

Improving students' reading comprehension by the use of contextual clues

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Bio

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Abstract

Comprehension in reading plays an important role in both personal and professional life. However, English reading comprehension tasks have proven to be a challenging for students due to their lack of vocabulary. For this current research, guessing the meaning of words from context strategy was implemented in a Forestry and Agriculture class at Lao Cai Community College. A pre-test, a post-test and a survey were collected to determine how the implementation of the technique affected students' reading skill. The results showed that teaching the students to guess the meaning of words via contextual clues brought about positive changes in students' reading skill. The students also felt motivated when doing reading tasks or reading for fun. It is hoped that the findings of the study will be a potential solution for teachers and students who have the same difficulties in teaching and practicing reading skill.

Overview of Action Research

1. Plan

The idea for my action research came to me while I was teaching reading skill for my students of Forestry and Agriculture. In general, my students found that reading texts relating to their major in English was a challenging. I tried to find a solution for that problem by figuring out the main reason why my students could not perform well in their reading comprehension tasks. Moreover, I read journal articles including ideas, suggestions, techniques or strategies which might work in my own teaching context. Finally, I decided to enlarge my students' vocabulary by teaching them how to guess the meaning of words from context. My action research aimed at answering the question: "How does guessing the meaning of words from context technique impact students' reading comprehension?"

2. Act

At the beginning of my action research, students were asked to do the pre-test with the aim of checking students' reading proficiency at that time. Then, the use of guessing the meaning of words from context was implemented during four weeks (from 23 April, 2015 to 21 May, 2015). I met my students three times a week and taught them how to

guess the meaning of words via contextual clues for ten minutes per a period. After four weeks, a post-test and a survey were delivered to measure students' changes.

3. Observe

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to interpret the data. The pre-test and post- test were collected and scored. All results were calculated in percentage. The survey was analyzed to examine students' attitudes toward the technique.

4. Reflect

The results of the study showed that most of students got higher scores after practicing the technique. They performed better in the post-test. Moreover, 75% of students felt more motivated and confident in reading.

After carrying out this study, I understand the importance of modifying my teaching method and developing students' "self-study". In reading comprehension, guessing the meaning of words can be a potential solution for my students in my own teaching context. Therefore, I will continue to apply this technique to them in the future.

5. Re-plan

I will keep implementing the technique of guessing the meaning of words via contextual clues to my students by expanding the timeline. I wonder whether this technique works well if it is applied to the first year students whose English proficiency is at low level. My new revised question is: How does guessing the meaning of words from context affect first year students in reading comprehension?

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