STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON EXPLICIT TEACHING IN READING COMPREHENSION IN AN ONLINE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This study examines students' perspectives of the implementation of explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies in an online academic reading classroom context at a university in Sumedang, Indonesia. The study employs qualitative research design embracing the characteristics of a case study. The data are obtained from an in-depth interview of students involved in the online academic reading classroom who have been taught using explicit reading strategies instruction for one semester. The objectives of the study are to explore students' perspectives of the role of the reading instructor, how the explicit instruction assists them in improving their academic reading, and the obstacles they find during the instruction. The data are analyzed descriptively by conducting data reduction and categorizing the data based on the three aspects formerly mentioned. The interview result points out a positive view about the implementation of explicit teaching of reading strategies and its effects on the students' academic reading improvement. The students also emphasize an essential role of the reading instructor in guiding the students to master academic reading strategies in the online classroom environment. The major obstacles encountered by the students are common technical problems like connection, audio and video as well as the problems with their fluctuating motivation in doing the online learning. However, all these problems are not related to their positive view about the application of the explicit teaching of reading strategies in the classroom.

Keywords: explicit teaching, reading comprehension strategies, students' perspectives

INTRODUCTION

The ability to read and comprehend a text is essential for living in the 21st century in which the flow of information is unstoppable (Israeli, 2017). For students, reading abilities can offer up new learning opportunities to enhance their personal and intellectual development particularly at the university level (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, Trong, & Sainsbury, 2009). Reading abilities are critical for them to produce high-quality writing during their studies.

However, numerous university students particularly those who are in their first year, experience some issues in comprehending a text especially in reading academically (Poole, 2019). Consequently, the students tend to face obstacles in their academic life. Lack of vocabulary, lack of comprehension of sentence patterns, trouble discerning the meaning of words in context, and inappropriate classroom activities are among the most common difficulties that students experience, particularly in the EFL setting (Alderson, 1984; see also Rodli, 2018).

This fact highlights the need for a more efficient instruction in an academic reading classroom. In providing a more effective instruction, one of the ways is to teach students to use reading strategies in order to encourage active reading, ease monitoring, and improve

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comprehension itself (Brown, 2017; Scammacca, Roberts, Vaughn, & Stuebing, 2015). In line with this, Onovughe & Hannah (2011) affirm that reading strategy is one of factors that determine and enhance students' reading comprehension ability.

With respect to this issue, reading instructors plays a crucial role to include strategic reading into their classroom methods. Strategic reading referred to in this context is when the readers (students) are aware of strategies in reading and understanding a text. Students are able to consciously identify the difficulties they face in understanding the text and then look for the most appropriate way to get out of these difficulties. This ultimately leads them to be able to further develop their reading skills (Brevik, 2019). When reading instructors can provide the right learning approach on how to apply effective reading strategies, students with low reading skills can develop into strategic and skilled readers (Zare & Otman, 2013).

In the effort to support the students to become strategic readers, teaching reading strategies explicitly is one technique that has been widely used. This technique is considered effective in assisting student to effective reading and promoting students' reading ability. This is also particularly required for students who struggle with reading since they are unlikely to find these strategies on their own (Pilonieta, 2010).

Furthermore, explicit reading strategies instruction is useful to ensure that students learn in a more systematic manner (Khaiyali, 2017). This is based on an explicit instruction process in which students are provided an explanation of learning aims, exercises, and feedback from the teacher until mastery of reading abilities is attained and students can apply them independently without the teacher's help (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Moreover, explicit teaching in reading comprehension is considered appropriate in helping students to be more independent in learning reading and to apply reading strategies that have been taught in the classroom into new texts (Atkins, 2013; Ballou, 2012).

In explicit teaching, there are four main stages that are usually carried out in core learning activities (see Archer & Hughes, 2011; Tierney & Readence, 1995) which include: 1. the stage of introducing reading strategies where students are given a series of examples and the teacher explains the purpose of using the strategies; 2. the modeling stage where the teacher explains clear guidelines for using and demonstrates the strategy; 3. the guided practice stage where students together with the teacher try to apply the strategy in order to prepare them to practice independently; and 4. the independent practice stage when students practice independently in doing similar exercises.

Moreover, during the current pandemic where teaching learning process cannot be done face-to-face, reading instructors should provide an appropriate approach for an online classroom. In an online classroom, students are required to learn more independently even though teachers still hold an important role to provide assistance and facilitate students in the learning process. With regards to the more independent learning, explicit reading strategies instruction seems to be suitable to use in an online reading classroom since students are scaffolded to eventually master the reading strategies through its stages since they are provided step-by-step demonstrations, a range of examples and non-examples, opportunities to practice the strategies on their own (Archer & Hughes, 2004).

Several studies that discuss explicit reading strategies teaching have been carried out in several research contexts such as at the primary level (Brevik, 2019; Iwai, 2016; Pilonieta, Hathaway, Medina, & Casto, 2019), secondary level (Fajriah, 2020), for students with special needs (Braun, Austin, & Ledbetter-Cho, 2017; Salehomoum, 2018), and tertiary level (Ajideh, Zohrabi, & Pouralvar, 2017; Zafarghandi, Hasaskhah, & Montaghami, 2016). However, there is a little research on the students' perspectives on the application of explicit reading strategies instruction at the tertiary level in Indonesia particularly in an online classroom context. Therefore, this research is intended to fill the gap. This study aims to identify the students' perspectives on the implementation of the explicit reading strategies instruction in an online academic reading classroom conducted at a university in Sumedang.

METHOD

As mentioned previously, the purpose of this research is to examine students' perspectives on the implementation of explicit strategy instruction in an online reading classroom at a university in Sumedang. In accordance with the purposes and the setting, this research employed a qualitative research design that incorporated a case study characteristic. Like a case study, this research explored a "program, process, or one or more individuals" (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). Furthermore, this research was conducted in a natural context in which the data was collected from a real events (see Creswell, 2010).

The data were obtained from in-depth interview of students involved in the online academic reading classroom. After finishing the online class via online learning management system (LMS) for one semester, six students were selected purposively based on their academic reading ability. An in-depth-interview then was conducted to each student to know their perspectives about the implementation of online explicit reading strategies instruction specifically from these three aspects: 1) the role of instructor in the implementation of explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies in the online classroom context; 2) how the instruction assisted them in improving their academic reading, and 3) the obstacles they faced in the instruction.

To obtain deeper information, an interview which involves semi-structured questions is used. Therefore, in the interview process, interview guidelines were prepared, yet follow-up questions were flexibly included depending on the response of the respondents. It provided a more flexible conversation between the interviewer and respondents as well as richer data.

The data analysis method used in this study is descriptive analysis. It was employed to analyze the dimension of the students' perspectives which covers three aspects namely the role of instructor, the implementation of strategy instruction in improving their academic reading and the obstacles they encountered during the instruction. The framework of the implementation of the explicit strategies instruction employed to analyze the data were dominantly proposed by Archer & Hughes (2011) and Tierney & Readence (1995).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, this research tries to identify students' perspectives on the application of the explicit reading strategies instruction in an online classroom in three dimensions: the role of the reading instructor, how the instruction assisted them in improving their academic reading, and the obstacles they faced in the instruction. Basically, there are the questions in the interview guideline to elicit the students' perspectives. However, in the in-depth interview process, there are follow up-questions which are posed based on the students' responses to the question in order to dig deeper information about the aspect being asked.

Before discussing the role of instructor and the students' obstacles in the instruction, the students' perspectives on the effect of the explicit strategy instruction in improving students' academic reading in the online classroom will be explicated first.

Students' academic reading improvement

Based on the interview, all respondents explain that explicit reading strategies instruction assisted them in academic reading comprehension in online context. The students consider the explicit instruction is required to help them use strategies in reading academic texts. One of the students specified that after the explicit reading strategies instruction, she was aware of the difference between reading for pleasure such as reading novels and short stories, and reading academic texts. She stated that students need some specific strategies in dealing with the academic texts. It shows that explicit reading instruction can be beneficial for students to distinguish academic reading to reading for pleasure, especially when they haven't been exposed to the academic reading strategies in their previous learning experiences. Referring to their statements in the interview, they haven't been taught to use reading strategies in previous reading courses. Based on their perspectives, they could

improve their reading skills particularly in academic reading which is, in their opinion, more complicated and difficult than reading other types of texts. It is similar to the result of the study conducted by Nordin, Rashid, Zubir, & Sadjirin (2013) that revealed that increased reading abilities are connected to the students' awareness of the use of strategies while reading.

Moreover, the students also indicated that their motivation and engagement in the process of reading increased after being taught the reading strategies in dealing with academic texts. It is similar to what Ferlazzo & Sypnieski (2018) state that some research shows that by explaining reading strategies to the students, they will be likely to be more engaged in reading activity. The students affirmed that their confidence in the process of reading also increase because they were taught the strategies in dealing with the text. This state of self-confidence makes them more engaged to reading activity.

The fact that the explicit teaching in reading strategies promotes the students' confidence might be true because of several reasons that the students elaborated. First, the process of reading academic texts was easier for them since they know the steps to use the strategies. One of the students also affirmed that after being taught and aware of the reading comprehension strategies, the process in comprehending an academic text was far more effective and faster. This fact led to the decrease of anxiety in reading. Beforehand, they felt more anxious in reading courses because they often found difficulties to comprehend the texts, in this context, English texts. Some of the students revealed some difficulties in reading English texts such as lacking vocabularies and problems in getting the meaning of the words in the texts. This is in line with what Alderson (1984) and Rodli (2016) state about common problems students face in reading. Similar to Aldreson's statement (1984), the students also assert that in their previous reading courses, the learning activities in the classroom did not suitable for them to get the reading skills required in their academic life. In their former reading courses, they were frequently provided a range of examples of texts and asked to answer questions about the text without knowing the strategies in comprehending the text easily. It might be the reason why they were uninterested to the reading courses in advance.

Second, based on the students' perspectives, explicit reading strategies instruction help them to conduct a more structured and systematic process in reading academic texts. This is obviously one of advantages of the application of explicit teaching in reading strategies instruction proposed by many experts (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Khaiyali, 2017; see also Tierney & Readence, 1995). In the explicit reading strategies instruction, students are required to go through several stages in which they are guided step-by-step to master the strategies and apply them independently (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Through careful teacher's supports in those stages, students can learn a new reading skill from the basic until the more complicated one. In the first stage, students are introduced to the skill or strategy through examples. Here, how, when, where and why the strategies are used is discussed. Tierney & Readence (1995, p. 280) assert that in this first stage, reading instructor can help students to distinguish one strategies to another by contrasting them with other skills; for example comparing "main idea with details, fact with opinion, or good summaries with good summaries". One of the students revealed that this stage helped them get new knowledge in contrasting different kinds of strategies so that their awareness of the strategies was even more improved. The next stage, modeling stage, include the demonstration of the use of the strategies. In this case, students are provided procedures to use the skills. Afterwards, the students are given guided practice. In this stage, students along with the instructor practice the skills together in order to prepare the students for independent practice. At this point, discussion between instructor and students occurs to further find out students who find any difficulty practicing the skill or strategy. Feedback for students are also provided by the instructor to help them cope with the difficulty. The provision of feedback in this stage for students can minimize the trouble in the next stages or when the students try to apply the strategy outside the classroom. It is stated that a "carefully structured lessons that include guided and supported practice result in higher levels of student success" (Archer & Hughes, 2011, p.22). Moreover, the next stage is the independent practice stage where the students are given a task to practice the skills independently. This stage is aimed at preparing the

students to apply the strategies outside the classroom. In this stage, the reading instructor still provides feedback when the students face difficulty in applying the skills.

Furthermore, the interview revealed that the explicit teaching of reading strategies was considered useful in the students' academic life in general. They affirm that the strategies have been taught in the online reading course can be used in some other courses which require them to read many academic texts (journal articles and books) or write an essay or mini-research. They stated that they have been helped to manage their time in reading a lot of articles so that they can work more efficiently to do the assignments in other courses. Even though they said that they found out many more challenging reading texts than what they have been given in the reading course, they claimed that the reading process is more easily to do. This result is in line with one of the aim of explicit strategies instruction particularly the modeling stage which is to prepare them to deal with a range of more complicated texts (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2018). About this point, the students even could determine the most beneficial strategies in certain reading contexts they have faced, for example in composing an essay. Many of them considered that strategies in determining main ideas and summarizing were the most useful strategies in writing their essay as they have to read a lot of references and paraphrase the result of their reading into their writing.

The role of reading instructor

With regards to the role of the instructor in the explicit strategies instruction, all the students agreed that the role of instructor is inevitably critical for them in the reading instruction. They considered that even though they conducted an online reading instruction which required them to be more independent in learning, they still needed the guidance and support from the instructor in the teaching learning process.

They affirmed that the role of instructor was to guide them through the stages of the instructions. As mentioned earlier, in explicit teaching reading strategies instruction, there are four main stages (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Tierney & Readence, 1995) that should exist in the teaching learning process. In those four stages, reading teacher or instructor plays an important part. In the first stage, the instructor should introduce and explain reading skills. In the modeling stage, teacher involves in demonstrating the use of strategies and give a step-by-step guideline in using the reading strategies. In the guided practice stage, teacher have to assist students to practice the reading skills together. At this point, teachers should work with students to identify how they go about applying the skills and what problems may emerge. Additionally, teacher also gives feedback when the students face difficulties (Pearson & Dole, 1987). Finally, in the independent practice stage, teacher still also plays an important role in giving feedback. It can be conclude that the primary responsibility of the instructor in explicit strategies instruction should be to assist students in constructing their own knowledge in reading as the result of the practical activities in all those stages (Archer & Hughes, 2011)

Based on the interview, one of the students asserted that the role of teacher is irreplaceable since they are unlikely to fully understand the strategies in reading comprehension without the teacher's involvement, especially in learning new skills or strategies. Most students agreed that there were several parts of the reading strategies lesson that is unlikely to be understood if the teacher did not explain in more details. In some cases, students also need the teacher(s) to clarify some complicated points in the teaching learning process especially when they face difficulties in applying the skills.

Some of the students also claimed that they have audio and audio visual learning style so that they need to listen to and/or see in order to absorb the information well. In the context of the present research, the students were provided synchronous and asynchronous instruction. In synchronous one, these students could listen to and see their teacher directly in the online meeting room. Meanwhile, in the asynchronous one, students are given instructional videos made by the teacher with regards to the explanation of the reading strategies. It is also stated by one of the students that she really needed the explanation of the strategies, especially for a more sophisticated skills. The student stated that when she was presented a comprehensive explanation from the teacher, she could fully understand skills.

Not only that, all students also regarded that in many parts of the teaching learning process, particularly when they found difficulties, they needed feedback from the instructor. In accordance to this, Archer & Hughes (2011) state that when necessary feedback is not provided, many students struggle in the learning process. Specifically speaking, in an online classroom like this research context, the feedback could be given directly when the online meeting done synchronously (for example through conference meeting platform). This can be the case when the students also asked for clarification at the time of the online conference meeting. In addition, when the students asked for feedback in the asynchronous meeting, the instructor could provide it through a brief instructional video. Considering this fact, the role of the teacher in the explicit instruction is considered exceptional in presenting material, giving necessary guidance and feedback.

The obstacles in online classroom context

In the learning process using the explicit reading strategies instruction, the students must face obstacles or difficulties let alone the online classroom context. The result of the interview revealed that all students experienced many temporary technical problems such as poor connection and troubles on the devices (such as audio and video problems) they used for the online learning. Certainly, these kinds of obstacles cannot be avoided in online classroom context. It is in line with the result of the research from Windiarti, Fadilah, Dhermawati, Pratolo (2019) that technical problems is one of the major obstacles in online learning. This obstacle may obstruct the teaching learning process. It is stated by the students that technical problems definitely hinder their comprehension of the strategies being taught by the instructor, especially when the meeting conducted synchronously through conference meeting platform (such as *Zoom* and *Google Meet*). Occasionally, they lost some parts of the instructor's explanation.

Additionally, because of the technical problems, they also encounter difficulties in asking for clarification or feedback from the instructor. This led to the fact that a few students keep their questions without trying to ask the instructor in the following time, outside the classroom or in the next meeting. This might also become the reason why some students cannot master the reading skills or strategies comprehensively. Since explicit reading strategies instruction has four main stages in which students are guided to master the reading skills step-by-step, the point that the students face this kind of difficulties might also affect the effectiveness of the instruction.

The next obstacle frequently encountered by the students is their fluctuating motivation in doing the online learning. Some students said that at times, their motivation in online classroom decrease because of many unclear reasons. This is relevant to what Dhawan (2020) affirms that for students, sometimes, online learning may be uninteresting. He asserts that a great time flexibility in online learning may be the reason underlying this issue. Consequently, the students often regard it difficult to find a time to do it. In this case, the students stated that they need to be motivated regularly by the instructor to gain their motivation back. Moreover, two students also revealed that their individual consideration and attention is required in keeping their learning motivation. Some of the students also confirmed that they expect a two-way interaction with the instructor in online learning. However, this is sometimes difficult to implement with many limitations faced by both students and instructor.

Referring to the issues mentioned above, it is understandable that the implementation of the explicit reading strategies instruction did not achieve its best potential results. Regarding this, it is suggested that reading instructors provide various teaching strategies to give the students more flexibility and convenience in online classroom context, for example by using different types of learning websites to create more attractive classroom activities.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of the study were to examine students' perspectives of the implementation of explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies in an online

classroom context. With this regards, three aspects of the students' perspectives were explored: 1) how the explicit instruction assists the students in improving their academic reading; 2) the role of the reading instructor in guiding the students; and 3) the obstacles they found during the instruction. The findings pointed out a positive view of the students towards the implementation of explicit teaching of reading strategies and its positive effects on the students' academic reading improvement. The students also highlighted an essential role of the reading instructor in assisting them to master academic reading strategies in the online classroom environment, more specifically in presenting the material, demonstrating the strategies and giving necessary feedback and support. Moreover, the major obstacles encountered by the students are common technical problems like connection, audio and video as well as the problems with fluctuating motivation in doing the online learning. However, the students fully realized that all these problems did not affect their positive view about the application of the explicit teaching of reading strategies in the classroom. The insights from the results of this study could be useful for reading instructor in designing a systematic reading comprehension instruction in online classroom context. However, to get a more comprehensive result, it is suggested that further studies be conducted quantitatively to see whether explicit instruction significantly improve students' reading comprehension.

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