



Original Article

Fourth Graders' Perceptions of the Use of Reciprocal Teaching Model in English Reading Comprehension

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Abstract: Developing reading skills plays one of the vital roles in teaching EFL learners, especially young learners; however, not all teaching models and approaches can be properly employed in teaching young learners. The mixed-methods study endeavours to explore fourth graders' perceptions of the use of the reciprocal teaching model (RTM) in learning English reading comprehension at a Ho Chi Minh City-based international school. A cohort of fifty students were involved in answering the questionnaire, and fifteen of them participated in semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data from the questionnaire were processed by SPSS in terms of descriptive statistics, and the qualitative data from interviews were analysed using the content analysis approach. The findings showed that participants believed that the use of RTM impacted positively their English reading comprehension. They could foster the use of reading strategies and improve their vocabulary and reading comprehension ability. Such preliminary findings can help to further research to confirm the effectiveness of RTM in teaching reading comprehension to EFL learners in general and young learners in specific.

Keywords: English, reading comprehension, reciprocal teaching model (RTM), young learners.

1. Introduction

Scholars [1-3] have asserted that reading plays a vital role in language acquisition (both first and second language) in general and foreign language learning in specific. Anderson (2003) [1] highlights that reading is “an essential skill which is the most important skill

to master for most of the learners of English in order to ensure success in learning” (pp. 2). It is observed that learners can make use of reading to gain knowledge of the world. Learners can acquire knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and ideas by reading different sources. In the same line, Tarchi (2010) [3] states that reading is not simply a process of decoding or spelling words, but readers interact with texts by interpreting the information with their prior knowledge and experience.

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In Vietnam, English is one of the compulsory foreign language subjects taught at different levels. Tran and Duong (2015) [4] mention that “English language teaching (ELT) in many Vietnamese classroom contexts is found to focus mainly on the development of reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar for the purposes of passing the final exams” (pp. 15). However, although students’ reading comprehension is strongly emphasised in English language classes, their English reading results are still satisfactory [5]. It is noticed that the reading strategies are not explicitly provided in English language classes, and students are not fully aware of employing reading strategies [6, 7].

To improve students’ English reading comprehension, many studies have been done to seek effective ways, strategies and models for teaching reading comprehension. Many scholars [8-10] have confirmed Reciprocal Teaching Model (RTM) as an effective model to improve students’ reading comprehension. Although RTM has been employed to teach reading comprehension at different ESL/EFL contexts, this model seems to be relatively new to young learners in the Vietnamese context. The current study, therefore, attempts to explore 4th graders’ perceptions of use of RTM in learning English reading comprehension in the context of a bilingual school in Ho Chi Minh City.

2. Literature Review

Reciprocal teaching is variously defined. Rosenshine and Meister (1994) [11] define that reciprocal teaching is an instructional technique that directly leads students to make meaning from the text through applying meta-cognitive thinking. Hacker and Tenen (2002) [12] declare that “Reciprocal Teaching is an instructional method in which small groups of students learn to improve their reading comprehension through scaffold instruction of comprehension-monitoring strategies” (pp. 669). Likewise, Carter (2007) [13] state that “Reciprocal Teaching is characterised as a dialogue that takes place between the teacher

and students or student leader and members of the group that result in students’ learning how to construct meaning when they are placed in must-read situations (tests or assignment)” (pp. 66). Within the scope of this study, RTM can be understood as a co-operative learning which facilitates learners’ reading comprehension through exchanging meaning of the text among their peers in groups.

RTM consists of four activities, namely predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing which engage the learners to the reading [14]. Predicting is to activate learners’ prior knowledge and link it to the new content and the organisation of the text to predict the author’s messages [15]. Learners can use images or clues to predict what they are going to read [16]. Questioning is to help readers to create questions of the main ideas of the text [17]. This activity can help readers to know how well they understand the text [16, 17]. Clarifying is to identify and clarify the difficult, unclear aspects of the text (e.g., unfamiliar words, sentences etc.). In this process, students can look for a teacher’s explanation or use a dictionary to solve such problems [15, 17]. Summarizing is to let readers retell the main points from the reading then organise them in an appropriate order. The readers have to summarise the text and use the new words [15]. In other words, they can rewrite the author’s text with their own words briefly.

Prior studies [15, 18-21] have been conducted to investigate the use of RTM. Internationally, Todd and Tracey (2005) [19] examined the effects of reciprocal teaching on four students’ vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. Two interventions (reciprocal teaching and guided reading) were employed in a six-week period. The result showed that three participants’ vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension were improved, but one participant did not progress after the treatment. Pilten (2016) [20] conducted a mixed methods study to examine the effects of reciprocal teaching in comprehension expository text. Fifty-four students of a primary school in the Konya

province participated in the study which employed pre-test and post-test to get data. The findings revealed that the experiment group's reading comprehension skills were better than the control group's. In the context of Vietnam, Dao (2001) [18] carried out an experimental study to find out the effectiveness of reciprocal teaching procedure among at-risk Vietnamese-American students. The cohort of 50 fourth, fifth and sixth grade students was divided into experimental and control groups. The findings indicated that the experimental group could gain higher results in reading comprehension than the control group. Pham (2016) [21] did a qualitative study on the use of reciprocal teaching for developing reading comprehension of Vietnamese EFL university students. There were 20 first-year students taking part in a 5-week study. The results unraveled that participants improved their reading comprehension ability, and they had positive attitudes towards reading. It is noticed that different research on reciprocal teaching has been conducted, but the research on this topic in the Vietnamese context is still limited. Therefore, the present study seeks to investigate fourth graders' perceptions of the use of RTM in learning English reading comprehension at a Ho Chi Minh City-based bilingual school, Vietnam.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Context and Participants

This mixed methods study was conducted at a Ho Chi Minh City-based bilingual school which offers courses in Vietnamese and English to three levels from elementary school to high school. For the Vietnamese courses, students are taught the program designed by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Meanwhile, for English courses, students are taught in 40% of learning time at school. As for the primary school, three English compulsory subjects, viz. English (10 periods/week), Reading and Writing (4 periods/week), and Grammar (2 periods/week) are taught. Besides, there are extracurricular activities (e.g., English

clubs or school trips) for students. In addition, the school has programs "English Days" on which students are encouraged to communicate in English all the time.

The participants were a cohort of 50 students from two intact classes in grade 4 (25 for each class) who were conveniently sampled. There were 24 males (48%) and 26 females (52%). Among 50 students, most of them (84%) started to learn English at kindergarten, and 16 % of them learned English from grade 1 (14%) and grade 2 (2%). Although participants spent around 40% of their learning time using English at school, there were 21 students (42%) who took extra classes at English language centers. Most of the participants (96%) reported that their English reading ability was at intermediate level. Of 50 participants, 15 were invited for semi-structured interviews.

3.2. Course of Reciprocal Teaching Model

The procedure for using RTM is as follows. Before using the RTM, the teacher allocated one week to introducing RTM strategies and letting students watch a video about RTM class. Then, the teacher conducted the reading comprehension lessons within eight weeks. The class was divided into small groups of four or five students. The teaching process consist of 4 following steps:

Step 1: the teacher wrote on the board the expressions that students could use while they predicted, clarified, questioned and summarised. Next, students were modeled, guided and learnt how to apply the strategies.

Step 2: in groups of four or five students, the teacher or team leader assigned a role to each student such as predictor, clarifier, questioner, and summariser.

Step 3: the teacher required students to read aloud a few paragraphs of the text then suggested them to use note taking such as underlining, highlighting the unfamiliar words or phrases.

Step 4: while reading and comprehending the text, each student was in charge of different roles to help each other obtain the supported knowledge. The predictor employed his own

experience and old knowledge of the previous content to help the group guess what they read about. Next, the clarifier supported the members to find and solve the unclear words or sentences. After that, the questioner asked questions about the text and reminded the group to use all types of questions to help them have a deep look at what they read. The summariser helped the group to know the main idea in their own words.

Step 5: after the students completed a short paragraph, they had to switch the role and continued doing the same process in the next text. And, this action was repeated until they finished reading the whole text. The teacher kept guiding the students the use of the four strategies until they utilised the strategies independently and fluently.

3.3. Research Instruments

This study employed two main instruments, namely a questionnaire and interviews for data collection. Based on the reviewed theories, the questionnaire was designed as a self-reported instrument which involves two parts. Part A collects participants' background information. Part B is the main content of the questionnaire including 20 items asking participants' perceptions of the use of RMT. These 20 items were designed with a 5-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) and divided into 3 groups: reading strategy use (10 items), vocabulary improvement (6 items) and reading comprehension ability (4 items). The questionnaire was designed in English and translated into Vietnamese. For the research purpose, the interview with 4 main questions were designed to triangulate the results gained from the questionnaires.

3.4. Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

To collect the data, 10 students were invited to pilot the questionnaire, then some adjustments were made to the questionnaire. After that, the questionnaires were administered to students in person. It took them 15 to 20 minutes to answer the questionnaire. Next, 15

participants were invited for interviews, each of which lasted around 20 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and recorded with interviewees' consent.

To analyse the data, the SPSS version 22 was employed for processing the quantitative data from the questionnaire in terms of mean (M) and standard deviation (SD). The interval mean scores were interpreted as follows: 1.00-1.80: strongly disagree; 1.81-2.60: disagree; 2.61-3.40: neutral; 3.41-4.20: agree; 4.21-5.00: strongly agree. Meanwhile, the qualitative data from the interviews were analysed using the content analysis approach. The interviewees were coded from S1 to S15.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. The use of RTM in English reading comprehension

The overall mean score (Table 1) of fourth graders' perceptions of the use of RTM in English reading comprehension was 4 out of 5 (SD = 0.98). Specifically, the mean score of the use of RTM in terms of reading strategy use was rather high (M = 4.02; SD = 0.95), followed by vocabulary improvement (M = 3.98; SD = 0.98) and reading comprehension ability (M = 3.96; SD = 1.04). This means that participants perceived that the use of RTM had positive effects on their English reading comprehension.

Table 1. The use of RTM in English reading comprehension

No		N = 50	
		M	SD
1	Reading strategy use	4.02	0.95
2	Vocabulary improvement	3.98	0.98
3	Reading comprehension ability	3.96	1.04
	Average	4.00	0.98

4.1.2. The use of RTM in English reading comprehension in terms of reading strategy use

As can be seen in Table 2, it was found that each strategy achieved certain dominance in

students' practice. Participants strongly agreed "Clarifying helps [them] to solve difficult words and sentences in the text" (item 3: M = 4.46; SD = 0.79). They agreed "Predicting helps [them] to use [their] prior knowledge and experience to think before reading" (item 1: M = 4.18; SD = 0.94), "Questioning helps [them] to check [their] understanding" (item 5: M = 4.04; SD = 0.92), and "Summarizing helps [them] to learn and remember the main ideas of the text" (item 7: M = 4.12; SD = 1.02). What is more, participants reported that "Before reading, [they] try to connect what [they] know about the topic and predict what will happen next in the story" (item 2: M = 3.88;

SD = 0.80), "[they] figure out the meaning of unclear words and phrases by asking clarifier in [their] group or teacher" (item 4: M = 3.98; SD = 0.65), and "[they] discuss what [they] read from the text with [their] friends to share information and personal ideas" (item 6: M = 4.05; SD = 0.87). They could "highlight or circle key ideas of the text" (item 8: M = 3.46; SD = 1.13) and "become "more experienced after week by week using RTM in [their] reading class" (item 9: M = 3.90; SD = 0.99). Moreover, they agreed "scaffolding at the beginning helps me to have a clear way to carry out RTM in groups" (item 10: M = 4.18; SD = 0.92).

Table 2. The use of RTM in English reading comprehension in terms of reading strategy use

No		N = 50	
		M	SD
1	<i>Predicting</i> helps me to use my prior knowledge and experience to think before reading.	4.18	0.94
2	Before reading, I try to connect what I know about the topic and predict what will happen next in the story.	3.88	0.80
3	<i>Clarifying</i> helps me to solve difficult words and sentences in the text.	4.46	0.79
4	I figure out the meaning of unclear words and phrases by asking clarifier in my group or teacher.	3.98	0.65
5	<i>Questioning</i> helps me to check my understanding.	4.04	0.92
6	I discuss what I read from the text with my friends to share information and personal ideas.	4.06	0.87
7	<i>Summarizing</i> helps me to learn and remember the main ideas of the text.	4.12	0.72
8	I highlight or circle key ideas of the text.	3.46	0.83
9	I become more experienced after week by week using RTM in my reading class.	3.90	0.99
10	Scaffolding at the beginning helps me to have a clear way to carry out RTM in groups.	4.18	0.94
	Average	4.02	0.95

The qualitative results confirmed the quantitative ones as interviewees stated that the use of RTM could help them with reading strategy. They shared that the explicit instruction of reading strategy could boost their reading comprehension (e.g., S2, S4, S5), so with the use of RMT they could use different

reading strategies effectively to understand the reading texts (e.g., S5, S12, S14).

4.1.3. The use of RTM in English reading comprehension in terms of vocabulary improvement

Table 3 indicates that students strongly agreed they "can remember new words in long-term

memory” (item 15: $M = 4.04$; $SD = 0.81$) and “have chances to retain vocabulary” (item 16: $M = 4.24$; $SD = 0.94$) by using RTM. Additionally, they could “learn more vocabulary” (item 11: $M = 3.76$; $SD = 0.77$) even “difficult

words or sentences” (item 14: $M = 3.92$; $SD = 0.73$), and “guess word meaning from the context” (item 13: $M = 3.72$; $SD = 0.85$); as a consequence, “[their] vocabulary increases” (item 12: $M = 3.84$; $SD = 0.93$).

Table 3. The use of RTM in English reading comprehension in terms of vocabulary improvement

No	Learning English comprehension with RTM	N = 50	
		M	SD
11	I can learn more vocabulary	3.76	0.77
12	my vocabulary increases	3.84	0.93
13	I can guess the word meaning from the context	3.72	0.85
14	I can easily learn difficult words or sentences	3.92	0.73
15	I can remember new words in long-term memory	4.40	0.81
16	I have chances to retain vocabulary	4.24	0.94
	Average	3.98	0.98

The results from interviews also showed that respondents’ vocabulary in reading was better after they learned reading comprehension with the use of RTM. The reasons for this answer came from teacher’s and teammates’ help to clarify the hard words, phrases, and sentences and respondents’ impression with their teammates’ examples or words.

Yes, I can ask the clarifier or teacher if I find any hard words. Clarifier explains new words with simple examples so I can easily understand and remember the words. (S2)

A little bit because my friends can explain the words impressively so I can remember them (S8).

Yes, if I find any new words, I can ask clarifiers and the ways he or she explains make me have a long-term memory of those words (S10).

I think a little bit when my friends explain the meaning or examples, I can remember them longer (S15).

4.1.4. The use of RTM in English reading comprehension in terms of reading comprehension ability

The results in Table 4 reveal that students agreed that “Discussing with group members about the reading texts makes [them] have a deep understanding about the text” (item 17: $M = 3.90$; $SD = 0.92$), “Finding the main ideas of the reading texts helps [them] learn the major content of the texts” (item 18: $M = 3.90$; $SD = 0.74$). They also believed that “[they] can generate questions related the text to get its important ideas of the reading texts” (item 19: $M = 3.88$; $SD = 0.88$), and “RTM improves [their] reading speed” (item 20: $M = 4.18$; $SD = 1.06$).

Table 4. The use of RTM in English reading comprehension in terms of reading comprehension ability

No		N = 50	
		M	SD
17	Discussing with group members about the reading texts makes me have a deep understanding about the text	3.90	0.92
18	Finding the main ideas of the reading texts helps me learn the major content of the texts	3.90	0.74
19	I can generate questions related to the text to get its important ideas of the reading texts	3.88	0.88
20	RTM improves my reading speed	4.18	0.66
	Average	3.96	0.84

Along with quantitative findings, the qualitative findings indicated that most of interviewees agreed that the use of RTM had positive effects on their reading comprehension ability. 93% of the answers presented that RTM improved their reading comprehension.

RTM helps me improve my reading comprehension, be better in teamwork, and discuss with my friends to understand the lesson. After each week, I can use RTM better (S3).

RTM helps me improve my reading comprehension. It can help me learn more vocabulary too (S4).

I know how to communicate with my friends and RTM helps to improve my reading comprehension (S12).

RTM helps me to understand the lesson and to be good at working in groups because each student has his or her role (S14).

4.2. Discussion

This study has revealed some significant results. It was found that students employed the reading strategies to understand the reading texts. It can imply that the use of RTM in teaching English reading comprehension could facilitate students' use of reading strategy to comprehend the text. Among reading strategies, it was found that clarifying strategy appeared at the highest frequency, which has been supported by Ramadan (2017) [22] who has highlighted that clarifying strategy is the most useful one employed by readers to understand the reading from the small units of the text.

Regarding vocabulary development, participants reported that they could improve their vocabulary with the use of RTM in reading class. One of the possible explanations for this finding may be that participants were bilingual students, so they had more chances to use vocabulary in other courses. Additionally, participants may find it easy to learn vocabulary with the help from their peers and teachers. This finding confirmed the results in the previous studies [8-10, 19]. Similarly, Mandel (2008) [9] asserted that the teacher performing as a facilitator can motivate students to

construct the meaning of the texts. Additionally, Ahmadi, et al., (2012) [8] have stated that RTM is an effective method for students with poor vocabulary.

With respect to the reading comprehension ability, participants thought that the use of RTM had a positive impact on their reading comprehension ability. As participants had to work in groups for discussion, they could learn from one another. Besides, they had to learn English around 40% of their courses at school. This could facilitate their reading comprehension ability. This finding was supported by that from Svetaketu's (2017) [23] research which has revealed that RTM could help learners to comprehend the reading texts.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study revealed that participants believed the use of RTM had positive effects on their English reading comprehension in terms of reading strategy use, vocabulary improvement, and reading comprehension ability. They were likely to widen the reading strategies and build up reading ability through performing their strategy awareness, and they could improve their vocabulary and reading comprehension ability. Some recommendations are suggested. First, as the RTM is proved to be effective, EFL teachers should be encouraged to employ the RTM flexibly along with other teaching approaches. To do this effectively, teachers and students should attend training on how to use RTM. Second, school administrators should be aware of the benefits of RTM in teaching English reading comprehension, so they help to organise workshops, trainings and seminars on the use of RTM.

This study still has some limitations. First, this study was a survey which was based on the 4th graders' perceptions; as a consequence, it may not deeply explore the effects of RMS on the students' reading comprehension. It is recommended that the further research should be a quasi-experiment to explore how RTM

impacts teaching reading comprehension at the primary school level. Second, the sample size of this study was quite small, so it cannot be generalised to other similar contexts. The future researcher should consider enlarging the sample size. Finally, this research only involved the 4th graders in answering the questionnaires and interviews concerning the use of RTM in English reading comprehension. There is, therefore, room for scrutinizing the perceptions of the students in other grades at the research context or expanding research participants at higher levels such as secondary school, high school and university.

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