

Literature Review of English Reading Strategies in Junior High School

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Abstract: Reading strategy, as one of the important branches of learning strategies, is a means adopted by learners for solving reading difficulties. In order to understand the basic situation of English reading strategy research, the author adopts a descriptive review method. By summarizing the research on English reading strategies by scholars at home and abroad, this paper elaborates on the current status of domestic research and foreign research separately. It is found that in the domestic research on English reading strategies, although both theoretical and empirical research are given equal importance, the research method is limited, the research content is too concentrated, and the theoretical research basis is insufficient. These areas require further improvement.

Keywords: Junior High School English; English Reading; Reading Strategies.

1. Introduction

The development of reading proficiency is a crucial aspect of second language acquisition, as it facilitates the mastery of the target language. Concurrently, the enhancement of students' reading proficiency is contingent upon the instruction of reading strategies. This paper employs a descriptive review methodology to analyses and compare research on English reading strategies at home and abroad, summarize the current research situation in this field, and provide a reference for the subsequent research.

2. Definition and Classification of Learning Strategies

2.1. Definition of Learning Strategies

The study of learning strategies has emerged as a prominent area of interest in the fields of education and psychology research, particularly since the 1990s. The study of second language learning strategies has gradually become a prominent area of applied linguistics research. A considerable number of researchers have made significant contributions to this field of study, resulting in a body of knowledge that has produced some noteworthy findings. However, there has been no consensus among researchers regarding the definition of second language learning strategies, with each researcher defining the term from a distinct perspective.

In the context of language learning, some researchers conceptualize language learning strategies as ideas or methods that emerge during the language learning process and can potentially influence the encoding process of language learners [1]. Oxford defines language learning strategies as specific actions or behaviours that students intentionally employ to enhance their progress in developing second language skills [2]. Cohen proposes that language learning strategies encompass conscious thinking and behaviour by learners with the explicit objective of improving their knowledge and understanding of the target language[3]. Ellis presents a synthesis of the disparate perspectives among researchers regarding the definition of learning strategies, delineating four principal domains of contention[4]. The first area of contention is whether language learning strategies can

be observed as behaviours or mental activities, or both. The second area of contention is whether learning strategies can be considered general features of a learner's learning path or method, or specific learning skills, or whether strategies can be seen as including skills. The third area of contention is whether learning strategies can be considered conscious, unconscious, or subconscious, including some strategies that have developed automatism through long-term use. The fourth area of contention is whether the learning strategy has a direct or indirect effect on the development of mediated language.

In China, Qin Xiaoqing defines language learning strategies as 'specific behaviors, steps, or techniques that are believed to facilitate the internalization, storage, extraction, or use of a second or foreign language'[5]. Furthermore, she posits that language learning strategies are skills that can assist language learners in enhancing their language proficiency. In contrast, Wen Qiufang posits that language learning strategies can be defined as "measures taken for effective learning[6]". She asserts that the essence of language learning strategies lies in the actions of language learners, a perspective that differs from the view held by other researchers who perceive language learning strategies to be primarily conceptual in nature. However, actions can be either external or internal. Furthermore, some researchers posit that learning strategies are both behavioral and conscious simultaneously. As Cheng Xiaotang and Zheng Min once mentioned in their work, learning strategies encompass both general features or trends and specific methods, measures, means, and techniques. The general characteristics or trends exert an indirect influence on the process of learning, whereas the specific strategies have a direct impact on the learning outcome. It is important to note that learning strategies are conscious behaviours, whereas unconscious actions or steps do not possess the characteristics of strategies.

Despite the difficulty in reaching a consensus on the definition of language learning strategies, one thing is clear that the crucial role that language learning strategies play in the language learning process. To some extent, mastering language learning strategies is equivalent to influencing the development of language orientation. Therefore, the study of language learning strategies is necessary.

2.2. Classification of Learning Strategies

The objective of categorising learning strategies is to provide a systematic description of the strategies employed by learners. According to the information processing theory proposed by Anderson, O' Malley and Chamot, language learning strategies have been classified into four categories: cognitive, meta-cognitive, affective and communicative strategies[7]. Meta-cognitive strategies are employed to plan the actions of learners and to monitor their use of language, as well as to evaluate their performance in a given task. Cognitive strategies are strategies for identifying, grouping, retaining, retrieving and using necessary language materials. Examples include using prior knowledge to make sense of material in a new language, mentally summarizing linguistic information, using visual imagery, or selecting appropriate words for a given context. Communicative strategies are used to interact with other learners. For example, asking questions to clarify social roles and relationships, asking for explanations or verification, and co-operating on tasks. Affective strategies are strategies that students employ to regulate their emotions, motivation, and attitudes. They are often used to mitigate anxiety and provide self-encouragement in learning situations. For example, using positive self-encouragement to complete a speech task.

However, Oxford discovered a link between language learning strategies and language materials. In view of this, Oxford classified language learning strategies into two categories: direct and indirect strategies. Subsequently, Oxford proposed that direct strategies can exert a direct influence on language learning, which are further categorized as memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensatory strategies. Indirect strategies are unable to exert a direct influence on language learning strategies, which also consist of three types of strategies: communicative, affective and meta-cognitive strategies. Cohen proposes that language learners employ language learning strategies with varying objectives[8]. In accordance with this perspective, he classifies language learning strategies as either language learning strategies or language use strategies. In more specific terms, language learning strategies are defined as the particular methods employed to facilitate the acquisition of a language. In contrast, language use strategies encompass a range of techniques, including retrieval strategies, coverage strategies, communication strategies and preview strategies.

On the basis of summarizing and learning from foreign research results, Wen Qiufang, taking into account the Chinese foreign language learning environment, classified language learning strategies into language learning strategies and management strategies[9]. She further pointed out that management strategies are related to the language learning process and language learning strategies emphasize the relationship between language learning materials and learning strategies.

In general, while there is no unified view on the definition and classification of language learning strategies, it is clear that language learners should select strategies that are appropriate for their needs, taking into account the specific characteristics of the learning environment, the learning phrases and the learning content. This approach will facilitate the most effective learning outcomes.

3. Definition of Reading Strategies

Reading strategy is an important part of learning strategy,

and different scholars have different views on the definition of reading strategy.

Abroad, Flavell considered reading strategies as some behaviours adopted by readers when they encounter reading difficulties[10]. Langer pointed out that reading strategy is a static, passive resource or skill used by readers[11]. Block believed that reading strategy is a conscious, dynamic process in which the reader interacts with the content[12]. Barnett concentrated on the psychological aspects of reading strategies, arguing that a reading strategy is a mental operation, a mental activity in which the learner effectively reads a text in order to understand what the author has written[13]. Lewis believes that learning strategies play an important role in students' English reading and suggests a relationship between reading strategies and students' English performance. If students use reading strategies in the reading process, their English reading performance will be better than those who do not use English learning strategies. Therefore, there is a significant correlation between the use of reading strategies and reading achievement. Wallace defines reading strategies from a different perspective compared to Langer. In short, Wallace considers reading strategy as a dynamic way of reading. Reading strategies are variable rather than static, and they vary from person to person depending on the reader's subjective reading purpose and the content of the reading[14]. Ellis points out that English reading strategy is a kind of learning strategy which is closely related to the acquisition and use of the language, and is carried through the mental and behavioural activities at every stage of reading. Johnson, K & Johnson, H argued that readers usually adopt methods to deal with the difficulties they encounter[15]. Whether or not they ultimately achieve their reading goals, the methods and behaviours that they actively choose in the process are referred to as reading strategies. Johnson proposed two types of reading strategies, intensive reading and extensive reading, and he was the first scholar to introduce intensive reading and extensive reading to the general public. Brown builds on this and offers his own view on the concept of intensive reading. Brown argues that intensive reading is carried out during classroom activities. Teachers direct students' attention to linguistic or semantic details to help them pay attention to grammatical forms and understand deeper meanings through literal meanings. Cohen argues that reading strategies are behaviors that readers adopt in order to complete a reading task. Some behaviors are external and observable, while others are internal and unobservable[8].

In China, Shu Dingfang and Zhuang Zhixiang advanced the argument that there is a distinction between reading strategies and reading skills[16]. They believe that reading strategies are means or methods consciously adopted by readers to solve problems encountered in reading. However, reading skills are methods adopted unconsciously during the reading process. The difference between reading skills and reading strategies lies in whether readers adopt these methods consciously or unconsciously. According to Liu Dandan, reading strategies are the approaches readers adopt according to the type of text, its content and the purpose of reading[17]. Li Jiongying posits that reading strategies constitute a specific reading behaviour or technique adopted by learners during the reading process[18]. The objective of employing reading strategies is to address cognitive challenges inherent to the reading process. Furthermore, the classification of reading strategies is divided into two categories: implicit learning methods,

which are typically unobservable, and explicit learning behaviours, which can be discerned by educators. Zhan Hualing and Ge Minggui[19] considered reading strategies as specific methods that learners use to improve their reading. Li Jinhua posits that reading strategies are behaviours adopted by readers to overcome reading difficulties[20]. These strategies encompass not only techniques employed during reading but also selective and controlled behaviours adopted by readers to achieve their reading goals.

These scholars define reading strategies from different perspectives. A review of the literature on reading strategies reveals that readers tend to employ these techniques when they encounter difficulties while reading.

4. Overview of Foreign Research on Reading Strategies

Since the 1960s, more and more foreign scholars have put their research interests in the use of reading strategies.

In 1977, Hosenfeld conducted a comparative analysis of the reading strategies employed by successful and unsuccessful readers[21]. The study involved a comparison between the two groups and identified nine key strategies that were more prevalent among the successful readers. In comparison to those who are unsuccessful at reading in a second language, successful readers demonstrated superior abilities in predicting the content of a text and guessing the meanings of vocabulary words based on context. Block is one of the foreign scholars who has conducted research into the relationship between the utilisation of reading strategies and reading ability[12]. The study revealed that individuals with high reading ability tend to employ reading strategies to regulate their reading process, whereas those with low reading ability often lack such active monitoring. O'Malley and Chamot placed a great deal of emphasis on emotional strategies in their study and found that students' reading efficiency improved dramatically when they used emotional strategies[7]. One conclusion that can be drawn from Anderson's study is that successful readers are more likely to use optimal reading strategies when reading[22]. Another important finding is that successful readers adapt their reading strategies to their reading needs. Dreyer and Neil also studied reading strategy training. They analysed the results of a pre-test and post-test of the training and found that students who received training in reading strategies were significantly better readers than those who did not receive training[23].

In summary, there seems to be a positive correlation between reading strategies and reading achievement. However, a scholar from Korea, Park, came up with different results. He investigated the correlation between TOEFL scores and the use of reading strategies and discovered that there was no notable correlation[24]. Yabukoshi and Takeuchi took Japanese junior high school students as research objective in their study and found that there was no significant correlation between reading scores and the use of reading strategies[25]. Therefore, the relationship between reading strategies and reading proficiency has not yet been agreed upon abroad and further research is still needed.

5. Overview of Domestic Research on Reading Strategies

Although research on reading strategies in the domestic context commenced relatively late, domestic scholars have been paying attention to reading strategies for a long time. In

the mid-to late 1990s, the domestic research about reading strategies presented a situation in full swing.

Domestic research on reading strategies also has its own characteristics. On the one hand, research conducted by scholars in the domestic context on reading strategies encompasses a diverse range of educational levels, including those at the college, high school, and junior high school levels. On the other hand, domestic scholars' research on reading strategies mainly focuses on learners' use of reading strategies.

Wen Qiu-fang used a case study method to select a successful English learner and an unsuccessful English learner to complete a study on the topic of 'Trends and Characteristics of Learning Strategies Changes'[26]. The study revealed that self-management strategies are a significant determinant of students' academic performance. Lv Zhongshe and Tu Yuancheng completed a study on Chinese students' English reading strategies[27]. The study was conducted with over 200 non-English majors. Half of the participants were trained in reading strategies while the other half were not. After three months, all participants did the same reading test papers. The results demonstrated that the group that received reading strategy training achieved higher scores than the group that did not receive such training. Moreover, through this reading strategy training, students with otherwise low reading skills learnt much faster than students with otherwise high reading skills. One conclusion can be drawn from this study that although students' reading abilities are different at the beginning, they can be improved through the conscious use of reading strategies. Liu Nina studied the reading strategy use of non-English major college students in terms of meta-cognitive, cognitive and social-emotional strategies[28]. On the one hand, the study found that the frequency of reading strategy use among these students was at a moderate level. On the other hand, this study concluded that college students' English reading performance is closely related to the use of reading strategy. More specifically, the use of students' reading strategies has a positive effect on their English reading performance. Li Jiongying and Pu Yiting collated papers related to reading strategies in China from 2006 to 2015 and concluded[18]. Firstly, there are many theoretical studies on reading strategies, but the theories themselves are relatively dated. Secondly, a single research method is employed in many studies. For example, some studies only use questionnaires to collect data. Their findings suggest that researchers should use different research methods. This finding shows a new direction for reading strategy research. Through the meta-analysis of reading strategy training and reading ability at home and abroad, Wang Lina and Wu Yongyi proved that reading strategy training can improve students' reading ability[29]. This provides a basis for teachers to focus on cultivating students' reading strategies in actual teaching. Ma Lili investigated the use of reading strategies among high school students[30]. It was found that most high school students hardly knew how to use reading strategies, especially meta-cognitive and social-emotional strategies. In fact, meta-cognitive strategies have long attracted the attention of researchers. Jiang Zhenyan used meta-cognitive strategies to train high school students and concluded that the use of meta-cognitive strategies had a positive effect on students' reading ability[31]. Researchers have paid more attention to the study of meta-cognitive strategy use in high school students.

In addition, junior high school students receiving training

in meta-cognitive strategies is no exception. Long Jiangying conducted an empirical study on developing students' awareness of meta-cognitive strategies involving three meta-cognitive strategies: global strategies, problem-solving strategies, and support strategies[32]. Zhu Jiaqi also focused on the use of reading strategies among junior high school students[33]. The findings of the study indicated that junior high school students exhibited a low level of utilization of reading strategies and a correspondingly low level of awareness of the importance of such strategies. In addition, the study also found that junior high school students used some cognitive and social-emotional strategies more frequently than meta-cognitive strategies. It is undeniable that domestic researchers have paid more attention to meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social-emotional strategies in their studies on reading strategies.

6. Existing Problems

Overall, the research on reading strategy training has made certain achievements in all aspects, but at the same time there are still deficiencies. Based on the above analysis of the current situation, the following problems mainly exist in this field at this stage:

First, the research method is single. Previous research has primarily focused on theoretical and empirical studies of reading strategies. Empirical research mainly focuses on the use of questionnaires and standardized tests, while other research methods (case studies, classroom observation, case studies and so on) are less used.

Second, the research content is too concentrated. The majority of strategy training is concentrated on meta-cognitive and reading cognitive strategies, with meta-cognitive strategies representing the primary focus. There is a paucity of studies on affective and communicative strategies for reading.

Thirdly, there is a lack of theoretical research foundation. Most of the research on English reading strategies in the domestic English community is based on foreign theories and has not formed its own set of theoretical system.

7. Conclusion

English reading strategy research has had some results, but there is still room for development. From the above summary, it can be found that: in the domestic English reading strategy research, although theoretical research and empirical research are both important, the research method is too single, the research content is too concentrated, and there is a lack of theoretical research basis and so on. These areas require further attention and improvement.

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