

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of explicit reading strategies on reading comprehension. In this chapter, the major findings of this study will be summarized first. In addition, some pedagogical implications for ESL/EFL teachers will be provided. And the limitations of this experimental study will be addressed. Finally, suggestions for future studies on the instruction of reading strategies will be provided.

5.1 Overview of Major Findings in this Study

The major findings will be summarized first, and then the discussion will be explained later.

5.1.1 Summary of Major Findings

This study investigates the effects of the strategy instruction on EFL junior high school students' reading comprehension. It also aims to examine the effects of the strategy instruction on types of reading comprehension questions. In addition, students' use of reading strategies and their responses to the strategy instruction are also discussed. On the basis of the results and detailed discussions presented in chapter four. The major findings of the study are summarized as follows.

First, the strategy instruction had a positive effect on students' reading comprehension. In the pretest, there is no significant difference in the mean scores of reading comprehension tests between the control group and the experimental group. The participants in both groups achieve similar proficiency level of reading comprehension. Their answers to the questionnaires are also similar. They seldom or only sometimes use reading strategies to comprehend due to the lack of the knowledge of reading strategies. In the posttest, the mean scores of the experimental group in the reading comprehension tests are significantly higher than those of the

control group. This shows that the participants in the experimental group make improvement in reading comprehension after they receive reading strategy instruction. Reading strategy instruction does contribute to better reading comprehension.

Second, the study also reported that the strategy instruction helped enhance students' ability of grasping main ideas, extracting detailed information, making inferences, and guessing word-meanings from context. Therefore, students' reading performance in main idea, detail, inference, and word-guessing questions were affected by the strategy instruction.

Third, the investigation of students' use of reading strategies suggests that most of participants in both groups did not have a clear idea of the instructed strategies (making prediction, skimming for main idea, scanning for certain information, making inference, guessing the unfamiliar words from the context, and self-monitoring). They did not know how to use them before the reading instruction. After the instruction, most of the participants in the experimental group had learned to use these strategies and they liked to use them. This indicated that the explicit strategy instruction is effective in building up EFL students' knowledge and encouraging their use of reading strategies. That is, through the explicit strategy instruction, students can be taught not only what strategies are, but also how, why and when to use them. The findings imply that EFL junior high school students need to promote their knowledge and use of reading strategies, and the explicit strategy instruction proves an effective way to help them achieve these goals.

Fourth, most of the subjects in this study had a positive response toward the strategy instruction. They reported that they had learned how to skim for the main idea, scan for important information, make predictions, make inferences, and guess the meanings of unfamiliar words from context. With regard to "doing self-monitoring", many of the subjects did not acquire this strategy because they felt it

hard to think of the process while reading a paragraph or articles. Likewise, except the skill of doing self-monitoring, most of the subjects reported their use of these instructed strategies in taking reading comprehension tests. Furthermore, most of the subjects thought that the learning of reading strategies had positive effects on them, such as promoting their reading ability, arousing their interest in English learning, and helping them get better grades on reading comprehension tests. They also expressed that they liked to learn these strategies, and they liked the teaching method. Especially, they hoped that there would be more teaching of reading strategies in the future. However, most of the subjects did not agree that the strategy training helped enhance their motivation to read English. On the other hand, of the six instructed strategies, “scanning for important information” was regarded as the most practical strategy, followed by “skimming for the main idea”. Finally, several positive comments were made by the subjects to emphasize that they did benefit from the strategy instruction.

To sum up, the strategy instruction helped enhance EFL high school students’ reading ability. Besides, the strategy instruction helped improve students’ comprehension of main idea, detail, inference and word-guessing questions. Moreover, after the strategy instruction, most of the students increased their interests in English reading and had more confidence in using strategies to achieve effective reading. Furthermore, they showed positive responses to the learning of reading strategies. With these mentioned above, the strategy instruction is found to be a practical program worth receiving a focus in junior high schools’ English learning classrooms.

5.1.2 Discussion of the Findings

This experimental study shows EFL junior high school students’ extensive use of acquired reading strategies did facilitate them in comprehending the reading articles. In the past, Taiwan JHS students seldom have access to reading strategies;

they easily feel panic and frustrated when reading longer and more difficult English articles. If they are taught some appropriate reading strategies based on their needs and reading proficiency, they may make remarkable progress in English reading comprehension. Such a finding conforms to many previous studies claiming that explicit reading strategies can not only assist EFL students to comprehend passages more effectively but also benefit them in performing better an academic achievement test (Carrell et al., 1989; Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Chen, 2005).

In the beginning, the research assumes that junior high school students will perform well in main idea questions, detail questions and word-guessing questions except inference questions. However, after this study, the finding indicates that junior high school students perform well not only in main idea questions, detail questions, word-guessing questions but also inference questions. The purpose of inference questions is to tell the literal comprehension from inferential comprehension. Although junior high school students' reading proficiency is not high, they have the ability of making inference. This new finding indicates that junior high school students can deal with the basic inference questions.

Most of the participants seldom use the reading strategies before the instruction, but they use of these reading strategies more frequently after the instruction. The result also shows that the participants in the experimental group use the reading strategies more frequently than the participants in the control group. The participants in the experimental group are more familiar with varied types of reading strategies and contextual cues, and it is much easier for them to find out these cues and make use of them. As a result, the participants in the experimental group are able to access a flexible use of reading strategies. This may explain why their scores of the reading comprehension are getting better after the explicit reading strategies instruction.

Explicit reading strategies instruction is viewed as a practical teaching method.

In this study, more than half of the students made positive comments on the reading strategies and considered them effective learning method. Most of them agree that the explicit reading strategies instruction really improve their reading comprehension. They also liked these strategies instruction. Some of the students agree that learning reading strategies is a way to enhance their motivation in reading English, but some do not. One possible explanation is that it is not easy to change students' perception of language learning with such a short-term instruction because language learning, as Ericsson and Simon (1993) stated, is very personal.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

On the basis of the findings of the study, several pedagogical implications for EFL reading teachers are given as follows.

First, given that the explicit strategy instruction helped enhance students' knowledge and use of reading strategies as well as promote their reading comprehension, EFL teachers should provide students with explicit strategy instruction, in which students are not only informed what strategies are, but also taught how, why and when to use them through the stages of modeling, guided practice, independent practice at school, and application at home. Besides, in order to make the strategy instruction more effective, EFL teachers should provide high school students with a systematic way of learning reading strategies from the first year. As reading is one of the most important skills for EFL students to master, and the goal of teaching reading is to help students achieve effective and strategic reading, EFL teachers should adopt the explicit strategy instruction to help students improve their reading ability. It is hoped that through the teacher's modeling and guided practice, students gradually learn to complete a task on their own. Finally, they can apply their acquired strategies to new and different reading situations.

Second, as suggested by Oxford (1992), besides giving explicit directions about strategy use and offering practice in transferring the strategies to new situations and tasks, ESL teachers should integrate this strategy training with their regular instructional activities over an extended period of time to prevent the strategy learning from becoming a separate minicourse on language learning strategies. Accordingly, EFL teachers should incorporate strategy training into their regular English class to help students develop their long-term use of reading strategies. This may not only provide students with more opportunities for practicing strategies and transferring them to new tasks, but also strengthen students' notion of holistic strategy use. That is, teachers should not limit the strategy instruction to mere subskills training for a short period of time, but should lead students to integrate the use of reading strategies into regular comprehension tasks for long-term learning. In this way, students can learn to use strategies more flexibly to facilitate their comprehension and become strategic readers.

Third, EFL teachers should recognize that successful reading comes from an integration of both top-down and bottom-up strategies. Accordingly, teachers should not limit their reading instruction to a process of decoding the written symbols, such as the mastery of word recognition and sentence structures. Given that the EFL high school students in this study were not skillful in using top-down strategies for global reading, as Eskey & Grabe (1988) argued, EFL teachers should help students develop a stronger bottom-up foundation of basic skills to facilitate their transfer of top-down skills they had already developed in their native languages; meanwhile, they should help students devote to the top-down reading for global meaning. That is, EFL teachers should help students develop the strategies for top-down and bottom-up models to achieve more successful reading. Most of all, the goal of reading is meaning, or comprehension. Reading instruction in junior high schools in Taiwan

should not be restricted to a tedious process of teaching grammar and analyzing sentence structures. In contrast, it should be a program in which students are trained to take an active role to construct meaning by the flexible use of strategies both in top-down and bottom-up models.

Fourth, in assessing reading comprehension, EFL teachers should avoid merely focusing on literal questions. In fact, this is not real comprehension, but recalling information. Teachers should use high-order questions, such as inferential, evaluative, application, or critical questions to encourage students to actively construct meaning beyond words. Engaging students in the learning of reading strategies, especially the global strategies, can facilitate their higher-level comprehension. Therefore, EFL teachers should design pre-, while-, and post-reading activities to involve students in the learning of high-level strategies as well as assessing them both textually explicit and implicit questions. Hopefully, this will help EFL high school students perform higher-level comprehension tasks better.

Fifth, EFL teachers should help students cultivate interest and motivation for English reading. As demonstrated in the study results, students' interest in English reading was enhanced after the strategy instruction. Therefore, teachers should involve students in strategy learning to promote their interaction with texts. Once students shift from a passive role to an active role to read strategically and effectively, they will arouse their interest in English reading. On the other hand, given that the strategy instruction in this study did not help build up students' self-initiative learning toward English reading and most of the subjects did not like the contents of reading in English class, EFL teachers should be more aware of the factors they can control to enhance students' motivation to read. As suggested in this study, teachers should involve students in a long-term learning of reading strategies to improve their reading ability. The enhanced reading ability may serve as a stimulus to activate students'

motivation to read. In addition, increasing the attractiveness of the reading content by using the authentic materials that students are interested in, designing interesting and challenging activities to get students more involved in what they are reading, or encouraging students to read extensively by offering them good text resources are all that teachers can take into account to promote students' motivation to read.

5.3 Limitations of this Study

The present study has some limitations. First of all, the research explored the reading strategy of a small group of EFL eighth high school students. Each group consisted of only 38 participants. The amount of the samples was small. If there were more students participating in this study, the result could be more persuasive and convincing.

Second, to avoid imposing pressure on the participants, the instruction was integrated into regular courses and the materials were based on the English textbook, Hanlin Book Three. Unfortunately, not all lessons contained enough knowledge and contextual cues for students to make use of. For example, the dialogues and reading paragraphs in Book Three were short and quite easy and there was no sufficient contextual information provided. The researcher had to use the articles in magazines and newspapers as supplemental reading materials, which may cause great burden for both the teachers and students.

Third, although the majority of the participants gave positive feedback on the explicit reading strategies questionnaire, there were indications in the interviews that a few participants in the control group gave wild guesses when they did the task. This would affect the results of the questionnaires made by the participants in the control group.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the design and the results of the study, some suggestions for further research are proposed as follows.

First, in this study, the effects of the strategy instruction on students' reading comprehension were measured by the reading comprehension post-test only, and there was not any follow-up measure to explore students' retention of the strategy use. As emphasized by Alvermann & Eakle (2003), although explicit instruction typically generated an immediate application of a particular strategy, there was no guarantee that students would use it on a long-term basis or in a new situation. To further understand students' extended use of their acquired strategies and the relationship between the strategy use and comprehension, future researchers can conduct a related study on strategy instruction over a long period of time and measure students' reading comprehension by several follow-up tests. In this way, the long-term effects of the strategy instruction on EFL students' reading comprehension as well as their extended use of strategies can be explored.

Second, the sample size in this study is only 76 eighth-grade students in Taoyuan Junior High School in northern Taiwan. Therefore, the results may not be representative of all the EFL junior high school students in Taiwan. Third, in this study, the assessments of students' reading comparison are restricted to multiple-choice questions only. Accordingly, future researchers can use different types of questions to assess students' overall reading proficiency. On the other hand, the study investigates the effects of the strategy instruction on students' comprehension in main idea, detail, inference and word-guessing questions. Similarly, further research can explore students' comprehension in more different types of comprehension questions.

Fourth, due to the time limit, the selected strategies in the treatment are restricted

to “skimming for the main idea”, “scanning for certain information”, “making predictions”, “making inferences”, “guessing the meanings of unfamiliar words from context” and “doing self-monitoring”. Further studies related to strategy instruction can include more strategies to enhance students’ flexible use of strategies both in bottom-up and top-down models for more strategic and effective reading.