



# Investigating the immediate and delayed effects of multiple-reading strategy instruction in primary EFL classrooms

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## ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at investigating the immediate and delayed effects of a multiple-strategy instruction on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' reading performance. The sample of the study consisted of 99, 11–12 year old, Greek-speaking EFL learners. The study, quasi experimental in design, involved an experimental group that received a three-month strategy instruction set within the Direct Explanation framework and a control group that received no such training but participated in the pretest, immediate and delayed posttest measurements. The results of the study indicated that the students in the experimental group improved their reading performance both in the immediate and delayed posttest measurements as compared to the students in the control group. Empirical evidence is provided regarding the effectiveness of explicit multiple-strategy training in EFL contexts with young, school-aged students. Educational implications and recommendations for further research are also discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the late 1970s, research has shown that skilled readers are active readers, have clear goals in mind, are highly aware of a number of strategies and use them to monitor and facilitate comprehension (e.g., N. J. Anderson, 1991; Erler & Finkbeiner, 2007; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001; Zhang & Wu, 2009). A considerable amount of second language (L2)<sup>1</sup> reading research, drawing on the studies examining the strategies deployed by skilled and less-skilled readers while interacting with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) written texts, has also investigated the impact of conducting multiple-strategy instruction on students' performance in an attempt to help less proficient L2 readers improve comprehension (Grabe, 2009; Koda, 2005).

Although there is some empirical evidence for the effectiveness of multiple-strategy instruction on EFL readers' performance or strategy use, there is a dearth of studies exploring the maintenance of comprehension gains after intervention withdrawal; the assumption that the maintenance of comprehension gains should constitute one of the main aims of strategy instruction programmes is supported by researchers (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 2011; Plonsky, 2011). Additionally, L2 researchers (e.g., Chamot, 2005; Macaro & Erler, 2008) accentuated the need for further intervention studies involving younger, school-

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<sup>1</sup> The researchers are aware of the difference between a FL and L2 (Oxford, 2003). In this paper, however, they adopt the terms L2 and EFL, as they are widely used in the literature.

aged students, as most studies involved older, university or college students. Meanwhile, there is a lack of focus on the reading comprehension skill in classrooms, which is often regarded as a tool for exposing learners to vocabulary (Dobson, 1998; Grenfell, 1992; Janzen, 2007; Manoli & Papadopoulou, 2013).

Regarding the Greek socio-educational context, which the present study focuses on, EFL teachers were found to use rather traditional and teacher-centered reading instruction patterns mainly focusing on readers' passive text interaction and word mastery (Manoli & Papadopoulou, 2013). Moreover, no study has ever focused on implementing multiple-reading strategy instruction, while a few studies have investigated the effectiveness of conducting individual reading strategy instruction providing positive results (Hatzitheodorou, 2005; Pappa, Zafropoulou, & Metallidou, 2003; Rizouli, 2013). For these reasons, the present study investigated the immediate and delayed effects of implementing multiple-strategy training within the context of EFL primary classrooms in Greece.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Language learning strategies, reading strategies and reading comprehension

Language learning strategies are considered complex cognitive procedures the learner consciously uses during learning to select, acquire, organize or integrate new knowledge (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). They support that, since learning strategies are viewed as complex procedures that learners apply to tasks to facilitate learning, such as vocabulary learning or language comprehension and production, they can be taught through the cognitive, associative and autonomous stages of learning; like other procedural skills, learning strategies are intentionally used in the early stages of learning, the cognitive and associative stages, until they are applied automatically in the autonomous stage.

Based on the above cognitive framework, Chamot and O'Malley (1987, 1996) developed the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA), an instructional model designed to foster students' achievement in English as a Second Language (ESL) by focusing on explicit language learning strategy instruction. It includes a five-phase instructional sequence: a) preparation, b) presentation, c) practice, d) evaluation, and e) expansion, where strategies in the form of declarative knowledge are explicitly taught, practised and evaluated to help turn this knowledge into procedural gradually. Concurrently, though there are a number of strategy classifications throughout the literature (e.g., Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 2011), O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classified strategies into: (i) cognitive, such as organization, inferencing, summarizing, and elaboration, which contribute to L2 processing input; (ii) metacognitive, such as monitoring or evaluating comprehension, which help learners organize, monitor, and assess their own learning; and (iii) social/affective strategies, such as working with peers, questioning for clarification or self-talking, which facilitate interaction with others and control of feelings in L2 learning.

Reading comprehension, particularly, is viewed as a complex multifaceted cognitive skill drawing on many knowledge sources and strategies ranging from decoding to integrating of text ideas with the reader's prior knowledge, which intricately interact to yield comprehension (Grabe, 2009; Koda, 2005). Reading strategies are considered to be "intentional actions chosen to facilitate reading at any level of processing" (Erler & Finkbeiner, 2007, p. 189).

L2 reading research indicated that proficient readers use more and different types of strategies depending on the nature of the task as compared to their poor counterparts who use either fewer strategies or strategies that are inappropriate for the task (N. J. Anderson, 1991; Geladari, Griva, & Mastrothanasis, 2010; Malcolm, 2009; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001; Zhang & Wu, 2009). This line of research has led to investigating the impact of strategy instruction on students' performance in an attempt to help less proficient L2 readers improve comprehension (Koda, 2005). More recent trends in L2 reading research focused on conducting multiple-strategy instruction rather than individual strategy instruction highlighting that strategic readers draw on a repertoire of strategies, perceive the nature of the problem, choose the appropriate strategies and orchestrate their use with other strategies according to the purpose of reading (Grabe, 2009).

### 2.2. Strategic reading instruction

Successful strategy use cannot be achieved simply as a result of reading but should be integrated in the reading instruction process through explicit teaching of the reasoning associated with strategy use (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009). This requires long periods of time and extensive practice in various reading situations (Carrell, 1998). Explicit strategy teaching is intentional and involves a cycle of direct strategy explanation, modeling, guided and independent practice to raise students' metacognitive awareness of the reading process and help them become efficient and strategic readers (Duffy, 2002; Grabe, 2009; Oxford, 2011). Metacognitive awareness during the reading process refers to the readers' metacognitive knowledge of the nature and purpose of reading and the self-control mechanisms they use to control comprehension (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). Metacognitive awareness of reading strategies comprises declarative knowledge (knowledge of what strategies are effective to enhance comprehension), procedural knowledge (knowledge of how strategies can be applied), and conditional knowledge (knowledge of why, when, and where each strategy should be applied to achieve the particular reading goal).

Good readers are metacognitively aware and strategic readers before, during and after the reading process (Pressley & Gaskins, 2006). Before reading they preview the text and form a plan about what to expect and how to read it. During the reading process, they monitor the process and adjust the reading speed by reading quickly or slowing and re-reading the difficult and/or important parts. They deliberately apply cognitive strategies, such as note taking or looking for the main ideas.

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