

Students Use and Acquisition of Critical Reading Strategies

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2020-04-08 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Urick, Steven T. メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.14945/00027263

Students Use and Acquisition of Critical Reading Strategies

STEVEN T. URICK (Education Development Center)

ABSTRACT

Recent years have seen growing interest in action research related to second and foreign language learning. Rather than attempting to create or strengthen generalizable theories, such research often aims for a better understanding of language learners within a particular context. This study builds on an earlier project, using questionnaires and interviews to gain understanding into students' acquisition and use of critical reading strategies (CRS).

The study's 10 participants were students enrolled in an academic writing course at a national university in Japan. They were first given questionnaires that asked them about their use of CRS in both English and their native language, Japanese. The questionnaire asked about strategies for dealing with non-fiction materials such as comparing the information in multiple texts and evaluating logic. The questionnaires were followed by informal interviews, which were used to investigate more deeply the issues that emerged from the questionnaire data.

Most students reported using CRS in both English and their native language. However, the interview data showed a wide variety of ways in which the students had acquired CRS, and differences in the ways they used them. Also, there was evidence that acquiring CRS in the students' native language was not a prerequisite for the acquisition of CRS in English. The article includes a discussion of the pedagogical implications of the project's results.

Keywords: critical reading strategies, student perspectives

1. INTRODUCTION

For students to produce good research-based writing it is crucial for them to be able to use critical reading strategies (CRS). CRS are those strategies that go beyond mere comprehension of a text, strategies such as considering whether an argument has been sufficiently supported, or comparing one's own experiences with the ideas put forward in a text. For learners of English as a foreign language, using these skills effectively can be challenging.

This action research project posed three main questions. First, what skills were students currently using when reading in English and which were they using their native language, Japanese? Second, how and when did students acquire the critical reading skills? Third, what differences were there between their use of strategies in English and their native language, and what were the reasons

for these differences?

2. METHOD

The ten students who participated were English majors in their third or fourth year at a Japanese national university. The study was conducted while the participants were taking an academic writing course taught by the author of this paper. Most of students were in a program which required them to write a graduation thesis in English in their senior year.

The students first took a survey on their non-fiction reading habits. This was followed by informal interviews, in which students were asked about their acquisition and use of critical reading strategies. The language used for the interviews was chosen by each student, some preferring English, and some preferring their native language, Japanese. Comments in Japanese have been translated into English by the author. Rather than using students' names, they are referred to by the letter S, accompanied by a numeral (for example, S1).

3. RESULTS

Results from the survey, translated into English, are shown in Table 1. The questionnaire is attached as the Appendix. An in-depth analysis of the questionnaire data is beyond the scope of this study, but a few observations can be made about the data. The answers for reading in Japanese and for reading in English were similar, with the responses for most items showing slightly less overall use for skills when reading in English. One exception to this trend is Item 3, which refers to analyzing the logic used by an author. While all students reported using this strategy at least sometimes when reading in English, two students reported hardly ever using this strategy when reading in Japanese.

A pilot study had shown wide variance in students' attitudes towards CRS, as well as many differences in their acquisition and use. Accordingly, the main goal of this projects was deepening understanding of the ways in which students acquired, perceived, and used CRS. For this reason, the questionnaire data were used to identify areas for investigation in the interviews, rather than for an analysis of the students as a group. The interview data were the main focus of the study, and an analysis of them did bring to light several interesting points.

First it was clear that students acquired CRS at different stages in their education and in different ways. For instance, S1, S3, S5 and S7 reported acquiring CRS during their university education. S5 mentioned how the seminar she participated in at university emphasized critical thought about authors of texts. S7 mentioned first acquiring the skill of comparing ideas in texts while at university. S1 mentioned that "she read more at university and this led her to use CRS in connection to formulating her own opinions."

Table 1

Results from Questionnaire

Part 1: Materials in Japanese When reading in Japanese, how often do you consider the following ideas?

		Always	Usually	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
1	The author's concepts, preconceptions		5	1	3	1
2	The author's purpose	3	5		2	
3	Whether or not the text is logical		5	3	2	
4	Which information is fact and which is opinion	5	1	4		
5	Whether or not the author's claims are sufficiently supported	5	4	1		
6	Comparing the text with your own experiences	2	4	3	1	
7	Comparing the text with other texts	1	5	3	1	
8	Critically approaching the author's claims		2	7	1	

Part 2: Materials in English When reading in English, how often do you consider the following ideas?

		Always	Usually	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
1	The author's concepts, preconceptions		4	2	2	2
2	The author's purpose	2	6		2	
3	Whether or not the text is logical		4	6		
4	Which information is fact and which is opinion	2	3	4	1	
5	Whether or not the author's claims are sufficiently supported	3	6	1		
6	Comparing the text with your own experiences	2	2	4	2	
7	Comparing the text with other texts		4	3	3	
8	Critically approaching the author's claims		3	5	2	

On the other hand, S2, S4, S6, S8, S9, and S10 spoke during interviews about learning CRS in high school. S10 explained that CRS were taught at her high school, although they were not taught in connection to university entrance exams. S4 talked about learning CRS at elementary school, junior high school and high school. S8 mentioned junior high school as well as high school as places where he acquired CRS. S6 reported "I didn't go to cram school and studied by myself. In high school, a native-speaking teacher of English taught me those kinds of skills."

S1, S2, S5, and S8 reported that the difficulty of reading English made it difficult or impossible for them to use CRS. S5 explained that because comprehension of written English is difficult, she

wouldn't be able to understand if she attempted to use CRS such as comparing information in multiple texts. S1 explained that she would like to compare ideas in texts with her own ideas and those in other texts, but that comprehension is difficult and often prevents her from using such CRS when reading in English. S8 offered that his reading habits in Japanese and English are "basically the same", but comprehending written English takes time so that moving beyond simple comprehension is difficult.

Interestingly, other students reported that because reading English was a more involved endeavor, they were more inclined to use CRS. S7 stated that since English is harder to understand, he takes more time to read, which allows him to consider such things as the author's preconceptions or purpose. He stated that he doesn't do this when reading Japanese. S10 told the interviewer, "I think critically more when reading English, because it is hard. Perhaps I do some of these things subconsciously in Japanese, though."

Two other issues that emerged from the interviews were student's construal of the reading process and students' attitudes. S5 explained that she tends to accept the points made in a text while reading it, and consider them afterwards. For this student, that critical interaction with ideas from texts was not seen as part of the reading process, but instead a separate activity. Other students' comments made it clear how the attitudes toward texts affect the way they read. S3 said that she lacks interest for readings associated with university classes and didn't take a critical approach with them, but used CRS for readings she chose to undertake herself. S4 reported that she did want to read more critically in English, but didn't feel a necessity to consider authors' preconceptions or concepts, wanting to simply deal with ideas in a text directly.

4. DISCUSSION

The data from interviews provide information that can help inform pedagogical decisions. Although other groups of learners may be more homogenous, this group demonstrated a lot of variety. In many learning environments it may be wise for teachers to expect many different levels of acquisition of and attitudes towards CRS. As mentioned above, students reported learning these skills at the elementary school level, junior high school level, high school level and at university. Students reported learning these skills both in Japanese classes and English classes. In this way, the length of time that individual students have used any given strategy and the language in which they have experience and expertise using strategies may often differ. To deal with this, for courses where CRS are an objective, exercises can be devised for developing students' ability to interact with texts critically.

The issue of the difficulty comprehending English texts, and the interference of this with employing CRS also has a relationship to course and material design. Notwithstanding that two students reported using more CRS with English texts just because of the high difficulty level, adapted

and simplified texts will be called for in many cases. We saw in the interviews for this project that many students reported having difficulty getting past simple comprehension. When designing tasks that aim to foster the use of critical reading skills, it may often be best to make sure the vocabulary and grammar used in texts is at a level where most of the students involved will be able to grasp the meaning easily, enabling them to focus on the use of CRS.

Finally, student attitudes need to be taken into account. It is likely that students who do not see any need to employ a particular reading skill will not make a strong effort to use it. A practitioner can and should present strategies to students by including a rationale that makes their importance clear. There is also the issue of student interest. A teacher can get feedback in formal and informal ways about the topics and types of texts used in a class. This feedback can be considered when selecting texts, with an eye toward providing topics and types of texts that interest as many students as possible. Beyond this, for research-based assignments, an obvious strategy is to give students a choice of topic so that they are not forced to read about something which does not interest them.

Appendix

Questionnaire

Survey on Nonfiction Reading Habits

Answer only in regards to non-fiction,
non-scientific material that you read as part of your studies at the university.

Part 1: Materials in Japanese 日本語で読む際、以下のことをどのぐらい考えるか、ご記入ください

		Always	Usually	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
1	著者の概念, 先入観					
2	著者の目的					
3	文書が倫理的かどうか					
4	事実と意見の区別					
5	主張の根拠が十分かどうか					
6	文書と自分の経験を比較					
7	文書とほかの文書の内容を比較					
8	文書の主張に対して批判的思考					

Part 1: Materials in English 英語で読む際、以下のことをどのぐらい考えるか、ご記入ください

		Always	Usually	Sometimes	Hardly Ever	Never
1	著者の概念, 先入観					
2	著者の目的					
3	文書が倫理的かどうか					
4	事実と意見の区別					
5	主張の根拠が十分かどうか					
6	文書と自分の経験を比較					
7	文書とほかの文書の内容を比較					
8	文書の主張に対して批判的思考					