

Developing a Model of Thematic / Character Analysis to Enhance the Literary Comprehension skills, Narrative Transportation, and Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies of EFL Student Teachers at the Faculty of Specific Education

Eman El Sayed Sayed Ahmed, Bahaa El-Din El-Sayed El-Naggar

ABSTRACT

The current study was conducted to investigate the effect of an instructional thematic/character analysis model on enhancing the literary comprehension skills, narrative transportation, and metacognitive awareness of reading strategies of EFL student teachers at the Faculty of Specific Education. The one group pre-posttest research design was adopted to achieve the research objectives. The study sample consisted of fifty second-year EFL majors who were selected by simple random sampling. Instruments of the study included a literary comprehension test, a narrative transportation scale and a survey of reading strategies. The experimental treatment lasted for 11 weeks during the first semester of the academic year (2019-2020). Over 25 sessions, the students received training on the implementation of the thematic/character analysis model throughout the introduction to literary analysis training course, which was designed and implemented by the researcher. The data obtained from the pre- and post-administrations of the study instruments were analyzed using descriptive statistics and t-tests. The study results indicated that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the study sample on the pre and post administrations of the literary comprehension test, the narrative transportation scale and the survey of reading strategies at 0.01 level of confidence in favor of the post administrations. This confirmed that the suggested model had a positive effect on fostering the participants' literary comprehension skills, narrative transportation and metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. Discussion of these findings, recommendations and suggestions for further research were presented.

Keywords: Thematic, Transportation, Metacognitive, Specific Education

I. INTRODUCTION

The close relationship between literature and language has led to an overwhelming upsurge of interest in their integration for pedagogical purposes in EFL/ESL contexts over the recent decades. Being a semantically dense art based on the refinement and sophistication of language that comes together in provocatively deviant

yet meaningful styles, literature is an incomparably rich source of authentic material; a memorized archive of linguistic usage that provides a supportive environment for language acquisition through intuitive assimilation (Collie, & Salter, 2009). Moreover, literary discourse, by providing a space for the exercise of mental energy and imagination, sensitizes EFL language learners to the subtle processes of reading; e.g. the use of schema, strategies for intensive and extensive reading (Fukaya, 2015; Sanchez, 2009), as well as harnesses their reflective and creative thinking skills (Yilmaz, 2012; Khatib, & Seyyedrezaei, 2017).

Owing to the depiction of intrinsically appealing themes that are replete with evocative symbolism, literature captivates learners, and offers them the pleasurable experience of manipulating language through creative tasks that require the reflection on prior experiences and memories for constructing textual meaning. This sort of cognitive stimulation intrigues readers and irresistibly triggers their intellectual, affective, and aesthetic responses without the threat of intimidation; ergo both reading competence and motivation are enhanced. In the meanwhile, literary transactions amplify an immersive mode of engagement (Bruns, 2011); a rapturous self-forgetting state that channels a powerful complex of emotional energies responsible for boosting catharsis, empathy, sympathy, spirituality, and enjoyment in consequence (Keen, 2011). This is usually followed by a reflective mode that cultivates moral edification, leads to stable improvements in Theory of Mind, and ultimately enhances self-discipline and emotional intelligence (Hakemulder et al., 2017).

Harnessing the power of literature in EFL classrooms; however, requires a unique glimpse into the comprehension processes involved in literary reading. Generally, reading comprehension is “a complex cognitive endeavor and is affected by, at least, the reader, the text, and the context” (McKeown et al., 2009, p. 218). During the reading activity, the reader and text variables mutually act on each other, each affecting and conditioning the other within a larger social context (McNamara & Magliano, 2009). Thus meaning is something that resides neither in the head of the reader nor on the printed page. Instead, literary comprehension constitutes a transactional process of meaning generation. While the text serves as a pattern that constrains what the reader can make of it by evoking a certain fusion of concepts, images, characters, scenes, and feelings in his consciousness, the reader brings to the text a unique linguistic-experiential reservoir to fill in gaps and build a coherent mental representation of textual meaning (Rosenblatt, 2004).

Considered within the context of EFL, literary comprehension seems particularly challenging. Various studies on literary reading (Khatib et al., 2011; Linkon, 2011; Wasti, 2016) have revealed the widespread dilemma of EFL students' inability to analyze, interpret, evaluate and appreciate the cultural, ideological, moral, social values of literary works. The lack of previous exposure to the techniques of literary analysis, combined with limited language and cultural literacy skills have created anti-literature students, and negatively affected their motivation towards and enjoyment of literary reading. However, the blame for comprehension deficiencies could not be squarely placed on the shoulders of students. Different surveys have indicated that compulsory literary reading courses have lacked well-designed curricular structures, and methodologies that tally the variables underpinning students' ability and willingness to read literature in a foreign language (Martin, & Ofsted, 2012; Paran, 2008; Zhen, 2012); i.e. linguistic, literacy, and world knowledge variables. Against this backdrop and in pursuit of developing professional, resourceful and highly motivated pre-service EFL majors, this study investigated the pedagogical effect of implementing a thematic-character analysis-based model geared towards the furtherance of literary reading skills.

Referring back to the power of fiction to elicit profound emotions through enabling the mimicry of experience without risk to personal identity (Maret et al., 2011), recent research in literary comprehension has paid

increasing attention to the affective aspects that are central to the phenomenological experience of narrative reading (Miall, 2011). When people read narratives, they may become mentally absorbed or 'swept away' as they experience a simulated reality, and react emotionally in response to the conflicts and relationships of story characters and textual themes (Mar, Oatley, & Peterson 2009). The most arguably popular concept that captures the experiential state of "being lost", "psychologically immersed", "engaged", or "engrossed" in the narrative world is called narrative transportation. The transportation model of narrative engagement configures readers as literal travelers who temporarily undertake a mental journey into the narrative world, whereby their thoughts, feelings, and attention become focused during the unfolding story events (Green & Clark, 2013).

With reference to the consequences of transportation, it is often linked to the reduction of negative cognitive responding, endorsement of story-consistent beliefs and attitudinal change (Van Laer et al., 2014), interest and narrative enjoyment (Busselle, & Bilandzic, 2009), as well as seeing a narrative as being more realistic. It also influences the cognitive processes that dynamically interact in an account of literary comprehension and interpretation, including executive attentional resources, working memory, long-term memory, and autobiographical recall (Bezdek, & Gerrig, 2017). In view of the heavy cognitive load imposed by transportation; however, it seems inherently demanding as it entails the construction of elaborative inferences for readers to keep pace with narrative cues, and move from the shallow text-base to the building of deep situation models. This is a problematic issue as reported by many studies (Al-Hazza, 2010; National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009) that lament the growing number of adolescent disengaged readers who have low-self efficacy and motivation, lack the proficient use of develop a nuanced repertoire of metacognitive strategies and self-regulation, and are unwilling to exert the effort necessary to comprehend challenging works.

The convergence across mainstream cognitive psychology and psychological reading research on the confluence among "cold" information processing, "hot" affective cognition, and the experiential self-reflective states of mind during the phenomenological act of literary reading emboldens us to suggest that they should be practically incorporated into literary pedagogy (Jacobs, 2015). EFL instructional design should be adapted to mediate affectively safe learning opportunities that scaffold creative engagement, and honor the distinctive meaning making experiences aligned with the aesthetic processes, which have been squeezed out of so much formal education. Accordingly, the current study attempts to fulfill the urgent need for empirical research on the rewarding emotive dimension in literary text processing through the implementation of an authentic pedagogical model that makes measurable and testable the effect of in-depth literary analysis of five affective inputs upon triggering and modulating the emotion-laden trance-like state of narrative transportation.

The foregoing discussion allows us to conclude that engaged readers are those who are motivated to read for different purposes, knowledgeable in their reflective construction of meaning from text, strategic in their approaches to comprehension (Israel, 2007; Veenman, 2015) in a fashion that achieves coherence at local and global levels. Accordingly, an important goal for reading instruction should be to help students become expert or more competent strategic readers (Kazemiet al., 2013). Thus, it is necessary to provide learners with reading strategy instruction to help them in planning, regulating and evaluating their own reading processes. As applied to reading, metacognitive awareness can be defined as the "knowledge of the readers 'cognition relative to the reading process and the self-control mechanisms they use to monitor and enhance comprehension" (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001, p. 432).

Most studies have specifically investigated the usefulness of metacognitive strategy awareness and use on the development of EFL students' reading comprehension, achievement, reading proficiency and motivation

(e.g., Ahmadiet al., 2013; Alhaqbani&Riazi, 2012; Tavakoli, 2015; Zhang &Seepho, 2013). Such studies uncovered that some differences exist between successful and less successful readers in terms of their actual and reported reading strategies, their use of global reading strategies, their metacognitive strategy awareness, and their perception of the good readerand their self-confidence as readers, with high-proficiency students employing multiple reading strategies more frequently than low-proficiency students. In spite of the importance of metacognitive awareness of reading strategies, many students enter higher education underprepared for the reading demands that are placed upon them, which is often due to their low level of reading strategy knowledge base, lack of cognitive processing strategies, and metacognitive control. Yet, there is much evidence to suggest that less successful readers can develop their reading proficiency via explicit training and scaffolding based on mastery of a strategy repertoire that are used by more successful readers (Iwai, 2016; Farzam, 2017; Ajideh et al., 2018). The goal of this study is to measure the effect of the Thematic/Character analysis modelupon enhancing EFL majors' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this study was to develop second-year EFL majors' narrative comprehension skills, narrative transportation, and metacognitive awareness of reading strategies through the implementation of a Thematic/Character analysis model.

Study Problem

The problem of the study arose from the fact that second-year EFL majors lacked important literary comprehension skills. They also suffered from deficiencies in narrative transportation, and had little metacognitive reading strategy awareness. The current study was an attempt at solving that problem through utilizing a Thematic/Character analysis model to develop EFL prospective teachers' literary text comprehension, narrative transportation, and metacognitive awareness of reading strategies.

Questions of the study

The study tried to answer the following main question:

What is the effect of developing a model of Thematic / Character analysis on enhancing the literary comprehension skills, narrative transportation, and metacognitive awareness of reading strategies of EFL student teachers at the Faculty of Specific Education?

This main question could be branched into the following sub-questions:

- A. What are the required literary comprehension skills for second-year EFL majors at the faculty of Specific Education?
- B. To what extent do second-year EFL majors master these skills?
- C. What is the students' current level of narrative transportation?
- D. To what extent are second-year EFL majors aware of the metacognitive reading strategies?
- E. What are the features of designing the Thematic/Character analysis model?
- F. How far could the Thematic/Character analysis model enhance EFL majors' literary comprehension?
- G. How far could the Thematic/Character analysis model enhance EFL majors' narrative transportation?
- H. How far could the Thematic/Character analysis model enhance EFL majors' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies?

Significance of the study

Results of the current study are hopefully intended to help achieve the following:

- a. Expose EFL student teachers to new literary practices that would promote their literary comprehension skills by refining their higher order thinking skills and literary appreciation, and raising their metacognitive awareness of reading strategies.
- b. Enhance EFL student teachers' emotional engagement through employing a variety of strategies that would pave the way for their transportation to the narrative worlds.
- c. Provide EFL instructors with a new pedagogical model, and effective techniques that might develop their performance in literary instruction by adopting a more student-centered approach, which fosters literary comprehension, self-regulation and involvement among students.

Instruments of the Study

For achieving the main goal of the current study the researcher used:

- a. A pre-post literary comprehension test, to measure the students' literary comprehension skills.
- b. A three-point Likert narrative transportation scale to measure the students' narrative transportation during reading before and after the experiments.
- c. A three-point Likert Survey of Reading Strategies to measure the students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies before and after the experiments.

Delimitations of the study

This present study was restricted to:

- a. A single study sample chosen from sophomore EFL majors at the faculty of Specific Education, Zagazig University.
- b. The development of some literary comprehension skills, which were validated by the jury as being important for the participants of the study.
- c. The implementation of the Thematic/Character analysis model designed by the researcher as an independent variable.

Procedures of the study

The study proceeded as follows:

- a. Reviewing literature and previous studies relevant to: - literary comprehension skills, narrative transportation, metacognitive awareness of reading strategies and Thematic/Character analysis models in order to prepare the theoretical background and the instruments of the study.
- b. Preparing a preliminary list of the literary comprehension skills, and submitting it to a panel of jury, including EFL methodology and literature specialists, for judging its validity.
- c. Analyzing the jurors' responses and determining the most important literary comprehension skills required for second year EFL majors at the faculty of Specific Education.
- d. Designing a pre-post literary comprehension test in view of the targeted literary comprehension skills, and submitting it to the jury members to determine its validity.
- e. Designing a narrative transportation scale, and a metacognitive awareness of reading strategies inventory, and submitting them to the jury members for verifying their validity and appropriateness.
- f. Modifying the literary comprehension test, the narrative transportation scale, and the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies inventory according to the jury suggestions.

g. Designing the Thematic/Character analysis model in light of the specified literary comprehension skills, the review of literature and previous studies related to character and thematic analysis models, and narrative transportation.

h. Selecting the study sample from second-year EFL majors at the Faculty of Education.

i. Piloting the study instruments to determine their consistency and reliability.

j. Pre-administering the literary comprehension test, the narrative transportation scale, and the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies inventory to the study sample to identify the extent to which they mastered the identified literary comprehension skills, the level of their narrative transportation, and the degree of their metacognitive awareness of reading strategies before conducting the experiment.

k. Teaching the study sample using the Thematic/Character analysis model designed by the researcher.

l. Post-administering the literary comprehension test, the narrative transportation scale, and the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies inventory to the study sample to evaluate the effect of the proposed model on developing the identified literary comprehension skills, enhancing narrative transportation as well as raising their metacognitive awareness of reading strategies.

m. Collecting the data, comparing the results of the pre- and post-tests, and analyzing them statistically.

n. Interpreting the results and discussing them in light of previous studies.

o. Drawing conclusions, specifying educational implications and recommendations, and offering suggestions for further research.

II. Results of the study

Findings of the present study verified that:

a. The suggested thematic/character analysis model proved to be statistically and pedagogically significant in developing the targeted literary comprehension skills. Significant mean difference existed between the pre- and the post-administration of the literary comprehension test as a whole and its dimensions at 0.01 level.

b. The suggested thematic/character analysis model proved to be statistically and pedagogically significant in enhancing narrative transportation. Significant mean difference existed between the pre- and the post-administration of the narrative transportation scale at 0.01 level.

c. The suggested thematic/character analysis model proved to be statistically and pedagogically significant in enhancing metacognitive awareness of reading strategies.

References:

1. Ahmadi, M. R., Ismail, H. N., & Abdullah, M. K. K. (2013). The importance of metacognitive reading strategy awareness in reading comprehension. *English Language Teaching*, 6(10), 235.
2. Ajideh, P., Zohrabi, M., & Pouralvar, K. (2018). The effect of explicit instruction of metacognitive reading strategies on ESP reading comprehension in academic settings. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 7(4), 77-86.
3. Alhaqbani, A., & Riazi, M. (2012). Metacognitive awareness of reading strategy use in Arabic as a second language. *Reading in a foreign language*, 24(2), 231.

4. Al-Hazza, T. C. (2010). Motivating disengaged readers through multicultural children's literature. *New England Reading Association Journal*, 45(2), 63.
5. Bezdek, M. A., & Gerrig, R. J. (2017). When narrative transportation narrows attention: Changes in attentional focus during suspenseful film viewing. *Media Psychology*, 20(1), 60-89.
6. Bruns, C. (2011). *Why literature? The value of literary reading and what it means for teaching*. New York, NY: Continuum International.
7. Busselle, R. & Bilandzic, H. (2009). Measuring narrative engagement, *Media Psychology*, 12, 321-347. doi: 10.1080/15213260903287259
8. Collie, J., & Slater, S. (2009). *Literature in the Language Classroom: A Resource Book of Ideas and Activities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
9. Farzam, M. (2017). The effect of cognitive and metacognitive strategy training on intermediate Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 7(1), 193-202.
10. Fukaya, M. (2015). The Use of a Literary Text in an Extensive Reading Programme: Reading Murakami's 'Super-Frog Saves Tokyo' in the World Café. In *Literature and Language Learning in the EFL Classroom* (pp. 260-279). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
11. Green, M. C., & Clark, J. L. (2013). Transportation into narrative worlds: implications for entertainment media influences on tobacco use. *Addiction*, 108(3), 477-484. Janicke, S. H., & Raney, A. A. (2018). Modeling the antihero narrative enjoyment process. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 7(4), 533.
12. Hakemulder, F., Kuijpers, M. M., Tan, E. S., Bálint, K., & Doicaru, M. M. (Eds.). (2017). *Narrative absorption* (Vol. 27). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
13. Israel, S. E. (2007). *Using Metacognitive Assessments to Create Individualized Reading Instruction*. International Reading Association. Newark, Delaware, International Reading Association.
14. Iwai, Y. (2016). The effect of explicit instruction on strategic reading in a literacy methods course. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 28(1), 110-118.
15. Jacobs, A. M. (2015). The scientific study of literary experience: sampling the state of the art. *Scientific Study of Literature*, 5(2), 139-170.
16. Kazemi, M., Hosseini, M., & Kohandani, M. (2013). Strategic reading instruction in efl contexts. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(12), 23-33.
17. Keen, S. (2011). Readers' temperaments and fictional character. *New Literary History*, 42(2), 295-314.
18. Khatib, M., & Seyyedrezaei, S. H. (2017). Short story based language teaching (SSBLT): A literature-based language teaching method. *Journal of Humanities Insights*, 1(04), 190-195.
19. Khatib, M., Derakhshan, A., & Rezaei, S. (2011). Why & Why Not Literature: A Task-based approach to teaching literature. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 1(1), p213.
20. Linkon, S. L. (2011). *Literary learning: teaching the English major*. Indiana University Press.
21. Mar, R. A., Oatley, K., & Peterson, J. B. (2009). Exploring the link between reading fiction and empathy: Ruling out individual differences and examining outcomes. *Communications: The European Journal of Communication*, 34, 407-428.
22. Mar, R. A., Oatley, K., Djikic, M., & Mullin, J. (2011). Emotion and narrative fiction: Interactive influences before, during, and after reading. *Cognition & emotion*, 25(5), 818-833.
23. McKeown, M.G., Beck, I.L., & Blake, R.G.K. (2009). Rethinking reading comprehension instruction: A comparison of instruction for strategies and content approaches. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 44(3), 218-252.

24. McNamara, D.S. &Magliano, J.P. (2009).Towards a comprehensive model of comprehension. In B. Rose (Ed.), *The psychology of learning and motivation* (pp.297-384). New York, NY: Academic Press.
25. Miall, D. S. (2011). Emotions and the structuring of narrative responses.*Poetics Today*, 32(2), 323-348.
26. National Assessment of Educational Progress (2009). NAEP 2008 Trends in Academic Progress (NCES 2009–479). Prepared by Rampey, B.D., Dion, G.S., & Donahue, P.L. for the National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.
27. Paran, A. (2008). The role of literature in instructed foreign language learning and teaching: An evidence-based survey. *Language Teaching*, 41(4), 465-496.
28. Rosenblatt, L. (2004). The transactional theory of reading and writing. In R. B. Ruddell, & N. J. Unrau (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (5th ed.) (pp. 1363-1398). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
29. Sheorey, R., &Mokhtari, K. (2001).Differences in the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies among native and non-native readers.*System*, 29, 431–449.
30. Tavakoli, H. (2014). The Effectiveness of Metacognitive Strategy Awareness in Reading Comprehension: The Case of Iranian University EFL Students.*Reading*, 14(2).
31. Van Laer, T., De Ruyter, K., Visconti, L. M., &Wetzels, M. (2014).The extended transportation-imagery model: A meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of consumers' narrative transportation. *Journal of Consumer research*, 40(5), 797-817.
32. Veenman, M. V. J. (2015). Metacognition.In P. Afflerbach (Ed.), *Handbook of individual differences in reading: Reader, text, and context* (pp. 26-40).New York, NY: Routledge.
33. Wasti, A. T. (2016). *The Role of Literary Texts in Pakistani EFL Classrooms: Issues and Challenges* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Essex, United Kingdom]. <https://repository.essex.ac.uk/id/eprint/17123>.
34. Yilmaz, C. (2012). Introducing Literature to an EFL Classroom: Teacher's Instructional Methods and Students' Attitudes toward the Study of Literature.*English Language Teaching*, 5(1), 86.
35. Zhang, L., &Seepho, S. (2013). Metacognitive strategy use and academic reading achievement: Insights from a Chinese context. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 10(1), 54-69.
36. Zhen, C. (2012). Characteristics and strategies of literature teaching in the EFL context in China.*International Journal of Electronics and Communication Engineering* 5(3), 35-43.