Effects of Awareness Raising About Reading Sub-Skills on Students' Reading Comprehension Enhancement: A Case of Woldiya College Of Teachers' Education

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Abstract

The major objective of this study was to investigate the effect of awareness-raising about reading sub-skills on the reading comprehension enhancement of students. This research is quantitative in nature employing a quasi-experimental design. Two group of students, experimental and contol with 32 and and 31 respectively students involved. A reading comprehension pretest and posttest were used to gather data. An independent t-test was used in order to determine the significance of the mean score difference between the experimental and control groups. After awareness raising activities about these micro-skills, a significant difference was found out between the learners in the experimental and control groups as (-6.821, df=61, p=.000 which is p<0.5) in favor of the experimental group. At the same time, the finding in the paired t-test showed that (t=-7.74, df= 31, p= .000) which is(p<0.05) implying a comparison of the means of scores obtained by the experimental group subjects in the pre-and post-test showing a significant difference.

Keywords*: Awareness- raising, reading sub-skills and Reading comprehension*

Introduction

In recent years, a bulk of research considering the role of awareness-raising activities on learners' ultimate comprehension and production elements of language enterprise has grown. Quite a number of studies (e.g., Elbro & Petersen, 2004; Nakatani, 2005; Saito, 2007; Svalberg, 2007; and Shu-Chin, 2011) have acknowledged a positive impact of awareness raising on learners' performances. Altman (1997:93) suggestedd that a key to the success of the language learner is the extensive employment of awareness—the focusing of attention on all aspects of the language to be learned". According to Norris & Ortega's (2000), explicit learning is more effective than implicit learning. In explicit learning, a learner should be actively involved in processing the input. The learning processes are thus distinguished from knowledge and regarded as products of traditional facts. Explicit learning implies that a learner gets involved in a meta- cognitive level. A process of performing the understanding of one's own thought involves the use of meta-language. In this respect, explicit learning implicates that the learner is capable of describing his/her thought process by talking about a particular characteristic of knowledge.

Every macro-skill (including reading) builds on several micro-skills as mentioned by Richards and Schmidt (2002): discriminating main ideas (skimming), noticing specific details (scanning), making inferences (noticing contextual clues), and making predictions (reading texts). A reading skill can be described as "a cognitive ability in which a person is able to use when interacting with texts" (Urquhart & Weir, 1998). Thus, unlike comprehension, which can be viewed as the product of reading a particular text, skills are seen

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as parts of the generalized reading process. Many different lists, taxonomies and even hierarchies of skills have been developed.

The earliest definition of reading can be traced back to Huey (1908). Huey viewed reading as gathering or choosing from what was written, suggesting that constant feeling of values which come out through effective reading. Huey was concerned with the process used to gain information from the printed page and focused particularly on the ideas represented in printed form and the means by which the mind takes note of them. Reading requires the capturing of both visual and non-visual information, which supports recent findings that prior knowledge about experience involving language – the syntactic, semantic, and orthographic elements used to create text – is stored in the reader's mind, enabling them to predict meaning. Alderson (2000) also strengthens that reading has to do with meaning. Consequently, from the above definitions of reading, the one that involves understanding or interpretation is the most important. Reading is private. It is a mental or cognitive process which involves a reader in trying to follow and respond to a message from a writer who is distant in space and time. For Harmer (1983), reading involves both the eyes and the brain where eyes receive message and brain performs the interpretation of messages received. Moreover, Ashby and Rayner (2006:52) cited in Grabe (2009) point out that "Reading is the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print" (Urquhart and Weir, 1998: 22), or, "Comprehension occurs when the reader extracts and integrates various information from the text and combines it with what is already known" (Koda, 2005:4).

Nuttall (1996) has defined skimming as glancing rapidly through a text to determine its gist in order to decide whether a research paper is relevant to our own work …or to keep ourselves superficially informed about matter that have no great importance to us. Scanning is a surface level process of reading---a rapid inspection of a text. Pugh (1978: 53) states "scanning is to find a 'match' between what the reader seeks and what the text supplies. In scanning, very little information is processed for long term retention or even for immediate action." A word attack skill is the other sub-skill that skilled language users display "word consciousness" (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts-Taffe, 2006). They have a meta-cognitive understanding of how words are built, and can articulate the strategies they employ as readers to solve unfamiliar words. Any of the strategies or techniques used by students to cope with the meaning of the unfamiliar words they face in a reading material can be referred to as word attack skills (Nuttall, 1982).

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the best predictors of reading achievement (Richek, 2005). Bromley (2004), in a comprehensive review of research on vocabulary development, concludes that vocabulary knowledge promotes reading fluency, boosts reading comprehension, improves academic achievement, and enhances thinking and communication. Most second language readers are usually hindered from adequately understanding the meaning of a reading material due to unfamiliar or difficult vocabulary items. Experts of reading believe that students need strategies that are important in helping them tackle the meaning of the difficult words they encounter in the text.

According to Ethiopia Early Grade Reading Assessment (2010), when it comes to reading comprehension, scores are extremely low, with more than 50% of the children in most regions unable to answer a simple comprehension question. The current status of students' reading skills call for significant interventions in the quality of reading instruction and the provision of reading materials are necessary. Mendida (1988) studied the reading ability of subjects and concluded that students are weak in reading. While their speed of reading is very slow, their efficiency in understanding the meaning of a text is very poor. Melkamu

(2002) studied English language teachers' reading lesson presentation in terms of the new course book for grade nine students. According to his findings, English language teachers' reading lesson presentation in grade nine was dominated by traditional practices such as loud reading, content explanation, assigning the students to read at their homes and so on rather than the communicative approach of presenting reading which was favored in the new syllabus and the new course book. As a result, there was a gap between the pedagogical procedures suggested in the new Teacher's Book for teaching reading lessons and the teachers' actual classroom reading lesson presentation practices.

In addition, different researches conducted in the area introduced varying sources of reading difficulty. For example, Andargachew (2004) reiterates that reading challenges result from teacher accustomed loud reading, lack of sub-skills practices and lack of suggestions for additional library work. Genene (1994) suggests that many students demonstrate the deficiency of the intended reading comprehension skills. He further explains that teachers give emphasis to other language skills over reading; teachers do not motivate silent reading. Reading comprehension problem then hampers students from achieving their success and meeting their goals academically.

We believe that our study is different from the researches mentioned above in their focus on the factors related to reading ability of the subjects and discovering the actual status of the students' reading ability. But this study was only to investigate the effects of awareness-raising on reading sub skills for reading comprehension development. In brief, the general objective of the study was to explore the impact of awareness-raising about reading micro skills on reading comprehension enhancement.

Method and Research Design

This study is a quasi-experimental design that has employed quantitative approach to determine the effects of awareness raising about reading sub-skills on students' reading comprehension enhancement. This design has one clear advantage over pure experimental designs, it is studied in natural educational settings (Creswell, 2003).

Participants

The participants of this study were taken from Woldia College of Teacher Education. The samples were 63(38 male and 25 female) 1st year regular students. 32 students (20 male and 12 female) and 31 students (18 male and 13 female) participated in the experimental and control groups respectively. All of them were enrolled in Basic English II (Eng 120 given in three credit hours), a compulsory English Course in the second semester of the academic year 2007 E.C. After the pre-test was administered for the selected two sections, each section was allocated as the control and the experimental group by the researcher. When the study was carried out, the experimental group received the treatment. This process was conducted for 10 weeks, hundred minutes (2 periods) per week.

The control group did not receive any treatment. The course of the study was held for similar 10 weeks. In the control group, the common practice of teaching reading comprehension was applied. The teacher told students to read the reading passage and answer comprehension questions.

Techniques of Data Collection

A reading comprehension test- was used to gather the necessary data from students. The data were collected using reading comprehension tests. The data collection was completed from March 15, 2007 to May 21, 2007.

Pretest and posttest

A common research design is the two-group pretest/posttest design with one dependent variable where subjects are not matched and may or may not be randomly assigned to the two groups (Cook and Campbell 1979). As tests can be applied to gather the required data as in the present study, two tests were prepared. The pretest was aimed to measure students' reading comprehension performance before treatment and the posttest was used to measure their performance after treatment. The following are descriptions about the nature of each test.

The reading comprehension test items of the pretest was written based on different passages about harmful traditional practices in Ethiopia and the history of football in Ethiopia. These topics were originally accessed from internet and were slightly modified. The topics are neither highly technical nor dependent on previous knowledge. The texts' difficulty level and length (one and half pages and seven paragraphs long) as recommended by experts who were consulted.

After the pretest had been prepared, it was given for fellow teachers for comments. Similarly, the posttest was also given to the same experts for evaluation before it was administered. After the pretest was pilot tested, it was given before the experiment began for both the control and the experimental groups. The posttest reading comprehension questions were also prepared based on topics about harmful traditional practices in Ethiopia and natural resources conservation. These topics were accessed from internet and deliberately chosen to make the post test as equivalent as the pretest. In addition, the post test questions were first piloted by students who were similar with the students in the main study. The researcher consulted TEFL experts to make the post test as equivalent as the pretest and all their comments were kept into consideration during the development of the posttest.

Techniques of Data Analysis

The control group did not receive any treatment during the study. Finally after 10 sessions of intervention, the post-test was given for both groups to test their reading comprehension enhancement. The main instrument of the present study was the pretest and posttest of reading comprehension. According to (Dorneyi 2007: 106), the data obtained from the study with a 'pretest post test' will be analyzed by "computing gains scores separately in the treatment and the control group by subtracting the pre test scores from the post test scores and then comparing these gain scores by using t- test to see whether the gain in the treatment condition is significantly bigger than the control condition." The independent sample test was used to compute the difference of the two populations means i.e. the experimental and the control group. Paired sample t-test was also used to test the significance of the difference between the two mean scores of the pretest and posttest of each group.

Result and Discussion

The effects of awareness-raising about reading sub-skills on reading comprehension achievement are presented in the following ways:

Table1. Significance of difference between mean scores of the control and experimental groups on reading comprehension in the pre-test (N=63)

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	sig
Controlled	31	11.0968	2.94794	1.001	.321
experimental	32	11.8438	2.97418		

Table 1 above shows the independent samples t-test of the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on the pre-test of reading comprehension. As can be seen from the table, the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on reading comprehension pre-test are almost the same. That is to say the pre-test scores (t =. 1.001, df=61, p =.321) (p>0.05) reveal that there is no significant difference in reading comprehension performance between the two groups before the treatment. The result of the reading comprehension test in table 1 indicates that the experimental and the control group obtain almost similar scores on the pre-test. The mean scores of the control and the experimental groups are 11.096 and 11.843 respectively. The table also shows that the standard deviation of reading comprehension achievement scores for the control and the experimental group are 2.947 and 2.974 respectively.

Table 2. Independent sample t-test comparing reading comprehension of the control and experimental groups during the post-test (N=63)

	Group post-test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	sig
Post	Controlled	31	11.6774	2.80935	6.821	.000
	Experimental	32	17.0000	3.35049		

Table 2 indicates the mean score difference of the control and experimental groups on reading comprehension post-test. The post test reading comprehension mean scores (t =6.821, df=61 p=.000) (p<0.05) reveal that there is a statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups, the treatment was helping the experimental group. Table 2 further describes that the control and experimental groups obtain different mean scores in the reading comprehension post-test. The mean score of the control group is less than the experimental group.

Table 3. Paired samples t-test comparing pre-posttest group reading comprehension of the Experimental group (N=32)

Experimental group	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	sig
Pre test	11.8438	32	2.97418	7.74	.000
Post test	17.0000	32	3.35049		

Table 3 indicates the experimental group paired differences on reading comprehension pre and post-tests results. The paired samples test results in the same table show (t=7.74, df= 31, p= .000) (p<0.05) that the experimental group has made a significant improvement in the reading comprehension post-test score. That is to say the experimental group's post-test reading comprehension mean score is higher than that of the pre-test reading comprehension mean score. Thus, a comparison of the means of scores obtained by the experimental group subjects in the pre-and post-testing of the reading comprehension indicates a significant difference between the pre-and post-test helping post testing. The treatment helped students to comprehend better in their post-test comprehension test.

Table 3 also shows the mean scores of the pre-post reading comprehension results of the experimental group. The experimental group's mean scores on the pre and post reading comprehension tests are 11.843 and 17.000respectively. The table reflects a higher result in the post reading comprehension test compared with the pre-test score. The standard deviation of the group on the pre and post reading comprehension tests are 2.974 and 3.350 respectively. This shows that the difference among the students' post score is greater than that of the pre test score. Thus, the experimental groups' pretest and posttest reading comprehension mean scores are significantly different.

Table 4. Paired samples test comparing pre-post-testing reading comprehension of the control group

Control group	Mean	Std. D	t	Sig.
Pretest	11.0968	2.9479	.964	.343
Posttest	11.6774	2.8093		

Table 4 describes that a comparison of the means of scores obtained by the control group subjects in the pre-post-testing of reading comprehension. The table reveals that (t=.964, df=30, p>0.05) there is not any significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post reading comprehension scores of the control group. The result, thus, shows that the control group students have not shown any significant improvement in their reading comprehension performance in the post-test.

Table 5. Paired samples test comparing pre-post-testing reading comprehension of low achiever groups

Low achievers	Mean	Std. D	t	Sig.
Pretest	10.1111	1.77859	8.59	.000
Posttest	16.4444	2.81220		

Table 5 illustrates a comparison of the means of scores obtained by the low achievers group subjects in the pre-post-testing of reading comprehension. The table reveals that (t= 8.59, df=17, p< 0.05) there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pre and post reading comprehension scores of the low achievers. The result, thus, shows that the low achiever group students have shown a significant difference in their reading comprehension performance in the post-test. Thus, the low achiever students had highly benefited from the given treatment.

Table 6: Independent sample t-test comparing post-testing comprehension of low achiever and high achiever groups

Groups	Mean	Std. D	t	Sig.
High achievers	16.3684	2.75299	1.24	.221
Low achievers	17.8462	3.95487		

Table 6 reveals a comparison of the means of scores obtained by the low achiever and high achiever group subjects in the post-testing of reading comprehension. The table reveals that ($t=1.24$, $p>0.05$) there is no a significant difference between the mean scores of the low achiever and high achiever group post reading comprehension scores. The result, thus, shows that even the low achiever group students have scored with a reduction of result from the high achiever group; their difference is not significant. Thus, the low achiever students have made improvement based on the treatment and they have more benefited than the high achiever group.

Table 7. Paired Samples t-test comparing pretest and pos-test reading comprehension of high achiever group

High achiever group	Mean	Std. D	t	Sig.
Pre-test	14.62	1.895	2.94	.012
Post-test	17.84	3.954		

Table 7 reveals a comparison of the means of scores obtained by the high achiever group pretest and pos-test reading comprehension. The table reveals that ($t=2.94$, $p<0.05$) there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the pretest and post-test of high achiever group. The result, thus, shows that the high achiever group has benefited from the treatment but the low achievers are more benefited than the high achievers.

Table 8. Independent samples t-test comparing post-test reading comprehension of female and male students in the experimental group

Experimental group	Mean	Std. D	t	Sig.
Males	16.4167	3.02890	.758	.455
Females	17.3500	3.55816		

Table 8 describes that a comparison of the mean scores obtained by the female and male students of experimental group subjects in the -post-testing of reading comprehension. The table reveals that ($t=.758$, $p>0.05$) there is not any significant difference between the mean scores of female and male student's post-tests reading comprehension scores. The result, thus, shows that female and male students have not shown any significant difference in their reading comprehension performance in the post-test. Sex does not have any contribution for becoming a good learner.

Conclusion

In relation to the first research question, the results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. Furthermore, it showed that the participants in the experimental group performed significantly in the reading comprehension posttest than the control group. The awareness-raising activity about reading sub-skills has contributed to the improvement of students' reading comprehension performance.

Based on their pretest scores the two groups were identified in order to deal with the second research question. These groups comprised of 13 'high achievers' and 19 'low achievers.' The pre-test was a 'control condition' and did not have any awareness raising activity. It was meant to identify the level of achievement of the students in reading comprehension. Then a post-test was administered that had treatments. The results of the tests revealed that both groups performed better in the post-test than they did in the pre-test. This implies that the treatment had assisted their reading comprehension in general. Further analysis, on the other hand, indicated that the treatment brought about a statistically significant effect only on the 'low achievers'.

The third research question was again to distinguish and compare the achievement of female and male students reading comprehension scores in the experimental group. The research revealed that ($p > 0.05$) there was no significant difference between the mean scores of female and male students' post test reading comprehension scores.

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