

## **A Comparative Study of Reciprocal Teaching Only (RTO) and Explicit Teaching of Strategies before Reciprocal Teaching (ET-RT) On Reading Comprehension of EFL Learners**

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**Abstract:** Reciprocal teaching is characterized as a dialogue taking place between the teacher and students (or student leader and members of the group) that results in students learning how to construct meaning when they are placed in must read situations (Carter & Fekete, 2001). It provides students with four discrete and specific reading strategies that are actively and consciously used as texts are processed (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). These reading strategies are clarifying, predicting, questioning, and summarizing. Reciprocal teaching has two forms. Rosenshine and Meister (1994) referred to these forms as reciprocal teaching only (RTO) and explicit teaching of strategies before reciprocal teaching (ET-RT). Fung, Wilkinson, and Moore (2003) claimed that "few students are able to handle the linguistic burden when the reciprocal teaching dialogue is conducted without explicit teaching of strategies" (p. 3). The present study was conducted to determine the difference between reciprocal teaching only and explicit teaching of strategies before reciprocal teaching on reading comprehension of Iranian female EFL learners. The result of statistical analysis revealed that reciprocal teaching can improve reading comprehension of EFL learners. The result of the tests also indicated that explicit teaching of strategies before reciprocal teaching (ET-RT) turned out to cause more gains in reading comprehension of EFL learners at the intermediate level.

**Key words:** reciprocal teaching, explicit teaching of strategies before reciprocal teaching (ET-RT), reading comprehension, reciprocal teaching only (RTO)

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Reading has been considered as one of the major sources of providing students with great amount of information about various subjects. Rivers (1981) stated that "the majority of the students, who never have the opportunity of conversing with native speakers of the most international languages, will have to resort to written materials in that specific language" (p. 260). Chastain (1988) stated that "language students need large amounts of comprehensible input, and reading materials provide the most readily available source" (p. 218).

Comprehension is the heart and goal of reading, since the purpose of all reading is to gather meaning from the printed page. Royse (2001) stated that "although every student knows how to read, many have never learned good reading skills" (p. 127). According to Hart and Speece (1998), "one of the greatest demands on students attending post secondary institutions is the comprehension of many different and difficult texts" (p. 670). As students continually try to construct meaning from a text they come to realize that reading is more than decoding words, it requires strategies that facilitate construction of meaning from the text (Lederer, 2000).

Reciprocal teaching, developed by Palincsar and Brown (1984), is designed to improve the reading comprehension of students who are able to decode, but have difficulty in comprehending age-appropriate text. Reciprocal teaching is designed to teach students cognitive strategies such as summarization, question generation, clarification, and prediction that might lead to improved reading comprehension (Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

Two forms of reciprocal teaching evolved in the course of the work of Palincsar and Brown. Rosenshine and Meister (1994) referred to these forms as reciprocal teaching only (RTO) and explicit teaching before reciprocal teaching (ET-RT). They further claimed that "the two forms differ in how and when the initial instruction in the cognitive strategies takes place" (p. 483).

Given that the explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies has been demonstrated to be effective in enhancing learning and performance (Hattie, Briggs, & Purdie, 1996; Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996), the question arises, "How comprehension strategies can be effectively employed in the college classroom?" One answer to this question would be by explicit teaching of strategies before reciprocal teaching. Fung, Wilkinson, and Moore (2003) stated that "explicit instruction before reciprocal teaching leads to readers' more conscious use of reading strategies, and to better reading performance" (p. 6). They further claimed that "few students are able to handle the linguistic burden when the reciprocal teaching dialogue is conducted without explicit teaching of strategies" (p. 3).

The purpose of this study is to determine whether explicit teaching of strategies before reciprocal teaching has any significant impact on reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners.

To fulfill the purpose of this study, the following research questions are addressed:

1. Does explicit teaching of strategies before reciprocal teaching (ET-RT) have any significant effect on reading comprehension of EFL learners?

2. Does reciprocal teaching only (RTO) have any significant effect on reading comprehension of EFL learners?

In order to investigate the above-mentioned research questions empirically, the following null hypotheses is stated:

1. Explicit teaching of strategies before reciprocal teaching (ET-RT) does not have any significant effect on reading comprehension of EFL learners.

2. Reciprocal teaching only (RTO) does not have any significant effect on reading comprehension of EFL learners.

### ***Reciprocal Teaching:***

#### ***A. Definition:***

Reciprocal teaching is an instructional style that was originally developed for struggling readers. It is in a category called interactive learning. Interactive learning is a style in which teachers and students take turns sharing information and leading discussion. This style shows students how professionals work together, learn, and understand. Reciprocal teaching prepares students to interact in the world outside of school (Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

Palincsar and Brown (1984) stated that it is designed to improve reading comprehension in children who can decode but experience difficulty in understanding text. Students in this program acquire specific knowledge as well as learning a set of monitoring strategies necessary for independent learning.

Carter (1997) pointed that in reciprocal teaching readers learn new information, main ideas, and arguments by using prior experience as a channel. Readers construct meaning from the text by relying on prior experience to parallel, contrast or affirm what the author suggests.

The components of reciprocal teaching are directly related to elements of zone of proximal development and scaffolding (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). According to Vygotsky (1978), "the zone of proximal development is the area between the actual developmental level of the child and the level of potential development and is the area within which instruction can take place" (p. 85-86). Vygotsky (1978) suggested that each child's development within his or her zone of proximal development is enabled through frequent, social interaction. Palincsar and Brown (1984) stated that reciprocal teaching is an intervention that was based on the notions of expert scaffolding. Consistent with Vygotsky's theory (1978), scaffold instruction involves working with students in their zones of proximal development (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Scaffolding involves the gradual release of responsibility from expert to learner (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Palincsar and Brown (1984) mentioned that in expert scaffolding, the expert acts as a guide, shaping the learning efforts of the novices and providing support for the learning until it is no longer needed. They further stated that "The metaphor of a scaffold captures the idea of an adjustable and temporary support that can be removed when no longer necessary" (p. 411).

Palincsar (1998) stated that the cycle of effective reading comprehension instruction begins with explicit strategy instruction by the teacher. During the next phase, the teacher offers varying degrees of support as students practice the strategy. This suggests that explicit teaching of comprehension strategies can provide a scaffold for students to begin to internalize the strategies taught and to apply them on their own.

#### ***B. History of Reciprocal Teaching:***

Since the mid 1980's reciprocal teaching has received much attention as a reading program that promotes reading comprehension (Marks, et al., 1993). Palincsar and Brown (1984), the creators of reciprocal teaching, described reciprocal teaching's instructional approach as problem solving activities that aim to promote thinking while reading, resulting in better comprehension of the reading passage. The delivery of the instruction can take a variety of approaches but usually incorporates scaffolding, small groups and the teaching of four reading strategies: Generating questions, summarizing, clarification and prediction (Alfassi, 1998).

In the late 1970's researchers began to teach students specific reading comprehension strategies, such as summarizing and question generating (Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). Until that time, students were rarely taught cognitive strategies that could help them understand a reading passage. According to Rosenshine and Meister (1994), during this period a great deal of instructional time was spent asking students questions about what they read but little time was spent instructing students on reading strategies that would help them with answering the questions. They further claimed that at the end of that decade researchers began to investigate cognitive strategies that would assist students with understanding a reading passage. Reciprocal teaching is one of the cognitive strategies that came out of that movement.

In their 1984 study, and in subsequent follow-up research, Palincsar and Brown found that their reciprocal students scored higher on comprehension-monitoring tests. Palincsar and Brown (1984) claimed that "the success of the reciprocal teaching study may be attributed not only to the strategies involved, but also to the interaction of the students in a cooperative learning activity, and to the responsibility placed on the students for their own learning" (p. 140). In the training phase, modeling of the strategies and control of the discussion and activities is necessarily teacher-centered. As the students gain confidence in their own efficacy with the reciprocal strategies, the teacher turns over direction of the exercise to the students themselves (Brown & Palincsar, 1989; Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

It is worth mentioning that since the development of the reciprocal teaching, many research studies have been carried out to explore the advantages of this model (Carter, 1997; Oczkus, 2003; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994), and to examine its effectiveness in improving reading comprehension skills across a range of elementary (Gilroy & Moore, 1988; Hacker & Tenet, 2002; Hashey & Connors, 2003; Kelly, Moore, & Tuck, 1994), middle (King & Johnson, 1999), and high school students (Westera & Moore, 1995)

### **Methodology**

#### **A. Participants:**

Ninety five female intermediate EFL learners, ranging in age from 14 to 19, learning English at a private language institute in Iran participated in the study. Based on Preliminary English Test (PET), 63 subjects whose scores were one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected and they were divided into two groups of 32 and 31 participants. Therefore, there were 31 intermediate female students in RTO group and 32 intermediate female students in ET- RT group.

#### **B. Instrument:**

In this study, the following instruments were used. The first instrument was a language proficiency test for homogenizing the students of the study, which is called preliminary English test or PET. The test included three sections: reading (five parts), writing (three parts), and listening (four parts). Totally test included 67 items, and 75 points with a completion time limit of 80 minutes. The other instrument was one pre-test of reading comprehension and one post-test of reading comprehension for both groups. Pre and post tests were selected from preliminary English test or PET. Each of these tests consisted of two reading passages followed by 60 multiple choice items with a completion time limit of 60 minutes. These tests were administered to capture any significant differences between ET-RT and RTO groups.

The other instruments were the Interchange (II) and New Headway book for intermediate level. The provided reading passages were related to the level and interest of the students. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the provided passages were used in RTO group as well. In other word, in both groups, students had a similar reading passage for every session.

#### **C. Procedure:**

Following the administration of PET, the researcher used 1SD above and below the mean criterion to select participants of this study. The number of selected participants in this study was sixty three. Then they were divided into two groups of 32 and 31 for RTO and ET-RT groups randomly. The groups then took a reading comprehension test as a pre-test. After 19 sessions of instruction (90-minute sessions three days per week lasting 7 weeks), a posttest of reading comprehension was given to both groups.

In ET-RT the researcher had to set aside at least five instructional day to introduce students to each of the following comprehension strategies including, prediction, summarization, question generation, and clarifying. In these lessons, students were introduced to the strategies, one by one, using worksheet activities led by the classroom teacher and conducted on a whole class basis. Separate lessons were devoted to instruction in question generation, summarization, clarification, and prediction. Each of the following comprehension strategies was explained by introducing key terms such as "*the most important ideas are.... This (part, book) is about.... The problem occurs when....*," in summarization; "*I didn't understand the part when.... This (sentence, paragraph, page) is not clear, this does not make sense to me,*" for clarification; and "*I think .... I wonder .... I predict ....*," in prediction. After students had been introduced to the key strategies, the group was ready to apply all four strategies from the reciprocal teaching package to a reading passage. The participants were grouped to perform key strategies of reciprocal teaching. In applying reciprocal teaching participants were required to perform these four roles of question generator, clarifier, summarizer, and predictor in each group. It means that for each assigned paragraph each students in each group was required to perform one role and these roles rounded by the next paragraph.

In RTO all modeling and instruction on how to develop and apply the four cognitive strategies took place during the dialogues. First of all, the participants were grouped into four groups. In each session, the teacher was the first learning leader. After the teacher modeled expert strategy use, the responsibility to perform the four strategies was given to one student in each group. Participants got more control of their own behavior in

questioning, clarifying, summarizing, and predicting by him/her. The instructional term included 19 sessions in both groups and the 20th session was dedicated to the posttest. During these nineteen sessions each class took about 90 minutes and participants spend 20 to 35 minutes per session for reading section. Four units of Interchange II including units one to four were covered. At the end of the intervention, a posttest of reading comprehension was given to both groups.

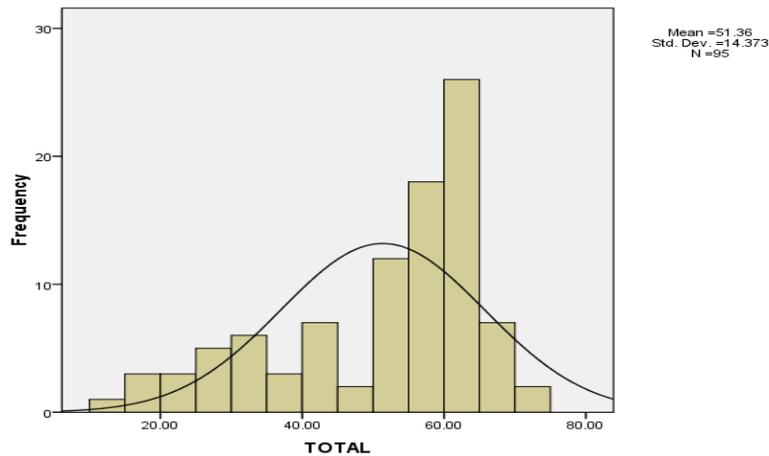
**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**A. PET Used for Homogenizing the Subjects:**

First, PET was used as an instrument for homogenizing the students of the study. After calculating the mean and standard deviation of the participants' scores on language proficiency test, only those scores which fell within one standard deviation from the mean were included in further data analysis. The learners who scored one standard deviation below and above the mean were divided into two groups of RTO and ET-RT randomly. The number of participants who scored one standard deviation below and above the mean was 63; there were 32 participants in RTO group and 31 participants in ET-RT group. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the language proficiency test in the study and Figure 1. shows the histogram of the language proficiency test scores of the subjects in the study.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics of the PET Administration

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total.	95	14.50	72.00	51.3553	14.3729
Valid N (listwise)	95				



**Fig. 1:** Histogram of the Scores Obtained in the PET Administration

To make sure that the histogram of the language proficiency test scores is a normal one, One-Sample Kolmogrove-Simimove Test was conducted. The Table 2 displays the result of the test.

**Table 2:** One-Sample Kolmogrove-Simirnov Test

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		
N		95
Normal Parametersa	Mean	51.3553
	Std. Deviation	14.3729
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.191
	Positive	.092
	Negative	-.191
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		1.864
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.620

According to the results of the One-Sample Kolmogrove-Smimove Test, the histogram of the total scores of these ninety five subjects was normal because the two-tailed significance of the test statistic was 0.62 (Asymp. Sig. > 0.05) meaning that the total scores of the subjects come from a normal distribution.

**B. Dividing the Subjects in Two Homogeneous Groups:**

After dividing 63 subjects into two groups of RTO and ET-RT randomly, to determine whether these two groups are homogeneous, an independent sample t-test between the total scores of the participants in RTO and ET-RT groups was conducted. Tables 3 and 4 display the descriptive data of the groups and the results of the conducted independent sample t-test procedure.

**Table 3:** Descriptive Statistics of RTO and ET-RT Groups

				Group Statistics	
	N	Mean		Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ET-RT	31	34.3548		7.10656	1.27638
RTO	32	34.5625		4.66931	.82542

**Table 4:** Independent Samples T- Test of RTO and ET-RT Groups according to their Language Proficiency Test scores

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
.017	.137	61	.891	.20766	1.51032	-2.81240	3.22773	
	.137	51.605	.892	.20766	1.52002	-2.84304	3.25836	

As Table 4 shows, there is no significant difference between these two randomly divided groups; and that they are actually homogenous.

**C. Independent Sample T-Test in ET-RT Group:**

To test the first null hypothesis of the study, an independent sample t-test was performed comparing the mean of ET-RT group's scores in the pretest and posttest phase. Tables 5 and 6 show the output of the independent sample t-tests procedure. The t-test results came out to be statistically significant at 0.05 level ( $t = 5.809$ ,  $df = 61$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Consequently, the results indicated that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of pretest and posttest in ET-RT group as posttest mean was higher than the pretest mean ( $48.2500 > 39.7097$ ). It can be concluded that at 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis could be rejected because t-observed value exceeded the critical value of t, meaning that the difference between sample means was large enough to be attributed to the treatment provided by the researcher.

**Table 5:** Pre and Posttest Statistics in ET-RT Group

Group Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ET-RT. pre	31	39.7097	7.81961	1.40444
ET-RT. post	32	48.2500	2.79400	.49391

**Table 6:** Independent Sample T- Test of Pre and Posttest in ET-RT Group

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	27.073	.000	-5.809	61	.000	-8.54032	1.47029	-11.48035	-5.60029
Equal variances not assumed			-5.737	37.327	.000	-8.54032	1.48876	-11.55595	-5.52470

**D. Independent Sample Test in RTO Group:**

To test the second null hypothesis of the study, another independent sample t-test was performed comparing the mean of RTO group's scores in the pretest and posttest phase. Tables 7 and 8 show the output of the independent sample t-tests procedure. The t-test results came out to be statistically significant at 0.05 level ( $t = 7.297$ ,  $df = 61$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Consequently, the results indicated that there was a significant difference between the mean score of pretest and posttest in RTO group ( $43.9677 > 35.8125$ ). It can be concluded that at 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected because t-observed value exceeded the critical value

of t, meaning that the difference between sample means was large enough to be attributed to the treatment provided by the researcher.

**Table 7:** Pre and Posttest Statistics in RTO Group

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
RTO.pre	32	35.8125	4.74809	.83935
RTO.post	31	43.9677	4.08643	.73394

**Table 8:** Independent Sample T-Test of Pre and Posttest in RTO Group

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.196	.04	-7.297	61	.000	-8.15524	1.11767	-10.39015	-5.92033
Equal variances not assumed			-7.314	60.176	.000	-8.15524	1.11498	-10.38540	-5.92508

**E. Independent Sample T-Test between ET-RT and RTO Groups**

To determine the differences between ET-RT and RTO groups another independent sample t-test was performed comparing the mean of RTO and ETRT group's scores in the posttest phase. Tables 9 and 10 show the output of the independent sample t-tests procedure. The t-test results came out to be statistically significant at 0.05 level ( $t = 4.869$ ,  $df = 61$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Consequently, the results indicated that there was a significant difference between the mean score of posttests in RTO and ET-RT groups as posttest mean in ET-RT group was higher than the posttest mean in RTO group ( $48.2500 > 43.9677$ ).

**Table 9:** Posttest Statistics in RTO and ETRT Groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
RTO.post	31	43.9677	4.08643	.73394
ETRT.post	32	48.2500	2.79400	.49391

**Table 10:** Independent Sample T- Test of Posttest in ETRT and RTO Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	6.625	.012	-4.869	61	.000	-4.28226	.87950	-6.0409	-2.52359
Equal variances not assumed			-4.841	52.838	.000	-4.28226	.88466	-6.0567	-2.50772

**Discussion:**

According to the result of the study, it can be concluded that reciprocal teaching was indeed effective. These results add support to Palincsare and Brown's (1984) assertion that reciprocal teaching can be effective method to improve the comprehension monitoring and comprehension fostering skills of students. These results are also consistent with those of previous studies (Gilroy & Moore, 1988; King & Johnson, 1999; lederer, 2000).

The above outcome displayed that in reading skill the ET-RT group outperformed the RTO group. In this study explicit teaching of strategies before reciprocal teaching (ET-RT) turned out to cause more gains in reading skill in ET-RT group in comparison with RTO group which did not receive explicit teaching of strategies before reciprocal teaching intervention.

The findings of the present study confirmed the ideas of some foreign language researchers about the efficacy of explicit reading instruction as a feasible tool to enhance students' reading comprehension. As mentioned by Rosenshine, Meister, and Chapman (1996), the explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies has been demonstrated to be effective in enhancing learning and performance. Fung, Wilkinson, and

Moore (2003) stated that "explicit instruction before reciprocal teaching leads to readers' more conscious use of reading strategies, and to better reading performance" (p. 6). Palincsar, Brown, and Martin (1987) found that when teachers comprehensively prepared students to activate each role, they were able to perform tasks and apply what they learned. Pressely (2000) claimed that explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies will improve reading skill.

As Palincsar and Brown (1984) mentioned, reciprocal teaching is an intervention that was based on the notions of expert scaffolding. The results of the current study and the literature on reading comprehension suggest explicit teaching of comprehension strategies before reciprocal teaching can provide a scaffold for students to begin to internalize the strategies taught and to apply them on their own.

#### **Conclusion And Pedagogical Implications:**

The findings of present study revealed that reciprocal teaching has significant effect on reading comprehension of EFL learners. As noted by Palincsar and Brown (1984), it is clear that reciprocal teaching can be effective method to improve the reading comprehension skills of students. The above outcome displayed that in reading skill the ET-RT group outperformed the RTO group. These results add support to Meyer, Young, and Bartlett (1989) assertion that explicit teaching of strategies is an effective means for improving reading comprehension.

Effective strategy instruction requires the teacher to become a mediator who provides explicit explanation, modeling, and scaffolding to help students construct understandings about the content of the text, strategies that aid in comprehension of the text, and the nature of the reading process (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Explicit teaching of strategies before reciprocal teaching appears to meet these requirements.

In essence, the implication for teachers who teach reading comprehension at any level is that initial, explicit instruction through modeling of comprehension strategies (i.e., predicting, clarifying, summarizing, questioning) can assist students in self-monitoring and applying the strategies when reading silently. Moreover, teachers need to be familiarized with reciprocal teaching. So, it would be reasonable to allocate some time to the training of teachers in this regard. By training teachers, successively students would benefit from this effective approach and teachers would have better learners in reading skill. Reciprocal teaching has proved to be useful with a widely diverse population of students. Therefore, in reading comprehension skill designing especial tasks based on reciprocal teaching reading comprehension strategies seems very advisable.

A possible future study could investigate the impact of reciprocal teaching on other foreign language skills including reading, listening, and writing. While reciprocal teaching utilizes the four strategies (1) predicting, (2) clarifying, (3) summarizing, and (4) questioning as a packaged intervention, it is suggested that similar studies could be done to determine which of the four strategies is most effective in increasing reading comprehension abilities.

It is hoped that these findings will motivate teachers to break away from the teacher-centered classroom practices and focus on student-centered classroom tasks. In such classes, the teacher becomes the guide on the side instead of sage on the stage. It is the teachers' duty to use exercises and tasks that develop learners' autonomy and responsibility in their classes. Teachers can achieve this goal by giving students more structure at the beginning of a set of lessons and gradually turning responsibility over to them to operate on their own.

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