EFL High School Teachers’ and Students’ Perceptions of Retell Story as a Post-Reading Activity: A Case in the Mekong Delta

Abstract: This was a descriptive study which investigated English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers’ and students’ perceptions of retell story as a post-reading activity in their teaching and learning at high school. The aims of the study were to find out the teachers’ perceptions about advantages and challenges of retell story and to figure out the students’ perceptions about benefits and difficulties of retell story in post-reading stage. This paper drew on data collected from questionnaire and focus-group interviews conducted with the students in grade 10 and from semi-structured interviews with the EFL high school teachers. These 03 teachers and 109 students were from a public high school at a city in the Mekong Delta. The findings revealed that both EFL high school teachers and students had positive perceptions about retell story activity. They perceived many advantages as well as some certain challenges when using retell story as a post-reading activity. Results and discussions for EFL teaching and learning in case applying retell story in post-reading stage were also presented in this study.

Keywords: EFL high school teachers/ students, retell story activity, perceptions, post-reading activity, Mekong Delta.

INTRODUCTION

English is considered as the most popular compulsory foreign language subject which students from primary to high school are forced to study. With the rapid development of the global economy, EFL teaching and learning has gained more importance. Moreover, the demands for students with higher level of competence in English are increasing. Therefore, learning English has become one of the most significant roles of all students because it not only helps them to be successful in their study but in their future jobs as well. However, in most rural schools in the Mekong Delta, students have limited time, low motivation, lack of English language use environment, and inappropriate instructional strategies. They have to focus on grammatical lessons for their exams. It is undeniable that lack of communicative skills, particular in speaking is a disadvantage for students. To help students acquire both the knowledge they learn from the reading and apply these in their daily communications, EFL teachers create English language use environment right in their classroom to get students’ participations.

To meet the requirements of the future jobs, students have to achieve certain knowledge in English and good at reading, speaking, listening and writing. Furthermore, English teachers must be good instructors so that they can guide students to participate in activities organized during the lesson, especially in reading, to help students gain knowledge and apply these into their daily lives as well as improve speaking skills at the same time. Students have to understand what they are learning, what they are reading about the text, how they can transfer the contents in reading into their own words, their own experience, or in speaking to others about the content in the reading they have learnt. After reading students should be encouraged to practice some active activities to enhance their skills in learning a foreign language.

Definition of Perception

According to the Oxford Modern English Dictionary, the term “perception” is an act or faculty of perceiving, or an intuitive recognition of a truth, aesthetic quality .,. way of seeing, understanding. In common terminology, perception is defined by Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English as “a) the way you think about something and your idea of what it is like; b) the way that you notice things with your senses of sight, hearing etc.; c) the natural ability to understand or notice things quickly.”

The word “perception” comes from the Latin words perceptio, percipio, and means “receiving, collecting, action of taking possession, and apprehension with the mind or senses.” In other words, perception is what people think, understand, or respond to things.

In this study, EFL teacher’s and high school students’ perceptions are thoughts, reflections, impressions which both EFL teachers and students think about retell story as a post-reading activity through their participating in EFL teaching and learning.
The importance of post-reading stage

According to Nutall (1996), when intensive work in a during whilst reading stage is completed, general comprehension must be intended to. At post-reading stage, students are expected to show their points of view, their agreement or disagreement with the author or the characters in the text through participating activities given. In this stage, students are expected to participate into activities which may focus on listening like Identifying differences, Add-on information and some other activities…, or focus on speaking skill like TV reporters, Main ideas list, Debate, Retelling story, Role play…, or focus on writing like Story Innovation, and Innovation on the ending and Summarizing….

These activities are taken from Bamford and Day (2004). However, in this study, the main point will focus on an activity to enhance speaking skill, which is retell story. EFL teachers should apply interactive post-reading activity in their reading lessons to help students to become more active, to have opportunities to practice their speaking skill. Consequently, retell story is the best choice as a post-reading activity in this research.

Retell story

Retell story is a new experience for EFL high school students in this study. It can help students to have logical thinking, know how to arrange the ideas appropriately. Retelling helps students to understand the content of the lessons clearly. When students retell stories in a comprehensive manner, they reflect on the text and make distinctions between the actual words on the page and the meaning behind them (Gambrell, 2010).

Gibson, Gold and Sgouros (2003) had the same idea with Owocki, 1999, who stated that retelling helps children rethink their way through a text, thereby enhancing their understanding. In daily learning activities students need to have opportunities to practise both inside and outside the class. Therefore, letting students retell what they understand, they know, they express their ideas about the content of the lesson was really necessary. It was also an opportunity for students to enhance speaking skill (Gibson, 2003).

Retelling helps to build reading comprehension. It is also a strategy to assess students’ performance. Small group retelling provides a supportive, collaborative setting to practice verbal discourse and recall of text (Gibson, 2003). With retell story students have to present what they learn and understand about the text in reading by themselves. By using language competence, students can perform their own ideas about the text.

The challenge which the students faced in using retell story was that they had to use target language to present their ideas in front of the class effectively. The students had to perform in any ways so that other students could understand and follow them. The EFL teachers could also evaluate the students’ understanding, language competence, speaking skill through their performances. Another challenge that both the teachers and the students had to face was the time restriction to do the retelling story assignment (Paulston, 1989). Because in the limited time in post-reading stage, the teachers gave instruction about the assignment, the students practiced with their friends first and then presented in front of the class. To overcome these challenges, the teachers were advised to give clear instructions, some prompts to the assignments before letting the students practise retelling. The students were also advised to use the target language as much as they could. They would retell what they understood about the lesson effectively.

Some Previous Studies

Rachmawaty and Hermagustiana (2010) conducted an experimental study. This study was on speaking fluency performed by six low level students using retelling technique. The aims of the study were to find out the effect of retelling on the students’ speaking fluency and to know the strategies used by those students while retelling a story. The result revealed that the speaking fluency of the students increased in some areas as shown by the improvement on their vocabulary and comprehension. Based on the research findings, they drew the conclusion that retelling was considered a technique which could be applied to improve students’ speaking fluency (Rachmawaty & Hermagustiana, 2010).

Atta-Alla (2012), in the USA, also had a study about the use of storytelling in EFL classroom. The objectives of the study were (1) to indicate the effectiveness of storytelling in integrating four language skills; (2) to improve the proficiency level of adult EFL learners. The model of storytelling suggested by Atta-Alla proved effective in increasing the subjects’ language proficiency and integrating their language skills, leading the author to state that “the results of the present study empirical support for the importance of using storytelling in the language curriculum” (Atta-Alla, 2012, p. 5).

While As, in Indonesia, conducted an experimental study with the objectives (1) to establish if storytelling was more effective than speaking tasks, (2) to describe the participants’ attitude toward storytelling based on EFL speaking practice. This study was carried out with two groups of 8th grade students. As found some key findings that the experimental group improved their EFL speaking as compared with the subjects from the control group. They also welcomed the introduction of storytelling with the aim of practising speaking (As, 2016).

All of the studies mentioned above contributed to the literature of teachers’ or students’ perceptions about
retell story. However, there are some gaps that need filling. Firstly, there were some studies about storytelling separately, no research aimed to investigate about both teachers’ and students’ perceptions about retell story particularly. Secondly, most of these were case studies or experimental studies, no research was designed as a descriptive quantitative and qualitative research. Therefore, this study focused to fill these gaps with its findings.

The Study

This study employed quantitative and qualitative approach to get deep insights of EFL high school teachers’ and students’ perceptions about retell story as a post-reading activity. The participants in this study were three EFL teachers and 109 students in grade 10 at a public high school in the Mekong Delta.

First, to get the students’ perceptions about retell story activity, quantitative approach through questionnaire and qualitative approach through focus-group interviews were used.

The questionnaire was adapted from Gibson, Gold and Sgouros (2003). There were two parts in the questionnaire. The first part was about the students’ demographic information regarding gender, age, and years of experience in learning English. The second part included 25 items, which consisted of 4 clusters about advantages (19 items) and 3 clusters about challenges of retell story (6 items). It was designed with 5 points Likert scales with choices ranging from “strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree”. Moreover, the “others” item was added to gain more students’ responses about retell story as a post-reading activity.

To complement the quantitative data, focus-group interviews were conducted with 3 groups (6 students per group). In the interview, all questions were about the benefits and difficulties of retell story in their learning. They also focused on what the students did to overcome these difficulties and what factors influenced their learning when they applied retell story activity in post-reading stage.

Next, to get the teachers’ perceptions of retell story, three EFL high school teachers were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview. All questions in the interview were about the advantages and challenges which the teachers had in their teaching. The questions also asked about the factors which influenced teacher’s teaching when applying retell story as a post-reading activity.

Results of the Study

1. EFL high school students’ perceptions of retell story
   a. Findings from the questionnaire

First, the questionnaire was employed to collect quantitative data to investigate the perceptions of high school students of retell story as a post reading activity about benefits and difficulties which they encountered in their learning. Quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed by SPSS software version 20.0.

| Table 1. Descriptive Statistics about Students’ Perceptions of Retell Story |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                            | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Mean   | Std. Deviation |
| Reading Comprehension RS   | 109| 3.00     | 5.00    | 4.3899 | .58574         |
| Grammar Improvement RS     | 109| 2.50     | 5.00    | 4.1995 | .66994         |
| Speaking Skill RS          | 109| 2.29     | 5.00    | 4.1232 | .67665         |
| Giving and receiving feedback RS | 109| 2.50     | 5.00    | 4.1697 | .63180         |
| Benefits of RS             | 109| 2.84     | 5.00    | 4.2052 | .58948         |
| Difficulties of RS         | 109| 2.50     | 5.00    | 4.2982 | .58403         |
| Valid N (listwise)         | 109|          |         |        |                 |

The descriptive statistic test indicated that the mean score of the students on benefits of retell story was 4.20, and on difficulties of retell story was 4.29. Both mean scores were at high level according to one-sample T-test, and the comparison to the test value 4.5 at the high level (Oxford, 1990).

The descriptive statistic test also showed that the students perceived more benefits in reading comprehension. It is showed the mean score was high at 4.38. Then the students had benefits in improving grammar, speaking skill, giving and receiving feedback from their teachers and friends when they applying retell story in their post-reading stage.

Next, from the mean scores of the students about benefits and difficulties of retell story, the researcher used independent T-test to assess whether male or female students perceived more benefits or difficulties in their learning. The result from the independent test indicated that both male and female students perceived benefits and difficulties at the same level.

b. Finding from the interview

Then, a qualitative research was implemented, focused-group interviews, to triangulate and strengthen the validity and reliability of the data gathered from the questionnaire as well as some aspects which were not discovered in the questionnaire.
Data collected from the interview indicated the students had many benefits when they applied retell story as a post-reading activity. Firstly, they became more confident in presenting in front of the class. Next, most students could understand more about the main ideas and details of the text. Moreover, they could improve grammar through reading sentences in the text before retelling it. They also knew how to arrange sentences effectively and logically by practising retelling day by day.

We feel more confident to present in front of the class, improve grammatical knowledge through the lessons, and we can understand more about the main ideas of the lesson. (Group 1 - student Beta)

I can speak coherent and fluent sentences. I can learn from my friends’ performance. (Group 1 - student Era)

I can arrange sentences better than before. My performances in front of the class are better. (Group 1 - student Anna)

I can remember the lesson better and understand more about main ideas of the text. (Group 2 - student Hugo)

I can learn vocabulary, apply grammar structures in my speaking. (Group 2- student Q-skill)

I can understand the lesson clearly about the main ideas and details. (Group 3 - student Star)

I can remember the lesson better and longer. (Group 3 - student Nick)

However, besides some certain advantages, the students had to face some challenges in practising retell story. First of all, the students were afraid of presenting in front of the class at first times, they had to be trained several times to be familiar with retelling something. Next, because some lessons were too long for the students to remember which made them encounter in difficulties to retell the whole content of the text. Finally, the students were also afraid of being laughed when they made mistakes.

I can’t arrange sentences coherently. I am afraid of speaking at first times. In retelling story, I have to do by myself, not with my peers. (Group 1 - student Cella)

I think it is difficult to retell some long lessons. We can’t understand all content of the lesson, so it is difficult to retell all. (Group 1 - student Dane)

I am afraid of making mistakes. I am afraid of being laughed by my friends. I like presenting in groups in front of the class. (Group 2 - student Jay)

I don’t know where I can begin to retell about the text, because some lessons are too long to retell all ideas. I can’t remember all content of the text. (Group 2 - student Lynn)

At the beginning, I don’t know how to arrange sentences in the lessons, how to retell. After teacher instructs several times, I can do better. Because I can’t remember all ideas in the lesson, I can’t speak fluently. (Group 2 - student Grant)

I am afraid of speaking in front of the class alone. I am afraid of making mistakes. I will be more confident if I work with my friends. (Group 3 - student Q-skill)

The content of the lesson is too long. I can’t remember all, so I feel nervous when retelling in front of the class by myself. I think my presentation will be better if I work in pairs or in groups with active friends. We can help each other in giving ideas and performing ideas. (Group 3 - student Oxy)

To sum up, from the quantitative and qualitative data collected, the researcher found three main findings. Firstly, the students had positive perceptions about retell story as a post-reading activity. They not only perceived many benefits in their learning but some difficulties as well. Secondly, the male and female high school students in this study had the same level in receiving benefits and in facing difficulties when they practised retell story in post-reading stage. Finally, the students’ learning attitude is the main factor which influencing the students’ learning when applying retell story activity.
2. EFL high school teacher’ perceptions of retell story

The data collected from the interviews presented that the EFL teachers indicated they had some advantages when using retell story in post-reading stage. The teachers could help the students to understand the main ideas of the lessons better when applying retell story in post-reading stage. Next, they could help the students to improve their speaking skill and become more confident.

With the use of retell story, I could help my students to understand the main ideas of the lessons better, to improve their speaking skill and review vocabulary and structure, apply these knowledge to their speeches. Then, I could help students to be more confidence in their learning, and I can evaluate students from their performance. (Teacher A)

I could help students to understand the main ideas of the lessons better, improve their speaking skill and become more confidence. (Teacher B)

I could help students to understand the main ideas better and gave prompt which make students become easier in making their speech more effective. (Teacher C)

Nevertheless, the teachers also had to face some challenges when they organized the students to practice retell story. They recognized that the students were still afraid of making mistakes, being laughed by their friends, therefore the students were lack of confidence to perform in front of the class whenever being asked. Moreover, the students’ performances were not effective, they still made more mistakes in their speeches. The teachers also worried about their students’ ability because the best students could do assignments well, whereas the average and the weak students could perform the contents of the lesson only in their first language, not in English.

I worried about my students’ ability because when applying retell story, only best students could do well, average and weak students could perform the contents of the lesson in Vietnamese, not in English. The students’ performances were not effective, they were afraid of making more mistakes in their speeches, or they couldn’t express all their ideas. Furthermore, my students said that they could study harder if their friends studied hard. They could study well if their friends were active in participating teachers’ activities. (Teacher A)

My students couldn’t apply vocabularies into their speeches therefore their performances were not effective. The students were afraid of performing in front of the class and they made so much noise when participating activities which influenced to the neighbour classes. My students were also influenced by their friends’ learning attitude. They could do the activities well whenever they did with friends. (Teacher B)

My students were afraid of performing in front of the class and made more mistakes in their speeches, so their performances were not effective. Some best students could do exercises well, the average students were still afraid of presenting their ideas although they had done with their friends before. They still made a lot of mistakes. (Teacher C)

In brief, the EFL high school teachers perceived that they had many advantages as well as some certain challenges when they organized the students to practise retell story as a post-reading activity in their teaching. Moreover, the teachers recognized that the students’ learning attitude is the main factor which influencing their teaching and the students’ learning.

Discussion and Implication

This study has similar findings with the study of Rachmawaty and Hermagustiana (2010), and As (2016). They considered retell story as a technique which can be applied to improve students’ speaking fluency. However, Atta-Alla (2012), indicated the effectiveness of storytelling in integrating four language skills while this study mentioned about improving reading comprehension, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and speaking skill.

From the results of this study, future research is advised to conduct with students in both grade 11 and 12 in order to have the general perceptions of students at high school. Moreover, future research can investigate more high school teachers and more students in both public high schools and high schools for the gifted to have more findings and implications about retell story as a post-reading activity.

To EFL teachers who will apply retell story as a post-reading activity, they are advised to do surveys in order to know the topics that their students like to discuss about, students’ learning styles, and the ways students usually work with their partners in groups or in pairs in post-reading stage. Moreover, teachers should give prompts/ hints clearly as scaffolding so that their students can easily understand what they will do with the assignments, which bring the best results.
CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide insights of EFL high school teachers’ and students’ perceptions about retell story as a post-reading activity. In light of these findings, some conclusions are made.

Firstly, the EFL high school teachers and students had positive perceptions about applying retell story in post-reading stage. They found that the use of retell story brought many significant advantages in their teaching and learning. They could change the teaching and learning atmosphere in the class because the teachers could help the students become more active. The teachers could also help the students to improve pronunciation and speaking skills and motivate the students’ attitude in their learning through active activities. Also, the students could understand more about main ideas and details in the lesson.

Secondly, the teachers recognized that when applying retell story, they also faced some challenges. For example, the students were afraid of presenting ideas in front of the class because of many various reasons: like lack of vocabularies, lack of speaking skills, passive habits or styles, or ineffective use of vocabulary.

Finally, the teachers and the students thought that the main factors influencing the implementation of retell story as a post-reading activity were students’ learning attitude and learning environment.

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