summary
			X		Identify Repetitions	Key Vocabulary
			X			Connections
			X			Image Summary
Feedback				Self-evaluation of workshop learning		

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Data collection and analysis

Participants provided feedback immediately following the workshop to gather their perceptions on the overall efficacy of the workshop and their key learning takeaways. Participants' survey responses were voluntary, anonymous, and open-ended. Data analysis consisted of a two-cycle coding approach. Descriptive coding was used during the first cycle of open coding to extract a categorized inventory of the strategies using lean codes. Codes were developed using a constant-comparison approach, allowing the coded data from one survey to be compared to that of another for either similarity or difference. The second cycle of coding consisted of axial coding (Saldaña 2009), categorizing the lean strategy codes into pre-, during-, and post-reading strategies.

6. RESULTS

The data analysis resulted in coding 11 separate strategies. Nine participants made broad references to strategy use in general. This resulted in the code *use strategies*, encompassing the participants' metacognitive awareness-raising of strategic reading; for example, one participant wrote, "reading actually [has] strategies", another wrote, "I should choose reading strategies deliberately when reading". The remaining codes emerged from explicit reference to a direct strategy; for example, *annotation system* came from, "develop my own code words for reading". The frequency of participant responses for each strategy is shown in Table 2. The axial codes for direct strategies are further broken down by pre-, during-, and post-reading strategies (see Table 3).

Table 2 Codes and frequencies

Codes	*N*
Use Strategies	9
Annotation System	9
Reverse Outline	7
Contextualize	6
No Highlighters	4
One Sentence Summary	4
Pre-reading Abstract	5
Use the Margins	2
Write Questions	3
Preview	2
Image Summary	2

Table 3 strategy frequency organized by pre- during- and post-reading strategies

Strategy	Pre-reading	During-Reading	Post-Reading
Pre-reading Abstract	5		
Preview	2		
Annotation System		9	
Contextualize		9	
No Highlighters		4	
Use the Margins		2	
Write Questions		2	
Reverse Outline			7
One Sentence Summary			4
Image Summary			2
Total	7	26	13

7. DISCUSSION

Participant responses illustrated a wide spectrum of what each learner found most useful. Of interest was the large number of responses encompassing the general idea of strategic reading. This supports Oxford's claim that reading strategy transfer may not be automatic

between the learners' L1 and L2 (2011), and that learners lacked the metacognitive awareness of extensive reading strategy use in the L2 prior to the workshop. The results may also support Kong's (2006) finding that L2 proficiency does not seem to predict readers' use of higher level thinking strategies, though outside of the competitive selection process for the program, there was no control for proficiency levels so this remains unclear.

The during-reading strategies were those most-cited as key learning points for the participants. One possible reason for this is that learners had immediate, hands-on practice with these strategies to help them decode meaning with a complex text, which parallels John's (2015) discussion of effective just-in-time learning as the teaching of concepts which are directly applicable. Even though participants completed the post-reading strategies, the workshop did not allow for a delayed review over the course of one to two days of their post-reading summaries or outlines to demonstrate the strategies as memory aids. The learners' perceptions of the relative utility of a given strategy may have been biased by their immediate workshop experience.

To more effectively demonstrate post-reading strategies, the workshop could be divided over two or more days to allow for delayed processing. Additional time would also allow for explicit instruction on strategies to decode complex sentence structure. This observation corresponds to the more general constraint of just-in-time learning, in that learners frequently have insufficient practice in applying their new skills or adapting these skills as contexts change (John 2015).

As with any research, the present study had limitations. First, while strategic reading is a precursor to improving reading comprehension, learner awareness and use of strategies do not mean the reader is an effective strategy user (Talebi 2013). That said, the declarative-precedes-procedural-knowledge argument, together with support from participants' feedback, indicates that there is value in explicit metacognitive and cognitive strategy training as it raises awareness in the autonomous learner about his or her own reading process. Second, self-reporting, as always, can be interpreted as suspect because of the possibility that the respondent will answer in the way he or she believes is desired. As such, self-reporting remains an inherent limitation in the current study.

8. Conclusion

Extensive reading is an integral part of any academic program. L2 students, however, may not automatically transfer reading strategies from their L1, making the reading process potentially challenging. Compounding this issue, autonomous learners cannot benefit from an integrated approach to strategy instruction delivered over time with teacher demonstration. The findings of the current study suggest that the workshop model benefited autonomous learners with awareness-raising of reading strategies, followed by during-reading decoding strategies as the key learning points. For autonomous learners with limited face-to-face instructional time, explicit reading strategy instruction via a just-in-time model may be useful. Subsequent research should examine the transfer of the workshop content to the participants' individual learning, including: 1) students' extensive reading strategy use immediately following instruction on independent reading tasks, and 2) students' continued strategy use over time.

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