THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHING METACOGNITIVE READING STRATEGIES ON THE READING SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS OF IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

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Abstract
The aim of the present study was to examine the influence of teaching metacognitive reading strategies on the reading self-efficacy beliefs of Iranian EFL learners. To this end, 90 upper-intermediate students (50 females and 40 males) were selected in several English language institutes in Shiraz, Iran. A pre-test of reading and a pre-test of reading self-efficacy beliefs were administered to the students to make sure about the homogeneity of their reading ability and their reading self-efficacy beliefs. They were then divided into experimental and control groups based on their scores. Therefore, 49 students were in control group (22 females and 16 males), and there were 51 students (27 females and 24 males) in the experimental group. The students in the experimental group were taught metacognitive reading strategies for two months, each month 12 hours and the students in the control group received no instruction regarding metacognitive reading strategies. After the two-month instruction, the two groups filled out the Reading Self-efficacy Beliefs Questionnaire. The data were analyzed through Independent-samples t-test. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. In other words, the students in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group. Moreover, there was no statistically significant difference between boys and girls regarding their metacognitive strategies. The findings of this study imply that teaching metacognitive reading strategies can influence students’ reading self-efficacy beliefs.

Keywords: Metacognitive reading Strategies, reading self-efficacy beliefs, gender

1. Introduction
Reading is a complicated cognitive activity which is vital to the obtaining of information (Alfassi, 2004). Reading strategies have attracted the researchers’ attention about how readers interact with a written text and how these strategies influence the comprehension of a text. Research shows that readers utilize a wide range of strategies which help them with the storage, acquisition, and retrieval of information (Rigney, 1978). Reading strategies show how readers understand a task, how they perceive what they read, and what they do when they do not comprehend a text. In summary, such strategies are the processes which are used by the readers to increase their reading comprehension ability and to tackle comprehension problems.
Metacognitive reading strategies are the strategies which are specific to reading and can be classified as: monitoring, evaluating, and planning strategies (Israel, 2007). Planning strategies are utilized before reading.
They prepare readers by activating their background knowledge (Israel, 2007). Similarly, previewing a picture, a title, or a heading can help readers to understand a text. Readers can also preview the information in the passage and they can notice the structure (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991). Another instance of planning strategy is setting the purpose for reading (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991; Pressley, 2002). Monitoring strategies are used while reading a text. Examples of monitoring strategies include understanding vocabulary, summarizing, self-questioning, and inferring the main idea of each paragraph (Israel, 2007). Readers might recognize the key words in a text and focus on them. Ignoring the unimportant parts of a text and emphasizing the important parts can also be considered as a monitoring strategy (Hudson, 2007). Evaluating strategies are used after reading a text. For instance, readers might think about how to use what they have read in other situations. To put it in a nutshell, metacognitive reading strategies can be classified as planning strategies (pre-reading strategies), monitoring strategies (while-reading strategies), and evaluating strategies (post-reading strategies). There are several factors which affect reading comprehension. Researchers believe that some learners are fast-achievers in learning a language while some learners achieve the same level of ability in a longer span of time. Some learners have some specific characteristics which help them to be more successful than others. One significant factor which influence the reading performance of learners is their reading self-efficacy beliefs.

2. Review of literature
Reading is regarded as an important skill because it is a major source of language input (Ediger, 2001), therefore it is vital that students improve their reading comprehension ability. Reading self-efficacy beliefs mediate the role of learners’ experiences and backgrounds with reading on students’ reading performance. It has been found that students with higher self-efficacy beliefs have a better reading performance in comparison with others (Chapman & Tummer, 2003). According to Paris & Oka (1986), reading self-efficacy is closely related to reading performance.

2.1 Self-efficacy beliefs
Self-efficacy is an issue which was first proposed by Bandura (1977). Then in 1986, Bandura put this construct in a socio-cognitive theory of human behavior. This theory assumes that individuals are able to think about their actions in order to shape their environment instead of reacting passively. Social-cognitive theory also states that human behavior is goal-oriented. It assumes a meta-cognitive activity which means that humans are able to analyze their own behavior through controlling the conditions in their environment. He believed that self-efficacy is what people believe about their abilities to control the events which might affect their lives and also the abilities which they have in order to put together the cognitive resources, motivation, and other actions which are essential in controlling task demands (Bandura, 1989). Therefore, self-efficacy is a rather new concept in academic research (Schunk, 1994). Recent studies have found that there is a strong link between the use of strategies and success (Magogwe & Oliver, 2007). Therefore, it can be concluded that self-efficacy beliefs and the use of strategies might be related. Some researchers found that self-efficacy beliefs have a positive relationship with the use of strategies. For instance, Pajares and Schunk (2001) found that learners who believed that they managed to do tasks used more cognitive and metacognitive strategies. This result may be because efficacious students work harder to avoid failure, and they attribute their failures to their insufficient or lack of efforts. Mills, Pajares & Herron (2006) maintain that students’ beliefs about their abilities can affect their performance and behaviors. Some researchers have investigated the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and language skills. For instance, Mills, Pajares & Herron (2006) examined the relationship anxiety, self-efficacy, and French proficiency in reading and listening. Results showed that there was a positive relationship between reading self-efficacy and reading proficiency while reading anxiety was not related. And also, there was a positive relationship between listening self-efficacy and females’ listening proficiency and there was a positive relationship between listening anxiety and listening proficiency of males and females. In another study, Ghonsooly & Elahi (2011) investigated the relationship between EFL learners’ reading self-efficacy and their reading anxiety and also the relationship between students’ reading achievement and their self-efficacy. The results indicated that high efficacious individuals achieved higher scores in their reading comprehension exam than low self-efficacious learners.

In order to examine the interrelationships among self-efficacy, language learning strategy use, and language learning ability, Gahungu (2007) conducted a study on 37 college students at Chicago State University. A four-item questionnaire was used in this study which was adapted from Oxford’s (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning. Students’ self-efficacy was measured via a forty-item questionnaire and their language ability was
measured by a cloze test. The results of the study showed that there existed a positive and significant relationship among those mentioned variables. These results clarify that self-efficacy theory is of great significance in explaining students’ achievements.

Self-efficacy beliefs are context-dependent. In other words, when an individual might have high self-efficacy for solving mathematical problems, but have low self-efficacy for learning a language (Bandura, 2006). Self-efficacy is necessary for individuals to make use of all their capabilities. However, having the required knowledge or skill to achieve success does not mean that an individual has a high sense of self-efficacy. Therefore, we should raise learners’ self-efficacy beliefs so that they have better academic achievements (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). Moreover, self-efficacy is domain-specific. In other words, teachers can help students achieve better academic achievements in reading via raising their reading self-efficacy beliefs. This can be done through metacognitive reading strategy instruction. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate whether teaching metacognitive reading strategies affect learners’ reading self-efficacy beliefs. Thus, two major factors affecting students’ reading comprehension achievement are reading strategies and reading self-efficacy beliefs which are the main focus of this study. On the other hand, this study attempted to explore whether there was any gender difference regarding reading self-efficacy beliefs.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

In this study 90 students in some English language institutes in Shiraz participated ranging from 18 to 30 years of age. The researchers put students in one experimental group (N=51; 27 females, 24 males) and in one control group (N=49; 22 females, 16 males). The participants have been learning English for two years so they are considered to be at upper-intermediate level based on the institute’s placement test scores. However, in order to make sure about the homogeneity of the students, Cambridge ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) was administered to the students. Having received the results of this test, the researchers assigned students to control group and experimental group.

3.2 Instruments

The first instrument used in this study was Cambridge ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) in order to homogenize the participants. Another instrument was Reading Self-efficacy Beliefs Questionnaire (RSEQ) which was developed based on guidelines proposed by Bandura (2006). This questionnaire consists of 10 statements which is scored on a 10-point Likert scale (See Appendix). The reliability of the RSEQ was found to be 0.82 using Cronbach’s alpha.

3.2.1 Training instrument

In order to train students in the experimental group, Chamot & O’Malley’s "Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA)" (1994), was used. There were five phases in teaching metacognitive reading strategies which will be discussed later.

3.3 Procedure

In order to ensure the homogeneity of students, the students were required to take Cambridge Preliminary English test of reading. Then, a pre-test of reading self-efficacy beliefs was administered to the students again to ensure the homogeneity of students regarding their reading self-efficacy. After that, the students in the experimental group received metacognitive reading strategies instruction which had five phases. Those phases were as follows:

Preparation: In the first stage the students were informed about the significance of metacognitive strategies and in each session a few strategies were taught. In this stage, learners used such strategies in order to plan their ideas and create new ones.

Presentation: In the second phase, the teacher explained the features, application, and the usefulness of such strategies. Then, students used those strategies to organize their ideas regarding the topic being discussed in the classroom.
Practicing: In this stage, students were given the chance to practice the strategies in an authentic task.

Evaluating: In the four stage, the students were required to do some activities for the purpose of evaluation like self-questioning and reported the result after using the strategies. Then, they shared their ideas with the teacher and with their classmates.

Applying learning strategies: In the final stage, the students were encouraged to apply the strategies which they believed were more useful. Also, they were asked to use those strategies in new contexts. Finally, they were required to make interpretations regarding metacognitive learning strategies.

Having received instruction on metacognitive reading strategies, the students in the experimental group were administered the reading self-efficacy beliefs post-test. The students in the control group were also required to take the reading self-efficacy beliefs post-test to find out whether there was any significant difference between the two groups. The results of the data analyses are presented in the next sections.

3.4 Data analysis
In order to analyze the data, the researchers used Independent-samples t-test and on way ANOVA using SPSS Version 22. The results are presented in the following section.

4. Results
4.1 Reading comprehension ability pre-test results
In order to find out whether the participants in the two groups are homogenous in terms of their reading comprehension ability, a reading comprehension test from Cambridge ESOL Preliminary English Test (PET) was administered to the students. The results (t=0.764, p<0.05). An ANOVA analysis was conducted to make sure about the homogeneity of males and females. Again, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups and therefore, they were homogenous as well (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group and Gender</th>
<th>Group and Gender (B)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Group: Male</td>
<td>Control Group: Male</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>1.512</td>
<td>.894</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group: Female</td>
<td>Control Group: Female</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>1.342</td>
<td>.873</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean difference is not significant at the 0.05 level.

4.2 Reading self-efficacy pre-test results
The results of reading self-efficacy pre-test analysis indicated that the two groups were homogenous since there was no statistically significant difference between them (t=1.423, p<0.05). Also, an ANOVA analysis was run to ensure that males and females are homogenous regarding their reading self-efficacy using the Reading Self-efficacy Beliefs Questionnaire (RSEQ). According to the results, there was no statistically significant difference between males and females regarding their self-efficacy beliefs before treatment (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group and Gender</th>
<th>Group and Gender (B)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Group: Male</td>
<td>Control Group: Male</td>
<td>5.897</td>
<td>4.432</td>
<td>.723</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group: Male</td>
<td>Control Group: Female</td>
<td>2.042</td>
<td>4.067</td>
<td>.879</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The mean difference is not significant at the 0.05 level.

4.3 Reading self-efficacy beliefs post-test results

Based on the results of the Independent-samples t-test analysis, there was a statically significant difference between the experimental and groups (t=3.587, p<0.05) regarding their reading self-efficacy. But the results of ANOVA analysis indicated that there was no significant difference between males and females regarding their reading self-efficacy beliefs (Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) Group and Gender</th>
<th>(J) Group and Gender</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Group:</td>
<td>Experimental Group:</td>
<td>-.427</td>
<td>3.651</td>
<td>.974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group: Male</td>
<td>Control Group: Female</td>
<td>2.419</td>
<td>3.892</td>
<td>.961</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean difference is not significant at the 0.05 level.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study are in line with those which concluded that teaching strategies affect learners’ self-efficacy (Khajavi & Ketabi, 2012; Shang, 2010). Therefore, based on the results of the study, teaching metacognitive reading strategies has an influence on students’ reading self-efficacy beliefs in Iranian context. However, there was no gender difference with regard to reading self-efficacy beliefs.

5. Implications of the findings

The findings of this study can be used by the education department by providing students with metacognitive reading strategies courses in educational settings. Metacognitive strategies can help students improve their reading ability and their reading self-efficacy beliefs. Therefore, course should be planned in a way that students make practical use of these skills while reading a text. It is worth mentioning that these strategies must be reinforced continually so that students can use them efficiently. This would save students’ time and energy while reading and they can retain information for a longer time. Thus, teachers should understand their students’ reading processes to help them use these strategies to deal with voluminous texts. On the other hand, students should try to use these strategies consistently while reading in order that they will be able to monitor their reading comprehension.

6. Limitations and suggestions for further research

Like any other piece of study, this study also suffered from some limitations. The participants in this study were EFL learners, and since metacognitive reading strategies can be applied to every kind of text, more studies can be done with students of other majors and other languages. Also, larger samples could be investigated to make sure about the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, since this study investigated only the effect of metacognitive reading strategies, future studies can be done on other kinds of strategies and compare the results.

REFERENCES


Vol. 4, Issue 5, December 2015


## Appendix

**EFL Reading Self-Efficacy Beliefs Questionnaire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I can identify the parts of speech of the words in an English text.</td>
<td>0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I can understand the meaning of words in an English reading text.</td>
<td>0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I can guess the meaning of a word from its context in a reading text.</td>
<td>0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I can connect my real-life knowledge and text information.</td>
<td>0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I can identify most of the denotations and connotations of a word in a text.</td>
<td>0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I can find the main idea of a reading text.</td>
<td>0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I can understand the writer’s purpose in a text.</td>
<td>0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>