

MAPPING MEANING IN TEXT: HOW METADISCOURSE BOOSTS EFL LEARNERS' READING SKILLS

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Summary of the study

The impact of English as a global language on educational systems around the world and the demands for reading in English has led to the importance of reading skill in academic contexts. Hence, efforts are constantly being made to improve language learners' reading comprehension skills. Reading comprehension can be simply defined as the process of getting meaning from a written text. However, considering the various purposes for reading and different processes that are involved in reading no single statement like this can express its complexity. Reading involves a combination of cognitive, linguistic, and non-linguistic skills ranging from the very basic low level text processing skills to high level processing. Many university EFL learners have difficulties in comprehending their academic English texts because they mainly rely on limited lower level reading strategies. Over reliance on lower level text processing strategies such as paying attention to single words, translation, and looking up new words, which are regarded as insufficient reading strategies takes EFL reader's attention away from higher order strategies. Lower level text processing skills though essential components of reading, do not guarantee reading comprehension, because reading is not a single factor process rather it is a complex process requiring both low-level and high-level text processes working together interactively as part of the reading process (Nassaji, 2003). The complex nature of reading processes at tertiary levels then requires readers especially EFL/ESL readers to go beyond the word and sentence levels and expand their repertoire of reading strategies.

Recognizing and understanding the authors' message is one of the difficulties EFL learners at tertiary level encounter while reading their academic English texts. EFL learners need to know that reading is not just extracting fact from a written text rather it is a communicative act in which they should play their roles in constructing meaning. One way to help these students cope with their academic reading materials is to teach them certain rhetorical characteristics of texts known as metadiscourse. Metadiscourse strategies enable readers to engage in a dialogue with the writer and participate in co-constructing meaning from the texts. Attention to these reading strategies is largely neglected in reading classes in many EFL learning environments.

The present study set out to investigate the effect of teaching metadiscourse strategies during one academic semester. Metadiscourse instruction was integrated into the reading classes of undergraduate EFL learners. Using a quasi-experimental design students were placed into two groups of experimental and control. The experimental group received instruction on metadiscourse strategies, while the control group received reading instruction through the conventional method for one semester. Through discourse analysis of different passages during the course of this



study and following Grabe's (2009) steps in strategy instruction, the students were taught different metadiscourse forms and their functions. Each category of metadiscourse were introduced, explained, and practiced to give students metacognitive awareness of metadiscourse resources as discourse organizing and as indication of writer's attitudes towards the reader and the text.

Findings from data analysis indicated that metadiscourse instruction enhanced the participants' use of reading strategies. Specifically, knowledge of interactive and interactional metadiscourse provided EFL readers with strategies that supported a broader understanding of texts. Additionally, metadiscourse knowledge proves advantageous for tertiary-level EFL learners, raising their awareness and use of the reading strategies, which ultimately enhances their reading comprehension. Based on the findings from this study and previous research demonstrating the supportive role of metadiscourse knowledge in understanding English texts, EFL teachers are recommended to incorporate metadiscourse instruction into their reading lessons.