

A Study on Teaching Methods of Reading Comprehension Strategies by Comparison between TEM-4 Reading Comprehension and IELTS Academic Reading Comprehension*

Qian Feng

Hubei Engineering University, Xiaogan, Hubei, China

Liping Chen

School of Foreign Languages, Yunnan Agricultural University, Yunnan, China

Abstract—The ultimate purpose of Test for English Majors 4 (TEM-4) and International English Language Test System Academic (IELTS A) are to test students' English language application abilities. This paper made a comparative study between reading comprehension part in two tests. It points out that IELTS A, with its up-to-date and diversified types of writing, can reflect students' real English level and ability to use English. IELTS reading requires that students adopt effective reading comprehension strategies to accurately and effectively extract the information and understand the meaning in the face of different types of English reading materials. Meanwhile, students can apply productive skills to use English language. It further puts forward 3 teaching methods of reading comprehension strategies: direct explanation, transactional method, interactive constructive method. It ends with factors teachers should take into consideration when teaching reading comprehension strategies. Three methods can be used in combination considering context of Chinese students' English learning, teachers' demonstration and effective group discussion and communication.

Index Terms—TEM-4, IELTS A, reading comprehension strategies, teaching methods

I. INTRODUCTION

Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools, as a new school-running mode, has been springing up across the country over the decade, which makes full use of high-quality education resources in foreign universities and introduces teaching contents and teaching methods into China. It opened a door for Chinese students to go abroad for further study. This new mode has made great contribution in promotion of higher education internationalization in China. For both English teachers and students, the problem they face is English language, since one of the prerequisites before going abroad is to pass language tests as IELTS or TOEFL. English language becomes the crucial tool not only for study but also for living in a foreign environment. Most Chinese universities are cooperating with UK universities and IELTS result will be accepted by most English speaking countries. That is why nearly all Chinese universities choose to focus on IELTS when teaching English in joint programmes. The full name of IELTS is International English Language Test System. It was developed by University of Cambridge Examination Committee, which was accepted as an authoritative test of testees' English level and effective English communication skills by more than 6,000 colleges and universities, government and professional bodies in the world. There are two types of test within IELTS. One is IELTS Academic, the other is IELTS General. IELTS Academic is for people planning to study in higher education or seeking professional registration. IELTS General is for people planning to study in secondary education, to work or to do some training programs in English-speaking countries.

Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools decides the importance of English language. The characteristics of joint programmes require that English language ability of students be higher than those in traditional higher education.

The English tests for English majors are Test for English Majors 4 (TEM-4) or 8 (TEM-8). Test for English majors is sponsored by Foreign Language Professional Teaching Steering Committee in Higher Education of Ministry of Education. It aims to measure English level of English majors in the last two years in universities. English syllabus of State Education Commission for English majors in the last two years in universities regulates that the task of English teaching is to continue to lay a solid foundation of English language, further expand scope of knowledge, and focus on cultivating integrated English skills, enriching the cultural knowledge, and improving communicative abilities. The nature of both IELTS and TEM reflects the ultimate goal is to test the students' language application abilities. At the

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same time, it determines that English teachers teach English as a tool for study and living.

Reading is regarded as one of the most important skills in our daily life, and for many English learners, the opportunity to directly communicate with native English speakers is really limited. Reading is quite an easy way to learn English language. Besides, reading comprehension part accounts for a large proportion in English tests.

This paper will make a comparative study on reading comprehension in IELTS Academic and TEM-4 to find out the differences between the two. It aims to put forward some practical teaching methods of reading comprehension strategies.

II. WHAT IS READING AND READING COMPREHENSION

What is reading?

We all know that reading is a way of getting knowledge and the main input method in foreign language learning, but what is the nature of reading? According to Goodman,

“Reading is a selective process. It involves an interaction between thought and language. Efficient reading does not result from precise perception and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest, the most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time.” (Goodman, 1973, p.35)

Reading experts consider reading as “the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction of the reader’s existing knowledge, the information suggested by the written text, and the context of the reading situation” (Anthony, Pearson & Raphael, 1993, p.284).

And with the influence of the theories of the Cognitive Psychology, the modern reading theory points out the purpose of reading is to obtain meaning and the process to obtain meaning does not only depends on some particular sentences and words, but depends on the sentences and words around in the co-text. And the modern theory believes that in the second language reading comprehension, besides the reading material, the invisible information plays an important role. Between both of them, the former one is the sensory input based on the language input, the latter one is non-sensory input which refers to the knowledge which has already existed in the readers’ brain. Only they work together, can reading be efficient and correct.

What is reading Comprehension?

Notions of reading comprehension have changed dramatically over the decades.

Harris (1995) concludes reading comprehension as “intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through text and reader”. Current research views reading as a more dynamic process. Grabe (1997) views reading comprehension as the activity of reconstructing a reasonable spoken message from written symbols to a form of language, which the person can understand. It is the most important skill for most language learner, especially for EFL learners. Reading involves the integrations of bottom-up processing which is text driven and top-bottom processing which is concept driven.

From the view of text linguistics, to understand the meaning of a text is an explanation behavior, which not only depends on the content the writer put in the text, but also the thinking which the reader brings into the text. That is to say, reading is an active process of the reader’s but not a passive one. It refers to the psycholinguistic action process which combines the decoding process of the literal comprehension and the inferential activity by the reader for comprehension. Reading comprehension is “the reconstruction of knowledge through dynamic and attentive reading procedures that direct readers to critically interpret and analyze the passage.” (Sharifah Amani Binti Syed Abdul Rahman, 2010, p.11) “Reading comprehension depends on the execution and integration of many cognitive processes.” (Panayioti, et al., 2014, p.10)

It is important that students “need to learn the uses of reading ... so that merely a vehicle for transmitting information but a real tool for fostering the construction and transformation of knowledge”. (Mateos, et al., 2007, p.489). Wyse (2006) introduces his text with the statement: “The single most important thing that you can do to improve the chances of success on your course is to read widely” (p.4).

III. COMPARISON BETWEEN READING COMPREHENSION OF TEM-4 AND IELTS ACADEMIC

A. Method

All reading comprehension materials in the paper are chosen from two sources. One is Cambridge IELTS, which is the only official publications of IELTS training materials by Cambridge University press. There are 9 serials from Cambridge 1 to 9, among which Cambridge 5 to 9 are updated and used frequently for training and teaching. In this paper, 4 tests in Cambridge 7 published in 2009 have been chosen. The other is the past exam paper of TEM-4 from the year of 2012 to 2015.

B. Data Analysis

When doing reading comprehension in TEM-4, examinees have about twenty-five minutes to finish twenty single choices. While in IELTS, the answer time for reading comprehension is sixty minutes, which consists of three parts, with different types of questions following each part. The comparative study will be focused on the following aspects: question type, text length, text theme and text form.

1. Question type

As a big part of TEM-4, reading comprehension plays an important role, which aims to detect examinees' abilities of understanding articles or literary works that are in the same level of some originals in a set time. The question type of reading comprehension part seems to be simple. It presents only one type, i.e. single choice, involving summing up and summarizing, questions of details, questions of inference, and questions of view and attitude.

Compared to TEM-4, question type in IELTS academic (IELTS-A) tends to be more diversified, which contains single choice, multiple choice, short answer question, sentence completion, notes/summary/diagram/ flow chart/table complication, list of headings, identification of writer's view/attitudes, classification, matching lists. And the difficulty level of IELTS-A reading comprehension is comparatively higher than that of TEM-4.

TABLE1
CONTENTS OF SINGLE CHOICE IN TEM-4 READING COMPREHENSION

Contents & number Year & percentage	Summing up and summarizing	Sentence comprehension	Questions of details	Questions of inference	Total number of question
2012	1	1	10	8	20
2013	1	0	13	6	20
2014	3	2	8	7	20
2015	2	5	10	3	20
Total	7	8	41	24	80
Percentage	9	10	51	30	100

TABLE 2
QUESTION TYPE IN IELTS-A READING COMPREHENSION

question type times	Summing up and summarizing	Multiple choice	List of headings	True or false question	Sentence completion	Schematic table item	Matching
Average times	4	4	3	7	3	6	1
Percentage	14.3	14.3	10.7	25	10.7	21.4	3.5

As has been mentioned before, single choice is the only type of reading comprehension in TEM-4. In table 1, among the total 80 questions, the contents of questions are different. Summing up and summarizing accounts for 9%, sentence comprehension accounts for 10%, questions of details accounts for 51% and questions of inference accounts for 30%. It's obvious that TEM-4 reading comprehension part pays much attention to questions of details and questions of inference.

In table 2, among the questions of Test1—Test4 in IELTS, the average times of summing up and summarizing is 4, the same with multiple choice, list of heading 3, true or false 7, sentence completion 3, schematic table item 6 and matching 1, with respective percentage as 14.3%, 14.3%, 10.7%, 25%, 10.7%, 21.4% and 3.5%. It is not hard to see that percentage of each type is close.

2. Theme and length

TABLE 3
THEME AND LENGTH IN TEM-4 READING COMPREHENSION

theme year	Types of writing				Theme	Text Length	
	N	D	A	E			
2012	2	0	1	1	A. manner B. recession in America C. graduate unemployment D. Tutankhamen	A.370 B.444 C.260 D.369	total 1443
2013	2	0	1	1	A. public speaking B. Rick Alden C. financial instability D. character model	A.458 B.506 C.481 D.455	total 1900
2014	2	0	1	1	A. pig in the middle B. stress in college life C. texting revolution D. growing-up	A.464 B.374 C.368 D.434	total 1640
2015	1	0	1	2	A. information in Internet B. internship C. war on anti-smoking D. attachment parents	A.371 B.497 C.432 D.561	total 1861

(Because of the limitation of space, here under type of writing, N stands for Narration, D for Description, A for Argumentation, and E for Exposition.)

TABLE 4-1
THEME IN IELTS-A READING COMPREHENSION

P \ T	Passage 1	Passage 2	Passage 3
Test 1	Bats research	Technology development	Psychology and study
Test 2	Japan pagoda	True cost of food	Rural transportation
Test 3	Ants wisdom	Population and genes	European forest protection
Test 4	Pyramid research	Fisheries research	Noise effect

(T stands for Test, and P stands for Passage.)

TABLE 4-2
LENGTH IN IELTS-A READING COMPREHENSION

Test \ Passage	Passage 1	Passage 2	Passage 3	Total
Test 1	877	827	934	2638
Test 2	1024	886	1147	3057
Test 3	897	713	948	2558
Test 4	865	885	750	2500

In Table 3, TEM-4 reading comprehension part consists of two pieces of narration, one argumentation and one exposition in 2012, 2013 and 2014 respectively, with themes being manner, recession, unemployment and archeology in 2012, public speaking, records of personages, financial issues and moral problems in 2013, game, college life, technology and life in 2014. In 2015, there are one narration, one argumentation and two pieces of exposition with themes of internet, internship, anti-smoking and family education.

The total text length is 1443 words in 2012, 1900 words in 2013, 1640 words in 2014 and 1861 words in 2015. Words in each piece of writing are between 200 and 600.

Table 4-1 presents themes of IELTS reading test. In Test 1, they are bats research, technology development and psychology and study. In Test 2, they are Japan pagoda, true cost of food and rural transportation. In Test 3, they are ants wisdom, population and genes and European forest protection. And in Test 4, they are pyramid research, fisheries research and noise effect.

In Table 4-2, it is obvious that the length of every reading article in IELTS is much longer than that of TEM-4.

3. Form

A typical form of text, nonlinear form, appears frequently in IELTS reading. "Linear Text is described as traditional text type that has a topic sentence at the beginning of a paragraph, is followed by several supporting sentences which serve as further elaboration to the topic sentence. Nonlinear is the opposite of linear text in which it allows readers to control their own movement, not necessarily using front-to-back movement and text is normally accompanied by graphic-visual representation." (Sharifah Amani Binti Syed Abdul Rahman, 2010, p.11). Nonlinear text intersperses in linear text with titles (or subtitles), prefaces, tables, charts, etc. There are many forms of examples of nonlinear texts. Printed forms as reports, application forms for hotels and companies, and encyclopedic entries are all good examples. (Ain Nadzimah & Chan, 2006). The following table shows clearly differences of text form between TEM-4 and IELTS.

TABLE 5
CONTRAST IN TEXT FORM

Form \ Number	TEM-4		IELTS	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Linear	16	100	0	0
Nonlinear	0	0	12	100
Total	16	100	12	100

What can be learned from Table 5 is that text forms in TEM-4 reading part are all linear, while in IELTS reading test, they are all nonlinear.

C. Results

Generally speaking, length of reading in TEM-4 is shorter than that in IELTS-A. Topics in TEM-4 are related to campus, network and some general reading. Compared with TEM-4, IELTS-A involves much more reading materials like geography, history, culture, medicine, education, management, sociology and other aspects. All articles are with nature of popular science, and the content is closely linked with hot topics in the contemporary society. Those include widely advocated traffic environmental protection concept like bus priority and carpooling, new technology like genes, industrial development like food, fisheries and noise effect, social science like psychology, and cultural knowledge like Japan pagoda and Pyramid research. All those appear in domestic newspaper and are often discussed in our social life. The multiplicity of the theme, on one hand, caters to the different students' interests and greatly enhances their study enthusiasm.

On the other hand, it is in line with the aim of teaching English as a tool for learning and living. Reading for the purpose of learning English and reading for getting information are quite different. The former is a process of accumulation of language knowledge, while the latter is a process of obtaining useful information based on language

knowledge and ability. The diversity of reading materials can stimulate students' thirst for knowledge and attract their attention to get information rather than mere grammatical and syntactic analysis.

What's more, the purpose of IELTS-A is to test whether those students with intention to study abroad are qualified with enough language level. When studying in a foreign university, it is common for a student to read a lot of literature and to search for a lot of information. In the actual test, students are indeed in the process of simulation, finding, retrieving and locating information rather than trying to understand every word.

Last but not least, different types of questions in IELTS show that reading is a two-way process. Besides those perceptive skills, students need productive skills. Of course, in this process of reading, students need to give full play to all their language knowledge, metacognitive strategies and background knowledge, etc.

IV. TEACHING METHODS OF READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

It can be seen from the above analysis, IELTS reading requires that students adopt effective reading comprehension strategies to accurately and effectively extract the information and understand the meaning in the face of different types of English reading materials. Meanwhile, students can apply productive skills to use English language. How to teach to help students master effective reading comprehension strategies is an important task faced by teachers in teaching English reading.

A. *Reading Comprehension Strategies*

Usually, there are four levels of reading comprehension a student can experience when reading. They are literal comprehension, interpretive or inferential comprehension, critical comprehension and creative comprehension from the lowest to the highest level. Literal comprehension refers to readers' understanding of what is explicitly stated in the text. Interpretive or inferential comprehension refers to readers' understanding of what is implicitly stated in the text by using background knowledge to help deciding the interrelationships between sentences and paragraphs. Critical comprehension focuses on personal judgments after reading by using critical thinking. Creative comprehension refers to the reader's emotional response. It focuses more on after reading activity. While involving himself/herself in the reading, the reader will have new ideas.

Thus, usually two sets of complementary strategies will be used when reading: those for superficial meaning and network of the reading and those for inner logic and insight or reflection of the reading. In relation to the superficial ones, at least three main features including unity, coherence and cohesion should be sorted out to facilitate the reader's understanding of the meaning. At lexical and syntactic level, details and explanations, examples, comparison, contrast, experience, definition, word formation, cause and effect etc. are the most common strategies used. At discourse level, basic elements of different types of writing and of different genres should be taken as clues of understanding. A clear understanding of patterns like problem-solution, claim-counterclaim, question-answer, and general-specific will help in reading. In relation to inner logic ones, Sylvia and Nancy (2014) put it as "macrostrategies: (a) suppression: where the reader eliminates irrelevant or redundant propositions; (b) generalisation: where the reader substitutes a series of propositions for a more general one or of a higher order; and (c) construction: where the reader infers new propositions that are implicit in the text, enriching the text as a whole and integrating its content to achieve global coherence." (Sylvia and Nancy, 2014, p141-142) Both situational knowledge and background knowledge will be fully used in reading comprehension process, including setting, topic, degree of formality, relation between interactants, social and cultural norms, general knowledge, cooperative principles, mutual understanding of interactants, etc.

B. *Teaching Methods*

How can a teacher help students to internalize those reading comprehension strategies?

1. Direct explanation

Direct explanation puts emphasis on direct exemplary role of teachers, which enables students to imitate the cognitive process of reading comprehension. Teachers try to combine the interpretation of the reading comprehension strategies with usage of them to make strategic activities be immediately applied in reading. Roehler and Duffy (1984) pointed out that teacher's explanation should be metacognitive rather than mechanical. Students should be helped to understand the purpose of using skills and how the reader successfully use skills to actively monitor and adjust in order to understand the discourse meaning. Thus, students' awareness of function and practicability of reading skills will be cultivated and the relationship between the process and reading activities be understood.

This teaching method generally includes the following interconnected teaching procedures or steps.

Firstly, the teacher demonstrates and explains directly to students reading comprehension strategies. Teachers choose reading materials and use the method of thinking aloud to show how to apply a reading comprehension strategy, which makes students visually observe process of reading comprehension.

Secondly, teachers guide students to practice. Students shall carry out the task of reading in accordance with the requirements of and apply reading comprehension strategies. Teachers will evaluate their performance and give feedback. Teacher's guidance will be gradually less on the application of the strategies.

Thirdly, teachers explain on the application of learned reading strategies in other types and genres of writing, which promotes students' ability of using reading comprehension strategies in different types of reading comprehension.

2. Transactional method

Transactional method puts emphasis on dialogue between teachers and students. Texas Education Agency emphasizes (2015) “students are taught to use a set of reading strategies to accomplish tasks like setting goals and planning for reading, using background knowledge and text cues to construct meaning during reading, monitoring comprehension, solving problems encountered during reading, and evaluating progress.” It “involves teaching students to construct meaning as they read by emulating good readers’ use of comprehension strategies.” The strategies typically include predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarizing. It occurs “in small-group settings, with the strategies used as vehicles to coordinate dialogue about text as students read aloud. In their groups, students are encouraged to relate a text to their background knowledge to summarize text, to describe any mental images they make during reading and to predict what might happen next in the text. As students read aloud, they engage in and exchange individual interpretations of and responses to the reading.” The importance lies in students’ cognition, internalization and independent ability of using reading comprehension strategies.

3. Interactive constructive method

Interactive constructive method “involves the interaction of readers’ prior knowledge, beliefs, concurrent experience, and the text in a sociocultural context to construct new meaning and understanding.” (Spence, 1995, p.2)

It is a kind of method which takes strategies as the medium to construct understanding. It emphasizes the interaction between readers and texts and between teachers and students. It argues that their reaction will affect their understanding of texts.

Several important teaching links are included in this method.

a. Teachers’ explanation and demonstration.

At the beginning of the teaching, teachers explain and demonstrate flexible use of several kinds of reading comprehension strategies, including different applications in different context.

b. Practice of students

Children practice using reading comprehension strategies with necessary guidance from teachers.

c. Group discussion and communication

In the group, children take turns by thinking aloud method to make their process of understanding and monitoring manifested. In particular, students tell others how they connect previous knowledge with the content and how they make summary. They describe the mental image appeared in their minds and how they predict the content. In this process, teachers and students will construct their own understanding respectively. They can communicate and discuss by brain storm.

V. CONCLUSION

No one teaching method can settle every problem once and for all. The above three ways can be used in combination. Especially under the background of Chinese-foreign cooperation in running schools, reading is not only a way of language learning, but also a tool of study and living. It is a way for learners to broaden their scope of knowledge, a tool to explore in the professional field, and a means to cultivate mode of thinking. In the teaching, teachers should take the following factors into consideration.

Firstly, English learning of Chinese students are in context of their native language. Students’ knowledge of pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and grammar plays an important role in English reading. When choosing teaching methods of reading comprehension strategies, these characteristics should be taken into consideration. Timely and appropriate teaching methods must be based on students’ certain English language foundation and goals and contents of the reading.

Secondly, teachers’ effective demonstration is an important guarantee for the implementation of teaching tasks. It will help to achieve good learning effect. Teachers themselves should first grasp the knowledge of reading comprehension strategies, and to make explicit the concrete way to apply various strategies.

Thirdly, group discussion and communication can effectively organize students to do practice. In the group, students can share their knowledge, describe reading comprehension process, deepen their understanding of English reading comprehension strategies, and apply the reading comprehension strategies.

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Qian Feng, first author of the paper, known as Caron Feng, was born in Xiaogan, China in 1976. She got her Bachelor of Arts in English teaching 1997, Certificate of Teacher's Qualification in HE 1997, and Master of Arts in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics in Central China Normal University in 2007.

She is now Associate Professor of School of International Education in Hubei Engineering University (HBEU) in China. She is also a member of Teaching Steering Committee in HBEU and a member of management committee of Chinese-foreign joint education programmes in HBEU.

Now she is a visiting scholar, supported by China Scholarship Council, in University of Wolverhampton for half a year.

Liping Chen, corresponding author of the paper, was born in Yunnan, China in 1965. She received her degree of Master of Arts in Higher Education from University of Wolverhampton, Britain in 2011. She is currently a professor in the School of Foreign Languages, Yunnan Agricultural University, Kunming, China. Her research interests include English language teaching, English teaching methodology and English-Chinese translation. Now she is a visiting scholar, supported by China Scholarship Council, in University of Wolverhampton for 1 year.