

RETHINKING THE READING PATH: PDP STRATEGIES FOR COMPREHENSION AND REFLECTIVE JOURNALING

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Abstract

In recent decades and beyond, there has been a global focus on the significance of reading. This is because reading is seen not only as a means to expand one's knowledge, culture, and language, but also as a way to improve critical thinking, express personal ideas, share knowledge, and offer perspectives based on the material being read. Consequently, various methods and techniques have been proposed to make the teaching of English as a Foreign Language in the context of reading more engaging. With this in mind, this article aims to explore the impact of PDP reading strategies on the students' reading comprehension and reading response journal writing. It is hypothesized that the implementation of PDP reading strategies in reading narrative books in a reading class would enhance the students' reading comprehension and would smooth the reading response journal writing. With the intention of meeting with the research's aims, the descriptive correlational design is applied and two main tools are selected: the structured observation and the questionnaire. One group out of five First year students of English, in the department of English at the University of Kasdi Merbah, Ouargla, within the academic year 2022/2023, was the sample that was given a pre questionnaire before the classroom observation with the intention of having an idea about the students' insights towards reading in general; their reading preferences and their reading frequency together with gathering information about the students' perceptions and views about the subject of reading. Then, during the classroom observation that took five weeks, the sample was observed with the purpose of having an idea about the the impact of PDP reading strategies on the students' reading comprehension and reading response journal writing. The students were provided with an overview of reading comprehension and reading strategies, specifically the PDP, and were guided to write their own reading response journal after having read the novel of the Alchemist of Paulo Coelho within one month. After that, the post questionnaire was conducted and administered with the intention of surveying the students' views about the impact of the PDP reading strategies on their reading comprehension skills and the PDP reading strategies effectiveness in enhancing them write their reading response journal. The analysis of the results obtained from both the questionnaire and the classroom observation go hand in hand with the research's aim and affirm that the PDP reading strategies do enhance students' reading comprehension and reading response journal writing.

Key words: PDP, Reading response journal, reading strategies.

I. The Theoretical Part

I.1. Introduction

One of the prominent elements of reading is comprehension that stands for the ability to understand and interpret written texts effortlessly. Even though the process of understanding and interpreting sounds plain, yet the act of comprehension, in fact, involves complex cognitive processes that go further than decoding written symbols to build meaning. Foreign language teachers, around the globe, are in a constant attempt to improve their students' reading skills through the implementation of various strategies and activities in their reading classes. One of the reading strategies that is drawn attention to recently is the PDP for it is designed with the intention of smoothing the reading process through the implementation of various activities that boost the student's comprehension, and enhance their creativity and learning centeredness, namely, the writing of the reading response journal.

I.2. What is reading

Due to the importance given to the reading skill, a myriad of definitions is put forward with the intention of facilitating the understanding of the concept of reading.

According to Smith (1973:2), reading “is an act of communication in which information is transferred from a transmitter to a receiver.” That is to say, in reading, writers are to be the transmitters of the message, while the readers are to be the receivers of the message, and the act of reading, here, is perceived as being the passage through which the message is transmitted. (Aguilar, 2003)

Reading, as explained by Cain (2010:2), “is much more than a single skill, it engages the harmonization of a series of abilities, strategies, and knowledge.” To put it differently, in reading, there is a sort of synchronicity between the reader’s abilities, strategies, and knowledge.

Nunan (1991; ac cited in Vaezi, 2005) defined reading as decoding written symbols in their aural corresponding form in order to create meaning from the text. In the same vein, Goodman (1976) highlights that reading is a psychological guessing game where the reader is supposed to decode what is said and make guesses in order to understand the author’s intention.

I.3. Reading comprehension strategies

I.3.1. Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is best understood as the process through which the recognized words are transmitted into a meaningful idea (Hoover and Gough, 1990). In simpler terms, reading comprehension is the capacity to construct a meaning after decoding the written symbols.

According to McNamara (2007:7), Reading comprehension strategies are defined as being “cognitive or behavioral action[s] that [are] enacted under particular contextual conditions, with the goal of improving some aspect of comprehension”. There are many reading comprehension strategies, yet, in this article, the PDP reading strategies are put under scrutiny. They are: Pre-reading, During reading, and Post reading.

I.3.2. PDP reading strategies

When the Pre-reading strategies, as explained by Medina (2008:26) aim at “prepar[ing] the [readers] for a reading selection, or giv[ing] them the first steps in order to develop skills in anticipation and prediction for the reading, activating background knowledge so they could later interact with the text”, the During reading strategies are intended to “help [readers] to understand the specific content and to perceive the rhetorical structure of the text” (Celce-Murcia, 1991 ; in Medina, 2008). That is to say, readers, in this stage learn how to interact with the text they read.

In post-reading, readers are to verify and expand the knowledge acquired in the reading. These last tasks also lead the learners to discuss and analyze the issues presented in the reading. (Medina, 2008)

I.4. What is a reading response journal?

A reading response journal is a journal where learners provide information about their at home reading experiences. The journal entries highlight the relationship between the reading material and the reader’s life experiences, views, emotions, etc. (Bouguebs, 2018)

In a reading response journal, learners communicate, in writing, not only information about the material they read, but their attitudes and emotions towards this latter, as well. This very task is referred to as “the reading response”.

The reading response is produced in relation to the type of reading materials being read. There are two reading material types: expository and narrative.

The expository text is an informational text that aims to persuade the readers by arguing one side of an issue based on the on cognitive analysis and the subsequent synthesis of complex facts. Expository texts typically follow one of five formats: cause and effect, compare a contrast, description, problem and solution, sequence. The narrative texts, however, tell a story where the succession of events is arranged in chronological order.

In order to write an effective reading response journal, the reader should use in the response journal sheet the PDP strategies in order to facilitate the writing process.

I.4.1.Pre reading

The Pre reading strategies involve four main elements: previewing, predicting, skimming, and scanning.

- **Previewing** means activating prior knowledge and gathering information about the material that is supposed to be read and getting an idea about it before reading it.
- **Predicting** is anticipating information and events in the text, story, or novel. It is guessing what will happen next in the material being read.
- **Skimming** is reading rapidly in order to get a general overview of the material being read (the back-page blurb, for example).
- **Scanning** is reading rapidly in order to find specific information (figures, names, dates, places, etc).

The reader should include in the response journal sheet information about the following:

The Book title, author's name, date and place of publication, number of pages, the author's biography, and the book cover description.

- What this book will be about?
- What does the title tell me?
- What do I already know about the topic?
- What do you predict will happen in the story? What information from the cover or the title helped you make that prediction?

According to Konstant (2003:11-3): "there is a vast amount of information that you can glean from [...] your preview". Here are some ideas about what readers should be looking for during the pre reading stage: the book cover, the back page blurb, the inside flaps, the foreword, table of content, graphics, pictures, and cartoons, tables, index, glossary, bibliography, etc.

I.4.2. During Reading

In the during reading stage, readers are to list the story elements such as:

- The story setting,
 - Characters: major and minor, round and flat
- Conflict: internal or external, the character's conflict with himself, or his conflict with another character
- Plot (exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution),

In the during reading stage, readers may ask and answer the following questions:

- a. Emotions – Why does the section or the whole book resonate with you?
- b. Characters – Who is involved? Why is he/she involved?
- c. Language – What do you notice about the choice of words? What literary tools does the author use to enhance the section and how does it affect the story, characters, scene, etc?
- d. What else do you find interesting? What are you confused about? What don't you like?

One key element in the during reading stage is the plot diagram. In the plot diagram, readers ought to organize the events in line with five main elements. They are:

1. **Exposition:** beginning of the story where characters and setting are introduced.
2. **Rising action:** where the main character faces a series of conflicts.
3. **Climax:** when the problem reaches a high point.
4. **Falling action:** events leading to the end of the story when the main character works to solve the problem.
5. **Resolution:** the outcome of the conflict.

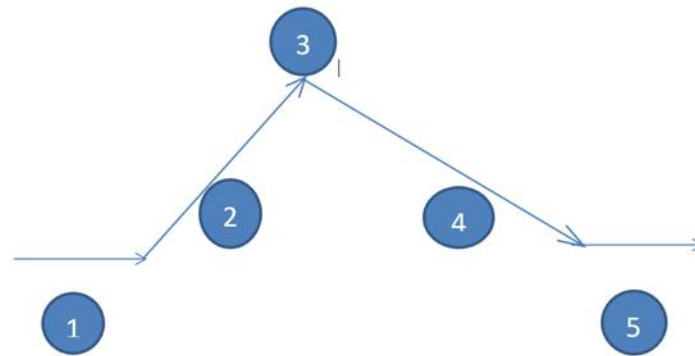


Fig. I.1. The Pot Diagram

I.4.3. Post reading

The Summary of the Reading: this part should involve a concise summary and analysis of the book and any main points the author seems to make. In a summary, readers should consider the following points:

- Address what the main thesis is for the reading. What is the reading about, and why did the author write the text?
 - Acknowledge any conclusions or commentary/arguments the author arrives at.
 - State one or two quotes that you like the most.
3. Respond to the reading with your own commentary.

The second half of a journal response should be the reader's commentary on the text. In this part, s/he expresses his opinion about the book and any arguments or conclusions s/he believes are present in the text. While the summary focuses on the "What" of the reading, the response should focus on the "Why."

- Describe the main character(s) in the story.
- What word best describes the main character(s)?
- How is the main character in this story similar and/or different to a character in another story you have read?
- What is the main problem in the story? How was the problem solved?
- What is the theme of the story? What other stories have you read with a similar theme?
- What is the moral of the story?
- What are the new words that you have learnt?
- Mention the quotes that you believe are inspirational.

II. The Practicle Part

II.1. Introduction

The present research aims at exploring the impact of implementing PDP reading strategies on students' reading skills and reading response journal writing. In this part, the tools of research used in this research are described as well as the target population and the sample. The findings obtained from the collected data are analyzed and interpreted with the purpose of determining the effectiveness of the PDP reading strategies in enhancing the students' reading and reading response journal writing.

II.2. Research Design

According to Blaxter et al. (2006), researchers are given a vast choice of approaches and methods that are put forward in order to help them with either investigating, or exploring their research's problem, yet they ought to check for their appropriateness and fittingness.

It is worth repeating that the fundamental aim of this research is to explore the impact of implementing PDP reading strategies on students' reading skills and reading response journal writing. With the intention of meeting with the traced objectives, and confirming or disconfirming the hypothesis, the research methodology adopted in this research is the descriptive correlational design, and the tools used are: structured observation, and the questionnaire.

To describe and to examine the impact of the PDP reading strategies on students' reading skills and reading response journal writing, it is worth to provide definitions for the concepts: observation, structured observation, and questionnaire.

II.2.1. The observation methods

According to Riazi (2016:88), the descriptive correlational research is: "a label given to those studies which aim at describing a social phenomenon by describing the relationship among variables in a target population." However, the Observation as a data collection method is, as stated by Bentley et al. (1994:4), observing "signs of behavior, or physical clues [that] [...] often provide us with a quick and easy indication of the presence or absence of [a given] behavior".

II.2.2. The structured observation

The structured observation is used in research when "an observation list is applied in a pre-determined number of situations or a pre-determined number of people" (Bentley et al., 1994:5). Structured observations, in fact, are practical when information is required to be collected about the point to which a given behavior occurs, together with information about the frequency, intensity, and duration of the behavior. In a classroom observation, the collected data revolves around the students' skills, attitudes, wants, and behavior.

II.2.4. The questionnaire

The questionnaire is defined to be a "relatively popular of means of collecting data [for] it enables the researcher to collect data in field settings" (Nunan, 1992:142). In similar vein, Brown (2001:6) defines the questionnaire as: "any written instrument that presents respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting them among existing answers". Kumar (2011:138) underlines the importance of the questionnaire, and suggests that the questionnaire is less expensive and may collect a large quantity of information quickly. In addition to that, the questionnaire offers a great anonymity for in some situations where sensitive questions are asked, the respondents answers are more accurate.

In the present research, the sample chosen to take part in this research was given a pre-questionnaire before the classroom observation, and a post questionnaire after the classroom observation. Both the pre and post questionnaire are composed of a varied set of questions; dichotomous, multiple choice, and open ended and close ended questions.

II.2.4. The Target Population

The target population is known to be the people that undertake an experiment for it is not possible to carry out an experiment with the whole population so it has to be lessened to a convenient number with the aim of generalizing the findings of the research.

Accordingly, the target population that took part in this research is a one grade level; it is represented by first year students of English in the Department of English at the University of Kasdi Merbah Ouargla, Algeria, within the academic year 2022/2023, and it is represented by 324 students making up six (6) groups.

II.2.5. The sample

Sampling was made use of with the intention of facilitating the practical research and generalizing the findings for a sample represents the whole population. Accordingly, in the present research, one group of 48 students is selected from the six ones at the beginning of the academic year 2022/2023, in the Department of English at the University of Kasdi Merbah Ouargla, Algeria.

II.3. Analysis of the findings

The present research aims at exploring the impact of PDP reading strategies on enhancing students' reading comprehension and reading response journal writing. The data obtained from the research tools is analyzed and interpreted and the results help in confirming or disconfirming the hypothesis that posits that the implementation of the PDP reading strategies would enhance the students reading comprehension skills and reading response journal writing.

II.3. 1. The Pre questionnaire

The pre-questionnaire was administered to the sample of 48 students during their reading class in the beginning of the academic year 2022/2023 and before the classroom observation with the intention of having an idea about the students' insights towards reading in general; their reading preferences and their reading frequency together with gathering information about the students' perceptions and views about the subject of reading. The pre questionnaire is self completed, and it is composed of fifteen (15) questions that are of a multiple choice type, others are dichotomous, and some others are open-ended. The pre questionnaire is divided into four sections that highlight the main elements of the research.

Section 1: students' personal information

In this section, students are asked to give information about themselves, their level in English, and whether their level helps them read books and novels easily. The interpretation of the students' answers reveal that the students' level in general is average (73%) and the majority of them (65%) believe that they can read books easily, however, (35%) believe that some books are challenging to them.

Section 2: Students' reading preferences and frequency of reading

This section aims at knowing whether the students like to read or not, identifying the types of books and novels that the students like to read, and knowing whether they read regularly or rarely. The results obtained from the interpretation reveal that the majority of students do not like to read (87%), whereas only (13%) affirmed that they like to read. When the students were asked about their reading preferences, (28%) of them mentioned that they like to read fiction, however (33%) like to read romance, and (39%) like to read about psychology and scientific books.

Section 3: Students' perceptions about the subject of reading, and their expectations from it.

In this section, the students are asked to give information about their insights about the subject of reading, and expectations from it. The students' answers varied between those who have an idea (5%), and those who believe that they are going to be taught how to read (95%)

Section 4: Student's background knowledge about the PDP reading strategies and reading response journal.

This section aims at having an idea about the students' background knowledge vis-à-vis the PDP reading strategies and reading response journal writing. In other words, whether they have heard about the strategies before, and whether they have written a reading response journal before. As for the students' answers concerning the PDP reading strategies, (87%) of the students believed that are teaching methods, however, (13%) mentioned that they ignore what the PDP reading strategies are. And as for the reading response journal, the majority of the students (76%) believe that it was a summary, (15%) thought of it as a students' personal journal in which they write their adventures, and (9%) had no idea.

II.3.2. The Classroom Observation

In the following table are mentioned the elements to be observed:

Table 1: The classroom observation

The skill	The level	Observation sessions	The elements to be observed
Reading	First year EFL students	The first week	Students' attitudes towards the reading response journal and the Pre reading stage
		The second week	Students' attitudes towards the reading response journal and the during reading stage
		The third week	Students' attitudes towards the reading response journal and the during reading stage
		The fourth week	Students' attitudes towards the reading response journal and the Post reading stage
		The fifth week	The impact of PDP reading strategies on enhancing reading comprehension and reading response journal writing

The central aim of classroom observation is to inspect the impact of PDP reading strategies on the students' reading comprehension and reading response journal writing. Before introducing the PDP reading strategies, the teacher (the author) explained the various concepts relevant to the reading skill and the reading syllabus starting from the definition of reading, the types of reading, the reading models, the reading processes, speed reading, etc. It was preferred that the students have a solid background before dealing with the subject matter.

The observation took five sessions given that the session takes one hour thirty per week. In the first session, the teacher first, asked the students' about their reading preferences as a warm up, and then asked if they have heard about *The Alchemist* of Paolo Coelho. The answers varied between yes and no, yet "no" answers outnumbered the "yes" ones. The teachers suggested the novel to be read within the current month. Then the teacher asked the students if they have ever summarized a short story they read or a novel. The answers, again, varied between "yes" and "no". Yet this time, the "yes" answers outnumbered the "no" ones. The teacher then, asked about the way they used to summarize the materiel they read, and the students provided me with many answers that almost all agree on the fact that the summary is to be in one block. The teacher then asked whether the students have an idea about the reading response journal and explained that and supported her explanations with some reading response journals that her students realized the previous years. The students demonstrated enthusiasm about the idea and the reluctance when they were asked to do the same for the elements to be included in the reading response journal are gloomy to them. After that, the teacher explained the Pre reading stage and what has to be done in every strategy (previewing, predicting, skimming, and scanning). The teacher gave examples with a book that the student had in class. The elements were summarized in a table in order to facilitate the understanding process. The students were engaged and participated then asked questions, other students gave examples with the stories they read in order to absorb the freshly learnt information.

In the second and third sessions the teacher explained the During reading stage relying on some examples of *Snow White* to describe the flat and round characters, and the plot diagram. The students showed interest and attention as the teacher explained, yet they asked many questions, to some, the questions are to correct their previous knowledge, to others, to polish it, and to some others, to grasp it. The plot diagram was a bit challenging to some of them for they could not give a clear cut between the elements of the plot. Here, the teacher gave examples with the fairy tales that we grew up reading and watching them.

The fourth session was reserved for the Post reading stage. In this stage, the teacher asked the students whether they have ever summarized a short story or a novel they have read. The answers varied between yes and no, yet this time the "yes" outnumbered the "no". Then, the teacher explained how to summarize a novel and what should be included in the summary. She highlighted that there should be mentioned the moral of the story, the new words learnt, and the comment about the novel.

In the fifth session, a month from having started to read the novel, the students submitted their work and were eager to share their reading response journal with the teacher and classmates. The majority of students was very creative, and put a lot of efforts in writing their journals and decorating them (pictures, drawings, etc). They were very enthusiastic and proud of themselves.

II.3.3.The post questionnaire

The post questionnaire was administered to the sample during their reading class in the end of the classroom observation with the purpose of surveying the students' views about the impact of the PDP reading strategies on their reading comprehension skills and the PDP reading strategies effectiveness in enhancing them write their reading response journal. The post questionnaire is self completed, and it is composed of fourteen (14) questions that are of a multiple choice type, others are dichotomous, and some others are open-ended. The post questionnaire is divided into three sections that underline the major elements of the research.

Section 1: students' personal information and reactions towards the novel

In this section, students are asked to give information about themselves and about their reactions towards the choice of the novel "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho, and the story itself along with questions that highlight the PDP reading strategies.

The students first were asked a question about whether or not they have heard about the novel "The Alchemist" of Paulo Coelho or not. (80%) of the students stated that they have not heard about or read it before. However (14%) mentioned that they have heard about it, and (06%) affirmed that they read the novel before.

When the students were asked about their reactions towards the choice of the novel, (88%) affirmed that it was a good choice, while (12%) mentioned that they wanted to read another novel in relation to their reading preferences.

The students were asked a question about what they first thought when they heard the title of the novel and about their expectations, (88%) thought that the story would be about chemistry, while (8%) thought that the story would be about some mysterious plot, while (6%) affirmed that it would be about a young boy lost in the desert, and probably they are the ones who have read the novel before or heard about it.

The students were asked a question about the plot, (95%) stated that they enjoyed it and found it interesting, full of adventures and wisdom. However, (5%) mentioned that the plot was a bit complicated.

The students were asked about whether or not their predictions about the novel before reading it are confirmed or disconfirmed. (96%) of the students affirmed that the story was different from what they expected, yet (04%) mentioned that their predictions were the confirmed for they have read the novel probably.

Section 2: Students' reactions towards the PDP reading strategies

This section aims at knowing whether the implementation of the PDP reading strategies helped them improve their reading comprehension skills, and whether they facilitated their reading process. The majority of the students (98%) affirmed that the PDP reading strategies helped them read smoothly and enhanced their reading comprehension. While (02%) were uncertain about that.

Section 3: Students' reactions towards writing their own reading response journals

In this section, the students are asked to give their opinions about the reading response journal and whether the implementation of the PDP reading strategies facilitated understanding of the story along with the writing of the reading response journal. The majority of the students (98%) affirmed that the PDP reading strategies helped them understand the story and facilitated the writing of their reading response journal. However, (02%) were unsure about that and it was the same percentage obtained in the previous question.

Conclusion

In brief, this research aim at exploring the impact of PDP reading strategies on the students' reading comprehension and reading response journal writing. It is hypothesized that the implementation of PDP reading strategies in reading narrative books in a reading class would enhance the students' reading comprehension and would smooth the reading response journal writing. With the intention of meeting with the research's aims, the descriptive correlational design is applied and two main tools are selected: the structured observation and the questionnaire. The analysis of the results obtained go in the direction of the hypothesis and the research's aim and affirm that the PDP reading strategies do enhance students' reading comprehension and reading response journal writing.

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