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# **Using Concept Maps Strategy for Developing the English Reading Comprehension Skills and Attitudes of Preparatory Students**

*A Thesis Submitted for the Master Degree in Education  
(Curriculum and Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language)*

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Title of the Research:** Using Concept Maps Strategy for Developing the English Reading Comprehension Skills and Attitudes of Preparatory Students

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of concept maps strategy in developing some reading comprehension skills of first year preparatory students and improving their attitudes towards reading English texts. In order to fulfill the purpose of the study, the researcher designed a reading skills checklist which was administered to a jury of specialists in the field of TEFL to identify the reading comprehension skills that are necessary for the subjects of the study. Based on the chosen reading comprehension skills by the jury, the researcher designed a concept mapping strategy aiming at improving those skills. A pre-posttest and an attitude scale were also designed, judged and administrated to evaluate students' performance in reading comprehension skills and investigate their attitudes towards reading English texts. Seventy students in two classes were assigned into two groups, an experimental group (N=35) and a control group (N=35). Both groups were pre- and post- tested on both the same reading comprehension skills test and the same attitude scale. The experimental group studied the reading comprehension passages of their text book (first semester) following concept mapping strategy, while the control group studied the reading texts following regular instructions with their assigned teacher. Results of the data analysis showed statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the control and experimental groups on both the student reading comprehension pre-posttest and the attitude scale in favor of the experimental group students' performance. This was ascribed to the effectiveness of the concept mapping strategy in developing the experimental group students' reading comprehension skills and improving their attitudes towards reading in English.

**Key words:** Concept maps, Reading comprehension

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction and Problem**

# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction and Problem**

### **Introduction**

Nowadays, English is an international language which is spoken all around the world. To learn English or generally any language, there are four skills needed to be learnt for full communication. When learning a language listening comes first, then speaking, then reading, and finally writing. These are called the four "language skills". Educators sometimes call these four language skills, the "macro-skills", which is different from the "micro-skills". Micro skills are language sub-skills such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

Reading is an important skill in English and any other language as well. All experiences and information can be obtained through reading. Reading is also especially important for students, as it is a means of enlarging their information and helping them achieve progress in all subjects. The first and foremost job of school is to teach children to read. Teaching reading should enable almost every student to be able to read fluently, to reach high levels of comprehension ability and to enjoy and learn from reading. Most students who fail to learn to read are destined to fall farther and farther behind in school and are effectively prevented from capitalizing the power of education to improve and enrich their lives (Hong, 2000 :135).

Reading is considered a skill that can be developed through teaching and practice. It is a complex skill consisting of many sub-skills, and there are many taxonomies of reading skills. Some of these taxonomies listed skills without categorizing them, while others categorized them into literal comprehension, inferential comprehension and critical reading. And some added recognizing vocabulary and creative reading (Sheng 2000 & Hong 2001 : 138).

Hutura (2015:15), stated that comprehension is understanding what is being said or read. When it comes to reading, it is an active process that must be developed if a learner is to become a proficient reader. Effective reading skill development is further accomplished when the learner becomes proficient in literal, inferential and critical comprehensive reading. Literal comprehension involves what the author is actually saying. The reader needs to understand ideas

and information explicitly stated in the reading material. Some of this information is in the form of recognizing and recalling facts, identifying the main idea, supporting details, categorizing, outlining, and summarizing. The reader is also locating information, using context clues to supply meaning, following specific directions, following a sequence, identifying stated conclusion, and identifying explicitly stated relationships and organizational patterns. These organizational patterns can include cause and effect as well as comparison and contrast.

Inferential comprehension deals with what the author means by what is said. The reader must simply read between the lines and make inferences about things not directly stated. Again these inferences are made in the main idea, supporting details, sequence, and cause and effect relationships. Inferential comprehension could also involve interpreting figurative language, drawing conclusions, predicting outcomes, determining the mood, and judging the author's point of view.

Critical comprehension concerns itself with why the author says what he or she says. This high level of comprehension requires the reader to use some external criteria from his/her own experience in order to evaluate the quality, values of the writing, the author's reasoning, simplifications, and generalizations. The reader will react emotionally and intellectually with the material. Because everyone's life experiences are varied, answers to some of the following questions will vary.

There is a fourth level of reading comprehension which is creative comprehension. At this level, the reader goes beyond the message of the text to generate new ideas or develop new insights related to the theme or topic, but not explicit in the text, (Westwood ,2003 :45).

Reading comprehension research has a long and rich history. There is much to say about both the nature of reading comprehension as a process and about effective reading comprehension instruction. Most of knowledge has been learned since 1975, as it should be, much work on the process of reading comprehension has been grounded in studies of good readers.

Reading strategies have always been important in teaching and learning strategy studies. Among the numerous reading strategies, graphic strategies are one of the few approaches that can be applied at the preview stage before

reading, during the reading process itself, and at the stage after reading. Graphic strategies provide readers with new approaches to reading that are different from traditional, linear text presentation. Instead, the structure of the whole text and the interrelations between concepts are illustrated with a visual method that gives the readers a clearer, more substantial understanding of what is being read. Generally speaking, there are three types of spatial learning strategies: graphic organizers, knowledge maps, and Concept maps. Applications of both graphic organizers and knowledge maps have achieved impressive results in assisting the reader in memorization and comprehension of text content, (Katayama & Robinson, 2000 : 121).

David Novak developed the concept mapping technique in the 1970s at Cornell University. Novak and his research team based their work on David Ausubel's cognitive assimilation theories and the constructivist movement, both of which stress the importance of assimilating new information into previously learned structures. According to (Dolehanty , 2008) Novak and Gowin presented models of concept maps and described potential applications for concept mapping: learning, planning and evaluation in their book 'Learning How to Learn'. They also discussed the use of the Vee heuristic diagram, and encouraged its use as a complement to concept mapping in order to help students understand how to learn. This book appears to be the first documented, substantially researched work on concept mapping and it is referenced in nearly every other work on the subject. It is noteworthy that Novak directly states that concept mapping could be used for "extracting meaning" from textbooks and literary texts. In 1984, he specifically proposed concept mapping as a tool for improving reading comprehension.

Concept map is a diagram showing the relationships among concepts. It is a graphical tool for organizing and representing knowledge. Concepts, usually represented as boxes or circles, are connected with labeled arrows in a downward-branching hierarchical structure. The relationship between concepts can be articulated in linking phrases such as "gives rise to", "results in", "is required by", or "contributes to". A key notion in mapping information from a text is that of creating propositions that involves the linkage of two or more concepts with the use of "linking words or phrases to form a meaningful statement (Novak & Cañas, 2006 :180 ).

Various meaningful statements can be read from a concept map about any major concept that has been mapped. Another essential feature is that concept