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## **The Impact of the Reciprocal Teaching Approach (RTA) on Understanding Academic Non-fiction Texts**

### **ABSTRACT**

This study was carried out in one school of Mangystau region, Kazakhstan. The subjects of this research are 8 grade students. The research lasted for 3 months. The research was conducted due to students' low reading comprehension results from external monitoring examination of academic performance, which is held twice a year to inform students strengths and weaknesses and curriculum revision. It aimed to see whether a reciprocal teaching approach (RTA) would enhance EFL learners' understanding of reading non-fiction texts. Qualitative data was obtained from observation notes and teacher/student interviews, quantitative dimension was designed by pre/mid/post-test scores. 80 students were involved, 41 being experimental focus and 39 being control group, overall 6 subgroups. By the end of intervention, students' understanding of the content of cause/effects, problems/solutions and texts with graphs enhanced significantly. The difference in the improvement of control and experimental groups was 17%, which could indicate the effectiveness of RTA if used appropriately.

## **RELEVANCE AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The research was conducted to inconsistently low reading comprehension outcomes (49%) revealed by the external monitoring system. Disalignment in contents of monitoring materials and curriculum contributed to low student results. Furthermore, several other contextual factors were the reason to start this research as insufficient soft skill development, students lacked collaborative learning experience , and students possessed limited academic vocabulary.

These challenges align with the notion that comprehension difficulties are not solely linguistic but also cognitive and metacognitive in nature. According to Best et al. (2008), deep comprehension requires active engagement with text structures rather than surface-level decoding. Therefore, the need for a structured, dialogic and scaffolded instructional approach became evident.

Teachers hypothesized that the Reciprocal Teaching Approach could address both academic literacy and soft skills development simultaneously, aligning with strategic school priorities focused on improving higher-order thinking and independent learning.

## **RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS**

The aim of this action research was to observe whether Reciprocal Teaching Approach (RTA) would improve EFL students' understanding of non-fiction texts.

The research question is “to what extent does RTA impact the reading comprehension skills of 8th-grade EFL students?”

This sought to determine whether RTA would lead to measurable improvements in reading proficiency.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Proficient readers effectively utilize reading comprehension skills at specific stages to construct meaning (Akyol, 2006). Güneş (2004) emphasizes engaging in tasks requiring higher-order thinking such as examining, selecting, decision-making, converting, interpreting, deducing, analyzing, and assessing is essential. Radcliffe et al. (2004) assert that explicit strategies encourage the activation of prior knowledge and self-monitoring while reading. The more background knowledge and skills students possess, the better they can understand and retain what they read. Best et al., deep understanding goes beyond merely interpreting sentences, requiring active engagement with the text at a more profound level. Brown/Palincsar (1987), aim of RTA is to equip learners with skills necessary to regulate their learning independently. Self-regulated learners take an active role in learning tasks by setting goals/monitoring their progress/managing their thoughts/emotions/making necessary adjustments to achieve their objectives (as cited in Loyens et al., 2008). Reciprocal Teaching (RT) was compared with modeling, where educator demonstrated how to apply RTA while reading, students observed, responded to teacher's questions. RT with independent practice involved teaching students the RTA for a week, followed by 5 days of independently applying the strategies in writing while reading. Only traditional RTA, which incorporated dialogic instruction, proved effective in producing significant and consistent improvements in student performance.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research deployed observations, interviews pre, mid and post tests. The mid-test was deployed during intervention to ensure whether RTA was effective. It revealed that students' reading comprehension had been improving.

80 students were involved, 41 being experimental focus and 39 being control group, overall 6 subgroups.

As it is EFL classroom, English is taught for half of the whole class, students' number varied from 12-14 students in each group. Three EFL teachers conducted this research. Each teacher has two classes, one was experimental, the other was control groups. There were also teacher-experts who also observed lessons. It aimed to reduce the probability of teachers' bias that conducted lessons and improve reliability of obtained data.

Qualitative data was obtained from observation notes and teacher and student interviews, quantitative dimension was designed by pre, mid and post-test scores.

## **RESEARCH PROCESS**

Teachers observed each other's lessons focusing on how it could be implemented taking into consideration students' levels of language proficiency, as RTA is more suitable for more attaining students. Experimental group students spent two weeks learning RTA through modelling of the teacher.

RTA contains specific roles which could be fulfilled by students. The role of "questioner" was encouraging to generate and ask thoughtful questions about the text to deepen understanding and engagement, whereas "summarizer" required to identify, concisely express main ideas of a passage in their own words. "Clarifier's" task was to resolve misunderstandings by identifying confusing concepts, seeking explanations while "predictor" prompted students to guess what will happen next based on context clues and prior knowledge.

Brown and Palincsar(1987) worksheet was used to understand RTA effectively. The worksheet's language was simplified to suit students' level. Authentic texts on topics such as "sport, health and exercise", "food and drink" were used.

Leader-student managed discussions related to the various stages of the strategy, contributing to student autonomy, making the learning process more student-centred.

## FINDINGS

The experimental group demonstrated:

- 21% increase in average reading scores.
- 15%, 15%, and 19% improvement across performance bands.
- 17% greater improvement compared to the control group.

Distribution analysis shows performance shift:

Score Range	Experimental (Post)	Control
18–20	12 students	—
15–17	22 students	11 (14–16)
12–14	7 students	20 (11–13)
Below 10	—	8 (8–10)

The data indicate not only mean improvement but also upward redistribution of performance levels. High-achieving students increased, while low-performing proportion decreased in experimental groups.

This measurable growth supports Davies & Pearse (2000) assertion that improved learner outcomes reflect effective instructional intervention.

7 students from experimental groups struggled with reading, scored 12-14 out of 20, while 22 students answered 15-17 out of 20 questions correctly, and 12 students obtained 18-20 correct answers. Comparing post and pre-test results improvement entailed 15%, 15% and 19 % respectively. This indicates that when teachers effectively applied RTA, students made significant

progress toward achieving all learning-objectives. While control groups consisting of 39 students, of 8 scored 8-10 from 20 questions, other 20 students got 11-13 and the rest 11 more attaining students scored 14-16 scores. The difference in the improvement of control and experimental groups was 17%, which could indicate the effectiveness of RTA if used appropriately.

Student interviews revealed:

- Increased confidence
- Greater engagement
- Shift from grade-orientation to learning-orientation

Statements such as:

“It’s not just about getting the grade anymore.”

indicate a motivational transformation.

These findings align with Palincsar (1984), who emphasizes teacher–student dialogue as central to strategy effectiveness.

"I feel like I understand things better when we talk about them in groups. The teacher helps when we get stuck." "I like how we get to share our ideas with each other. It makes things clearer."

Furthermore, small-group interaction (3–4 students) strengthened peer scaffolding, consistent with Hashey & Palincsar (1987), who highlight peer interaction as a key mechanism in comprehension development.

"I think leading the group made me more confident in my ideas"

Students also reported leadership development through role rotation. This demonstrates that RTA not only supports cognitive development but also soft skills acquisition.

Students reported RTA was more effective for comprehending non-fiction texts than activities they encountered before. They found it easier due to peer support, constant guidance, extra time provided for comprehension

"I feel like I can speak up more in class now."

"I feel more involved when we work through the text together. It helps me focus on understanding, not just getting the right answers."

The educator noted that working in small groups and fostering student-to-student and teacher-to-student interactions, along with setting a clear model, positively impacted students' comprehension.

When RTA is deployed efficiently, it not only enhances comprehension but also fosters a sense of leadership and collaborative skills.

## CONCLUSION

Small groups of three to four students work best when using the Reciprocal Teaching Approach (RTA). For students to completely understand the procedure and expectations, a minimum of two weeks of teacher-led modeling is required. Student responsibilities that are well-defined, organized, and routinely cycled support skill development and balanced involvement. Graphs and diagrams are examples of visual texts that should be methodically incorporated into instruction. Encouraging meaningful academic debates requires specific support for peer dialogue.

Giving teachers professional development centered on dialogic instruction is essential for school-wide acceptance. Rather than being viewed as an extra tactic, RTA ought to be incorporated within the academic literacy program. Mid-cycle assessments can be used to successfully guide instructional adjustments and track student development.

When teachers effectively applied RTA, students made significant progress toward achieving all learning-objectives.

When RTA is implemented appropriately, students are more focused on the learning process rather than simply on marks.

When RTA is deployed efficiently, it not only enhances comprehension but also fosters a sense of leadership and collaborative skills.

This indicates effectiveness of RTA as good results reflect effective teaching (Davies&Pearse, 2000). Certainly, it doesn't refute that there could be other factors which could contribute to the improvement of students' understanding of non-fiction texts.

The difference in the improvement of control and experimental groups was 17%, which could indicate the effectiveness of RTA if used appropriately.

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