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Title	The Effect of Comparison and contrast and KWL Chart on Reading Comprehension of Unfamiliar Texts
Year	2013
Program	Master of Arts in Education (Language and Literacy Education)

ABSTRACT

Comprehension is the basis of reading and reading without comprehension is not considered as reading. Very often students can become easily frustrated when they do not understand what they are reading in unfamiliar texts. As a result, they become demotivated. A teacher needs to find out what are the causes and design and tech strategies in order to help students close the gaps in their understanding of the unfamiliar texts. This study investigated the effect of comparison and contrast and KWL chart as pre-reading activities on reading comprehension of unfamiliar texts.

Specifically, the study answered the following questions: (1) is there a significant difference between the students' reading comprehension scores on familiar texts and their scores on unfamiliar texts? And (2) Is there a significant increase in reading comprehension scores as a result of using KWL chart for activating prior knowledge and using comparison and contrast for unlocking vocabulary of unfamiliar texts?

Data were elicited from thirty-six 1st year Chinese Malaysian students consisting of 18 males and 18 females who were randomly selected from a secondary school.

A descriptive and quasi-experimental method with one group pretest-posttest design was used. The instruments used for the data collection were reading texts and reading comprehension tests. The subjects read three familiar and three unfamiliar texts and took three comprehension tests. Each of the reading comprehension tests consisted of eight multiple-choice questions and two short answer questions. The three-reading comprehension test on unfamiliar topics served as pre-tests. For the unfamiliar texts, interventions in the form of explicit strategies like comparison and contrast to unlock vocabulary and KWL chart to activate prior knowledge were given. At the end of the intervention, a post-test was administered. Their scores were then compared.

At 0.001 level of significance, analysis of t-test revealed significant differences between the mean scores of familiar texts and unfamiliar texts. The result showed that the subjects achieve significantly higher scores on familiar texts than on unfamiliar texts. This indicated that familiarity with the topics of the texts facilitated reading comprehension and comprehension performance.

The findings through computation and analysis of t-test at 0.001 level of significance also revealed that there were significant differences between the pre-test and post-test mean scores. A comparison between the pre-test and post-test scores showed that the subjects achieved significantly higher scores in the posttest after the intervention was given during the pre-reading stage.

The findings of this study indicated that topic familiarity has an influence on reading comprehension. The findings also indicated that interventions that used strategies such as comparison and contrast to unlock vocabulary and KWL chart to activate prior knowledge during pre-reading have a positive effect on the subjects' reading comprehension performance on unfamiliar texts. Educators designing and implementing reading lessons ought to consider these factors. The study recommended that teachers could use pre-reading strategies on unfamiliar texts. Besides, textbook writers could also provide pre-reading strategies such as comparison and contrast and KWL chart alongside each reading task to make reading comprehension lessons more effective.