
The Effect of “Student Achieving Independent Learning” (SAIL) in Teacher-Fronted and Reciprocal-Based Classrooms on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners’ Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of “Student Achieving Independent Learning” (SAIL) as a package of reading comprehension strategies in teacher-fronted and reciprocal-based classrooms on intermediate EFL learners’ reading comprehension ability. To fulfill the purpose of this study, 88 female EFL learners were selected through their performance on a Preliminary English Test (PET). Reading part of PET was used as a pretest. Based on the results, the students were none randomly assigned to two experimental groups and one control group. A posttest was administered at the end of the treatment to all groups and their mean scores on the test were compared through a one way ANOVA. The result indicated that there were significant differences between means of all groups on the posttest. Additionally, the results of Scheffe’s post-hoc tests showed that there was significant difference between two experimental groups and control group. Moreover, there was no significant difference between two experimental groups.

Key words: Students Achieving Independent Learning, transactional strategy instruction, input hypothesis, reciprocal teaching, reading comprehension.

Introduction

Learning a foreign language comprises different skills including speaking, writing, listening and reading. Learners won’t progress in their personal goal and job if they do not have the ability to read well. “Reading is one of the most important activities in any language class, not only as a source of information and a pleasurable activity, but also as a means of consolidating and extending one’s knowledge of the language” (River,1981,p.259). Some learners have difficulty in meaningful understanding of the text. In fact they are not aware of their own purpose, goals of reading and different sorts of strategies which may improve their reading comprehension abilities. According to Grabe and Stoller (2002), the reading comprehension processes occur when the reader understands the text correctly and then meaningfully interprets it. “The reading

goal is to read for meaning or recreate the writers meaning. Reading to improve pronunciation, practice grammatical forms and study vocabulary do not constitute reading at all because, by definition, reading involves comprehension. When they are not comprehending, they are not reading” (Chastain, 1988, p. 217).

In order to achieve this purpose, the reader would be equipped by several important factors such as personal characteristics, styles, and strategies. Comprehension strategies involve an awareness of interacting with the written material and an ability to construct meaning. Good readers do not rely on any single strategy to comprehend what they read. Rather, they have a repertoire of strategies and apply different strategies at different points in a text, switching strategies as the text or reading activity demands (e.g., Brown et al., 1983; Levin & Pressley, 1981).

Providing students explicit instruction in comprehension strategies can be an effective way to help students overcome difficulties they have in understanding a text. Students Achieving independent Learning (SAIL) offers a promising approach to comprehension instruction, with rich, motivating interactions around text and increasing sophistication of student strategy use over time (Duke and Pearson, 2002). Teachers need to help students build the reading habit so that they can recognize reading as being a normal part of classroom practice and they would engage in tasks with as much enthusiasm as they do other activities.

Students Achieving Independent Learning (SAIL) as a package of reading strategies was introduced by Bergman and Schuder in 1986. Progress is measured on two fronts: (1) the level of independence in proficient use of individual strategies, and (2) the number of strategies the student can use proficiently (Schuder, 1993). Schuder and Bergman (1986) introduced five principal criteria for choosing strategies to teach in SAIL, they were: (1) how effective the strategies were in raising student achievement, (2) their validation in experimental research, (3) their theoretical importance in constructive processes, (4) their reachability / learnability, and (5) their generalizability. Based on these criteria they selected the following learning strategies for explicit instruction in reading comprehension: predicting, visualizing, questioning, clarifying, making associations (e.g., between the text and the students' experiences), and summarizing. Every SAIL lesson has three primary purposes: (a) to help learners understand (get the gist of) whatever they are reading; (b) to encourage learners to work hard and have fun doing so, and (c) to help learners learn strategies that will help them read with understanding more successfully (Schuder, 1993).

SAIL is a form of TSI in which teachers use explicit instruction in and modeling of strategy use and focused discussion to teach students when, why, and how to apply the strategies. Students then practice strategy use in various settings and with different kinds of texts, presenting and explaining their personal interpretations of a text to each other. Although most often used with

middle and upper grade students, SAIL has been used successfully with primary grade students also (Pressley et al., 1992). The focus of SAIL is to help students learn how to choose the most effective strategies to use for any given text. In SAIL, more and more responsibility for choosing, using, and evaluating strategies is ceded to the student by the teacher within and over each year of instruction. According to Bergman (1992) SAIL was developed as a strategic-based program in order to help students become successful independent readers and learners.

Much of the researches on SAIL and its intellectual cousin, TSI has been qualitative, looking in detail at the ways that strategies are taught and learned. These studies suggest that SAIL, and similar programs offer a promising approach to comprehension instruction, with rich, motivating interactions around text and increasing sophistication of student strategy use over time.

A Maryland public school system experimented with one version of TSI—a program official called SAIL. In 1991-92, the program was evaluated in a carefully controlled comparison involving predominantly low-achieving 2nd grade readers. The students were divided into two groups. One taught through the SAIL method, the other using conventional strategies. At the beginning of the year, the two groups showed no differences on either standardized comprehension or word skills measures. By the end of the year, however, the SAIL students did substantially better on both tests. A variety of indicators showed that the SAIL students were getting much more out of the text than were the control participants (Pressley et al., 1995, p.81).

A study of SAIL with low-achieving students in second-grade classrooms (Brown et al., 1996) found that the SAIL students performed considerably better on standardized measures of reading comprehension and word attack than the students of teachers who were not using the SAIL methods. Furthermore, the SAIL students made richer interpretations of text and acted like more strategic readers. SAIL is only one member of a family of approaches that use transactional strategy instruction. There is no indication that primary-grade students are unable to handle this approach to text comprehension instruction.

Brown et al., (1996) study used Anderson's TSI model under the name SAIL (Bardonner, 2007, p.200). Their study conducted by 60 students, who were in five paired SAIL or traditional classroom. At the end of the year, the students in the experimental group, in which SAIL as a treatment was interjected, showed more growth than the students in traditional classroom in a wide variety of measures. During strategy interview, SAIL students reported using more comprehension and word-level strategies. Results of the study indicated that students in the experimental group reflected higher skills on recall tasks, were able to use more strategies independently, and significantly performed better than the control group students on the comprehension and word skills (Stahl, 2003).

Reciprocal teaching refers to the reading instruction originally developed by Palincsar and Brown (1984). It occurs in the form of dialogues between teachers and students. At first, the

students learn key strategies and practice them. Second, the teacher models the entire process step by step using structured dialogues. Third, the teacher gives the students a chance to get involved and coaches them on how to ask appropriate questions, write adequate summaries, and so on. Gradually, the teacher's role as a leader decreases. Finally, the students take on greater responsibility to carry out the whole process.

In contrary with Teacher-fronted class which is characterized by the teacher's speaking most of the time, leading activities, and constantly passing judgment on student performance, whereas in a highly student-centered classroom, students will be observed working individually or in pairs and small groups, each on distinct tasks and projects. Reciprocal teaching allows the students to monitor their progress and assume the ultimate responsibility for their learning from the text regardless of the content covered in a particular class (Slater & Horstman, 2002). Reciprocal teaching allows students to take ownership over their reading and learning (Hashey & Connors, 2003). By gaining control of their learning while they read, students also have the potential to become better self-regulators of their reading (Hacker & Tenent, 2002).

This study seeks to identify the effect of Student Achieving Independent Learning (SAIL) as a package of reading comprehension strategies on EFL learners' reading comprehension ability, as well as, to compare teacher-fronted and reciprocal-based classrooms' application of SAIL on reading comprehension ability. So research results emphasized the benefits of using reciprocal teaching in:

- Teaching students at different levels, and in different subjects regardless of students' abilities (Myers, 2006);
- Helping students acquire vocabulary and reading comprehension for low-achievers in elementary grades in basic level (Todd and Tracey, 2006);
- Developing students' higher order thinking skills (Hacker & Tenent, 2002).

In order to achieve the purpose of this study the following research questions were proposed:

- Does Student Achieving Independent Learning (SAIL) as a package of reading comprehension ability strategy in teacher-fronted classroom have any significant effect on EFL learners' reading comprehension ability?
- Does Student Achieving Independent Learning (SAIL) in reciprocal-based classroom have any significant effect on EFL learners' reading comprehension ability?

- Is there any significant difference between the effect of Student Achieving Independent Learning (SAIL) in teacher-fronted and reciprocal-based classrooms on reading comprehension ability?

Methodology

This study was conducted with 88 female learners in Hazrat Zaynab High School in Qaemshahr. The participants were third graders from different majors with the age range of 15-17 who were non-randomly selected from among 112 learners at the same grade and homogenized through a sample Preliminary English Test (PET). Those participants whose scores were one standard deviation above and below the mean participated in the study.

Preliminary English Test (PET) was administered for homogenizing the participants at the beginning of the study. PET is part of a group of examinations developed by Cambridge ESOL called the Cambridge Main Suite. It is the intermediate level Cambridge ESOL exam and consists of the four parts of reading and writing (paper 1), listening (paper 2), and speaking (paper 3). Reading part of PET was used as a pretest.

The posttest was a test based on the taught material in the classroom and administered at the end of this period. This test was piloted with 30 participants who had the same characteristics of the main participants. It comprised 35 multiple choice items. The reliability index of the test which was estimated through KR-21 method was 0.77 which seems to be an acceptable reliability index. The researcher used this test to measure the participants' reading comprehension development during the treatment.

In order to convey the study, first, PET was administered to 112 female students of Hazrat Zeinab high school. It is worth mentioning that this test was piloted with 30 participants who studied in aforementioned high school and were the same level as the main participants. Then 88 participants whose scores were one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected for this study. The reading items of PET were scored separately as the reading pretest.

These eighty-eight homogenized students were none randomly assigned in three groups, two experimental groups and one control group. Two experimental groups were given SAIL reading comprehension strategies as treatment in two different ways. One group received it in teacher-fronted way in which teacher directly trained strategies to students. The second experimental group worked in reciprocal-based teaching method. It involved a gradual release of responsibility from teacher to students. Students in this group were divided into 6 groups; each group consisted of 5 participants. Reciprocal-based teaching involved the instructor and students reading a section of the text in small groups. The instructor then led a discussion of the text, while modeling appropriate SAIL strategies. During this discussion and modeling process, the instructor encouraged students to ask questions of both the text and strategies. The instructor

used this discussion to develop both reading comprehension and strategic learning. This general process of reading and discussing continued throughout the length of the text. However, as students became more facile with the reading comprehension strategies, the instructor began to have students take the role of instructor or discussion leader. As students began to lead the discussion process, the instructor assumed the role of guide or facilitator, rather than a leader. The group interactions were cooperative, and the teacher provided support on an as-needed basis only. She provided scaffolding that the groups make progress. The control group did not receive any treatment. In order to prevent any threats to the internal validity of the research, all three groups received the same reading texts from Interchange 2, the same length of teaching time, the same classroom environment, and the same tests. In both the experimental and the control groups, reading was consequently followed by a warm up, reading the text, clarifying the new vocabularies, and asking some comprehension questions. The only difference was that the experimental groups were given a package of strategies, SAIL, as the treatment. This study was performed during 2 months, 8 weeks and twice a week for each group.

The clarification strategy included discussions of text processing at a number of levels from clarifying basic material stated in the text to drawing interpretations of text material in order to relate the texts, experiences, and reading goals. The reading passages were read by whether the teacher or learners. Then there were discussed. At the last stage, the students were asked to carry out some related activities or tasks. The clarification strategy involved teacher-to-student, student-to-teacher, and student-to-student talk. Both two experimental groups received the same treatment; the only difference was that in teacher-fronted group there was teacher-to-student talk.

The visual strategy was trained in such a way that the participants were given a reading passage that was full of visual and other sensory details. Then the teacher/group leader read the passage aloud to them and they followed along reading on the printed text. Throughout the reading process, the participants were asked to stop and visualize the specific details just read. In reciprocal-based teaching group students were allowed to share their sensory impressions with each other. They were asked to compare their visualization, point out common images and the specific text passage that given them. The students were challenged to explain the differences in their visualizations, especially those that depart from the shared images. In teacher-fronted group this relationship was defined between the teacher and students.

In the case of summarizing, the participants were asked to follow some steps consequently. At the first step, the participants were asked to delete unnecessary and redundant materials. They were also asked to build a word instead of a list of items. In fact they were forced to have creativity in the case of building word. Then they were trained in order to replace a word instead of individual parts of action. Then the participants were requested to select a main topic. If there were not any main topics, they had to invent a main topic.

The training questioning strategy were somehow different, because the participants were asked to distinguish among three types of questions: (1) Right There Question- Answer- Relationships (QARs) were those in which the question and the answer were explicitly stated in the text, (2)

Think and Search QARs had questions and answers in the text, but some searching and inferential text connections were required to make the link, and (3) On My Own QARs were those in which the question was motivated by some text element or item of information, but the answer had to be generated from the students' prior knowledge. Unlike reciprocal-based group in which both teacher- to- student and student- to- student were allowed to ask these three types of questions, in teacher- fronted group just teacher had the responsibility of asking question from students.

Making prediction and then read how to turn out were at the core of prediction strategy. Two activities dominated the work: making predictions and activating prior knowledge about story theme, content, or structure. The students were encouraged to generate expectations about what character might do based on their own experiences in similar situation. In reciprocal-based group, students shared their expectation with each other and group leader in their small group. Whenever students faced problem in predicting phase, teacher as the facilitator supported them. In the teacher-fronted groups, participants didn't share their predictions with each other and it was only the teacher who played the role of the interlocutor.

All of these strategies regarding different situations and needs were taught to the experimental groups' students who would have been able to apply them independently. In the last stage, two experimental groups and one control group were given a reading comprehension test as a posttest. It was piloted with the same 30 participants who attended the pilot of language proficiency test (PET). This test comprised 35 multiple choice items. Then their scores were analyzed in order to identify how their reading comprehension ability influenced by SAIL and indicated that if there was any significant difference between teacher-fronted and reciprocal-based groups.

Results and Data analysis

Before accomplishing one-way ANOVA, as shown in Table 4.1 test of normality is performed to determine whether the data are normally distributed or not. The following table presents the results from two well-known tests of normality, namely the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test and the Shapiro-Wilk Test. As it is shown in the Shapiro-Wilk Test, the sig values for all three groups in pretest and posttest are greater than 0.05. Thus, it is concluded that the data were normally distributed.

Table 4.1. Normality Tests

Group		Kolmogorov – Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig	Statistic	Df	Sig
Control	Pretest	.088	28	.200*	.987	28	.858
	Posttest	.093	28	.200*	.973	28	.670
Reciprocal- Based	Pretest	.099	30	.200*	.978	30	.782
	Posttest	.099	30	.200*	.991	30	.995
Teacher- Fronted	Pretest	.107	30	.200*	.984	30	.913
	Posttest	.119	30	.200*	.986	30	.956

A one-way ANOVA was run to compare the means of the teacher-fronted, reciprocal-based and control groups on the pretest of reading comprehension in order to prove that they enjoyed the same level of reading comprehension ability prior to the main study. Based on the results displayed in Table 4.2. ($F(2, 85) = .034, P = .967 > .05; \omega^2 = .01$ it represents a weak effect size) it can be concluded that there were not any significant differences between means of the teacher-fronted, reciprocal-based and Control groups on the pretest of reading comprehension. Thus it can be claimed that they enjoyed the same level of reading comprehension ability prior to the main study.

Table 4.2. One-Way ANOVA Pretest of Reading comprehension by Groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.425	2	1.213	0.034	0.967
Within Groups	3073.29	85	36.156		
Total	3075.716	87			

A one-way ANOVA plus post-hoc Scheffe's tests were run to compare the means of the teacher-fronted, reciprocal-based and control groups on the posttest of reading comprehension ability in order to test the three research hypotheses raised in this study. Based on the results displayed in Table 4.3 ($F(2, 85) = 7.974, P = .001 < .05; \omega^2 = 0.14$ it represents large effect size) it can be concluded that there are significant differences between means of the teacher-fronted, reciprocal-based and control groups on the posttest of reading comprehension.

Table 4.3. One-Way ANOVA Posttest of Reading comprehension by Groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	454.657	2	227.329	7.97	0.001
Within Groups	2423.24	85	28.509		
Total	2877.898	87			

As displayed in Table 4.3 means of the teacher-fronted, reciprocal-based and Control groups on the posttest of reading comprehension test were 22.03, 23.83 and 18.32, respectively.

Table 4.4. Descriptive Statistics Posttest of Reading comprehension by Groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	SE	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	28	18.32	5.925	1.11	16.02	20.61
Reciprocal-Based	30	23.83	4.878	0.89	22.01	25.65
Teacher-Fronted	30	22.03	5.202	0.949	20.09	23.97
Total	88	21.5	5.751	0.613	20.24	22.68

Although the F-value of 7.974 indicated significant differences between the mean scores of the three groups on the posttest of reading comprehension, the post-hoc Scheffe's tests needed to be run to compare the groups two by two in order to probe the research hypotheses.

Table 4.5. Post-Hoc Scheffe's Tests Posttest of Reading comprehension

(I) group	(J) group	Mean Difference (I-J)	SE	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
reciprocal-based	teacher-fronted	1.8	1.378	0.43	-1.6348	5.2348
	Control	5.51190*	1.403	0.001	2.0163	9.0076
teacher-fronted	reciprocal-based	-1.8	1.378	0.43	-5.2348	1.6348
	Control	3.71190*	1.403	0.035	0.2163	7.2076
Control	reciprocal-based	-5.51190*	1.403	0.001	-9.0076	-2.016
	teacher-fronted	-3.71190*	1.403	0.035	-7.2076	-0.216

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results, it can be concluded that the experimental group outperformed the control group in their level of reading comprehension ability. It could be generalized with little (if any) hesitation, that using SAIL could significantly improve EFL learners' reading comprehension ability. This finding is specifically in line with what Perssley (1992) had found in his study regarding the effectiveness of SAIL on improving reading comprehension ability. As Duke and Pearson (2002) noted in their study, SAIL offers a promising approach to comprehension instruction, with rich, motivating interactions around text and increasing sophistication of student strategy use over time.

The third question was about the probable difference between teacher-fronted and reciprocal-based classroom on applying SAIL. Although results indicated there were significant differences between the mean scores of teacher-fronted and reciprocal-based classrooms, post hoc Scheffe showed no significant difference between these two groups. At the end it can be concluded that:

- a) A: There is a significant difference between the teacher-fronted ($M = 22.03$) and control ($M = 18.82$) groups on the posttest of reading comprehension ($MD = 3.711$, $P = .03 < .05$). Thus the first null-hypothesis as Student Achieving Independent Learning (SAIL) as a package of reading comprehension strategy in teacher-fronted classroom doesn't have any significant effect on EFL learners' reading comprehension ability was rejected.
- b) There is a significant difference between the reciprocal-based ($M = 23.83$) and control ($M = 18.82$) groups on the posttest of reading comprehension ($MD = 5.51$, $P = .001 < .05$). Thus the second null-hypothesis as Student Achieving Independent Learning (SAIL) in reciprocal-based classroom does not have any significant effect on EFL learners' reading comprehension ability was rejected.
- c) There is not any significant difference between the reciprocal-based ($M = 23.83$) and teacher-fronted ($M = 22.03$) groups on the posttest of reading comprehension ($MD = 1.80$, $P = .430 > .05$). Thus the third null-hypothesis as there is not any significance difference between the effect of Student Achieving Independent Learning (SAIL) in teacher-fronted and reciprocal-based classrooms on reading comprehension ability was supported.

Implications

This study has several implications for textbook developers, teachers of English as a foreign language, and learners. Syllabus designers and materials developers have to provide the content of teaching materials with comprehensible and proper passages and exercises to familiarize learners with different strategies. It is thus recommended that more built-in support structures should be applied in a lesson in the form of well-designed tasks that enhance the students' learning.

Teachers are expected to gradually release responsibility to the students, allowing them to do what they can on their own. Teachers are allowed to intervene only when support is needed. Teachers also can encourage language learners to seek out appropriate strategies and use them independently to comprehend various texts. Teachers can use SAIL program in order to motivate the students and help them learn more independently in reading authentic texts.

This study revealed that comprehension as the main factor in reading is enhanced through the awareness of strategies which in turn makes learners aware of successful reading in a discourse community. There is of course no dispute over the importance of explicit instruction of strategies in teaching reading and one goal should be to enable learners to read more strategically.

Accordingly, teaching strategies should be a part of the pedagogical curriculum to help students empower themselves in the act of reading more efficiently. Moreover, language learners can become more active and independence while they independently use their selected strategies to comprehend reading.

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