

The Effects of Reading Strategy Instruction on Japanese EFL Students' Lexical Inferring:
An Analysis of Written Recall Protocols

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This study examined the effectiveness of reading strategy (RS) instruction for Japanese EFL students, focusing on the contextualized vocabulary inferring strategy and the training of that strategy. The contextualized lexical inferring strategy is one of the most effective reading strategies that can be taught. As the Exam Review Committee Report issued by National Center for University Entrance Examinations suggested, high school students should acquire this strategy. This study focused on the relationship between this strategy and the reading comprehension of high school students.

The participants were 89 third-year high school students. On the basis of the assumption that the use of the lexical inferring strategy is influenced by the student's vocabulary size, students were divided into two groups, i.e., the larger vocabulary size group (LVG) and the smaller vocabulary size group (SVG), according to the results of a vocabulary size test. The instruction was based on five steps of the inferring strategy procedure proposed by Clarke and Nation (1980).

To investigate the types and frequency of the strategies students judged that they used when reading passages, questionnaire surveys were conducted before and after the training session. During the training, five written recall tests were given to identify the actual use of the strategies and the effects of the strategy instruction.

Research questions were followings: (1)What changes are observed in students' perception of the RS use after instruction? Is the change of their perception affected by their vocabulary size? (2)Does their perception of strategy use match the actual reading process they show in written recall tests? Does their vocabulary size bring different results?

The comparisons of the scores obtained from the pre and post questionnaires showed significant differences in the strategies for contextualized vocabulary inferring, the use of formal schema, and understanding the text without translating into Japanese. First, the use of contextualized vocabulary inferring was improved only

for the SVG students after the strategy instruction. Second, the students' perception of formal schema use was significantly improved regardless of their vocabulary size. Third, regarding the strategy of understanding the text without translation, the significant improvements for the vocabulary size and pre/post instruction, respectively.

The analysis of the five written recall tests scores showed that the correlations between vocabulary size and 5 written recall tests scores became gradually milder during this study. This result suggests that the instruction contributed to the improvement of the SVG's reading comprehension in particular and minimized the discrepancy of reading performance between the two groups. However, there was no strong correlation between the use of each strategy as described by the students in the post questionnaire and the scores in the written recall tests.

In addition, written recall tests scores were qualitatively analyzed. The analysis of the interpretations of the unknown word showed that the strategy instruction was especially effective for students with smaller vocabulary sizes. SVG students, due to their smaller vocabulary sizes, relied more on the strategies taught in the training session, which as a result compensated for the discrepancy in the vocabulary

knowledge between the two groups. On the other hand, some of the LVG students were likely to guess the meaning of a word, relying too much on their vocabulary knowledge, and they ended up with the wrong interpretations of the unknown word.

Based on the findings above, this study resulted in the following findings: (1) Explicit strategy instruction raises students' awareness about strategy use and enhances the frequency of students' strategy use, and (2) students' vocabulary size has an influence on the effectiveness of strategy instruction.

This study yielded some implications for classroom practice: (1) Materials used for strategy instruction should be carefully selected in accordance with students' vocabulary size. (2) Teacher should consider accessibility of the text structure for students. The expository text, which implies a clear cause-and-effect relationship or comparison-and-contrast organization, is more appropriate for strategy training. (3) RS should be utilized flexibly to meet the purpose of reading. Some modification of the strategies is sometimes needed to accommodate students' reading ability or the degree of text difficulty. Both vocabulary building and strategy use will definitely contribute to the improvement of students' reading ability.

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