Improving Teaching and Learning
Perspectives from Australia & Southeast Asia

Edited by Kevin Laws, Lesley Harbon & Christabel Wescombe

Developing Educational Professionals in Southeast Asia

DEPISA Monograph no. 3
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Cover: DEPISA members at Suratthani Rajabhat University, June, 2014.
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An Aberrant Tendency in Scientific Research

Trân Thanh Ai  
*Can Tho University, Vietnam*  
ttai@ctu.edu.vn

**Abstract**

For a number of years there has been much news in the media about the education crisis and the backwardness of scientific research in Vietnam. This situation was evident from the extremely modest position of Vietnamese universities in the World Universities Rankings and through the paucity of scientific articles published by Vietnamese scientists in international journals. Yet the country has the largest number of professors and doctors in Southeast Asia. In the educational sciences, the situation is even more disappointing. Once again, we have to pay careful attention to the quality of scientific staff in our country in order to find radical solutions to treat the causes of this crisis and backwardness. In this paper, the results of a preliminary examination of over 600 titles of masters’ dissertations in educational sciences are reported to identify the causes of weakness in educational research in Vietnam, and to suggest some fundamental solutions.

**Preview**

Education in Vietnam is facing many problems on many issues, among which are scientific research and research training. Especially, in social sciences and educational sciences, the situation isn’t bright at all. Nguyen Dang Hung (University of Liege, Belgium) talked about the situation of Vietnamese education in these terms:

> The education of Vietnam is seriously ill. We have to search its principal origins in order to find a cure. In effect, the disease has penetrated into the bone, and has become metastatic. It must have strong methods to treat its origins, even surgery to have a chance to escape from danger.


Darriulat (Academician of French Academy of Sciences) in commenting upon Vietnamese university lecturers recently revealed a truth: ‘Many university teachers simply read their lectures in text books and are unable to conduct any research work.’ (Darriulat, 2014).

Faced with this situation, we ask why higher education in Vietnam has reached such a crisis and why lecturers are unable to conduct research. In order to improve the quality of higher education in Vietnam, first we have to find out causes of negative aspects of this gloomy situation. In this article, an aberrant tendency that has been found in masters’ dissertations in educational sciences in Vietnamese universities will be reported. This tendency can be considered dangerous for education and training in particular, and for sciences in general.
Overview

Scientific activities are often evaluated from a quantitative and qualitative point of view. Quantitatively, evaluation is based on the quantity of scientific articles published in international scientific journals. Qualitatively, evaluation is based to a large extent on citation statistics registered in citation indices.

According to statistics in 2012, Vietnamese scientists published about 1,200 scientific papers in international peer-reviewed journals, and in 2011, they published 1,324. From 1970 to 2011, the total number of papers published by Vietnamese scientists was 10,745, that is, 22% of the papers published by Thailand, 27% of Malaysia, and 11% of Singapore. The performance of Vietnam is lower than Chulalongkorn University or Mahidol University in Thailand, or University of Malaya in Malaysia (Nguyen Van Tuan, 2013a).

In addition, Vietnam is 50 years behind Thailand on scientific publication, even though the number of top graduates is large: 9,000 professors and associate professors, 24,000 PhDs and more than 100,000 masters’ degrees (Duong Bui, 2013).

From 1996 to 2010, Vietnamese scientists published 39 papers in international journals, representing 9% of the total number of papers in social sciences (Pham Thi Ly & Nguyen Van Tuan, 2012).

Table 1: Scientific performance of some Asian nations 1996-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Articles</th>
<th>Citations</th>
<th>Citations/art.</th>
<th>Index H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>1,455</td>
<td>7,672</td>
<td>9.11</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>1,193</td>
<td>6,194</td>
<td>7.34</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>905</td>
<td>2,490</td>
<td>8.18</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>3,037</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>1,826</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>1,718</td>
<td>7.05</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pham Thi Ly & Nguyen van Tuan (2012)
Some people say that these data aren’t exact because the number of papers in Vietnamese isn’t precisely calculated yet. However, this is common for all non-English speaking countries. In addition, papers in Vietnamese reviewed by international peers aren’t regarded as responding to international standards, especially in social sciences (Tran Thanh Ai, 2013). In any case, even if this above-mentioned classification doesn’t exist, people can recognise the stagnation of scientific activities in Vietnam. It affects directly the quality of education and training in Vietnamese universities. There is proof that no Vietnamese university was placed among the world’s top 2,000 universities 2012.

Tran Van Tho (Waseda University, Tokyo), who has collaborated for many years with Vietnamese universities in economics, made the following remarks about PhD theses of Vietnamese students:

*The choice of subject of Vietnamese students makes the PhD theses lack academic characters and of originality. Therefore, the contents and level of those theses are still far from the minimum standards of the world, and people who have this PhD can hardly have discussions with foreign experts.*

(Tran Van Tho, 2003).

In the field of medicine, Nguyen van Tuan (Garvan Institute, Sydney, Australia) had the same remarks:

*I have read many PhD theses of medicine throughout the Vietnam, and I think that the majority are just a collection of several reports of a single study. Its contents are simple, and largely an inventory of clinic cases (like the statistical exercises, and the enumeration of cases). It’s possible to say that the majority of theses that I have read are equivalent to the dissertation of bachelor honours degree or of master’s degree.*

(Nguyen van Tuan, 2013c).

P. Darriulat also talked about Vietnamese PhD training degrees in these words:

*A recent article published in the newspaper An Ninh Thu Do reports on a number of dysfunctions of the Vietnamese system in awarding PhD degrees. Such a major dysfunction is illustrated by the case of students buying their dissertation at prices reaching up to 500 million VND [...] A second dysfunction is the inability of the panels supposed to evaluate the skills and knowledge of such students to do a job, tacitly that their members are either incompetent or corrupted or both.*

(Darriulat, 2012).

Such opinions aren’t rare; they make a gloomy picture on higher education in Vietnam.

Many Vietnamese researchers often think that foreign scientists are a little severe or ‘unrealistic’ when they evaluate scientific research from Vietnam. On the other hand, several Vietnamese scientists alert ‘diseases’ of education and sciences, and show many causes of this negative situation, as observed by Hoang Tuy (Institute of Mathematics, Vietnam):

*Many scientific works and PhD. theses, even on international studies such as fundamental sciences and economics... are equivalent to waste paper if we evaluate them according to
international criteria. A lot of professors are incompetent, and well below international standards.

(Hoang Tuy 2007).

More precisely, Dang Xuan Thi (Institute of Mechanics, Vietnam) also showed the impertinence of many researchers:

*The majority of scientific works that we have led are the application of world achievements in the specific conditions of Vietnam. Problems that we have chosen as research objectives are often outdated up to 20 years, even 30 or 40 years.*

(Vu Tho 2012).

In educational sciences, the Ministry of Education and Training recently made some official comments on the actual situation of scientific research:

*Research methods, procedures and research techniques are relatively backward, therefore we often commit systematic errors and results of research lack convincingness, due to dearth of generalisation.*


**Objectives of this research**

This short description leads me to focus on the causes of this situation. Many analyses show principal causes such as: a lack of budget; a linguistic barrier to English; incomplete conscientiousness to international publication; and absence of adequate remuneration for scientists. However, besides these causes, we are interested in procedures of scientific activities of Vietnamese scientists in general, and those of dissertation directors in particular.

We suggest that the most important cause of weakness of Vietnamese scientists is lack of knowledge of research methods. In order to verify this, an examination of masters’ dissertations in educational sciences and educational management posted on the website thuvienluanvan.com was done. At this time, only the titles and subject matter of dissertations were examined with the purpose of exploring the feasibility of this research. It was estimated that the titles of masters’ subjects represent more or less the knowledge of scientific research of students and their supervisors.

**Some basic principles of scientific research**

Whether it is natural sciences or social sciences, or educational sciences, whether it is fundamental research or applied research, there are basic principles of scientific research that people recognise as postulates:

- Scientific research consists of producing new knowledge (declarative or procedural) on the world, of ‘uncovering new facts and adding them to the existing corpus of knowledge’ (Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrisson, K. 2007), or of correcting, even of denying, false knowledge.
• Scientific research always begins with a phenomenon that science doesn’t explain, or partly explains. Researching this kind of phenomenon consists of understanding the essence, attributes, and origins of the phenomenon. In educational sciences, research mainly consists of finding out deep causes of educational phenomenon, in order to build solutions. In this manner, scientific research involves solving the research problems theoretically.

• Scientific research is based on observations, analysis, objective measurement, and demonstrations, i.e. scientific methods.

• Results of scientific research must be verified and turned into scientific knowledge which is capable of explaining other same cases, ‘of checking them out with the same or other materials and thereby test the results’ (Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrisson, K., 2007).

In other words, researchers have to use scientific methods, i.e. ‘a scientific approach necessarily involves standards and procedures for demonstrating the ‘empirical warrant’ of its findings, showing the match or fit between its statements and what is happening or has happened in the world’ (Cuff and Payne 1979: 4).

Research data: Masters’ dissertations in educational sciences and educational management

The website entitled, Thư viện luận văn các chuyên ngành, means Library of Dissertation in Training Fields. It comprises dissertations from more than 90 fields of knowledge and training, and includes dissertations in educational sciences and educational management.

Our research data contain 633 dissertations. By referring to the titles of dissertations, two categories were identified: empirical research and applied research. We call empirical research all works based on empirical data, and applied research all works consisting of applying some theories to professional fields of practitioners. In that way, empirical research comprises dissertations whose titles use keywords such as ‘Actual situation’, ‘Solutions’, ‘Measures’, ‘Actual situation and solutions’, and ‘Examination’; and applied research comprises dissertations whose titles use the title keyword ‘Application’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Summary table</th>
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<tr>
<td>Categories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empirical research</td>
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Empirical research

In this category, there are 408 dissertations, representing 64.46% of our research data.

**Titles including ‘Actual situation’** (173 dissertations)

As the keywork ‘Actual situation’ shows, this kind of dissertation consists of undertaking fieldwork. The goal is to build a primary database in order to find out research problems and to prepare intensive research works in the future. As they are the first stage of scientific research, their results are only raw data, they lack scientific significance. Thus, they must be utilised in order to make a scientific contribution. In other words, it isn’t possible to regard this kind of dissertation as scientific research.

**Titles including ‘Solution’, ‘Measures’** (96 dissertations)

This kind of dissertation consists of building solutions or measures for problems in the field, or problems of day-to-day living, in order to solve difficulties in daily duty. In this way, solutions proposed are only based on personal experiences, or on causes that people have known. In other words, this means professional activities ‘daily research’ but not scientific research, because this kind of dissertation doesn’t consist of finding out unknown causes. That’s why this kind of dissertation can’t provide novelties.

**Titles including ‘Actual situation’ and ‘Solutions’, ‘Measures’** (62 dissertations)

This kind of dissertation contains two previous kinds, i.e. it consists of describing situations and proposing solutions. It’s a problem-solving process of following stages: identifying problems; consulting a list of possible solutions; and choosing or searching suitable solutions.

**Titles including ‘Examination’** (77 dissertations)

This kind of dissertation consists of investigating some aspects of professional reality such as intellectual capacity of pupils at primary school X or practice of teacher in course of... It is intended to describe things or phenomena appearing in the process of teaching. In educational sciences, this descriptive approach is less useful than the explanatory approach, because it cannot detect causes that induce problems.

**Applied research**

In this category, there are 225 dissertations whose titles include ‘Application’ (225 dissertations, 35.54% of the total). As the dissertation titles indicate, the aims of these works are to apply theoretical knowledge to a situation in order to improve problematic situations.
This type of research is only considered as scientific research when the researcher generalises its results from knowledge in order to apply it to similar situations.

**Preliminary interpretation**

In principle, the title of scientific work has to reflect its content, and the dissertation director has to help students formulate the title as well as possible. However, there is probably clumsiness in this task. In any event, such clumsiness does not compromise the results of this exploratory research, because the analysis in this study focused on both quantitative and qualitative data.

Through the exploratory examination of 633 dissertation titles, a strong tendency to solve daily problems in masters’ dissertations (64.46%) was noted.

The dissertations on ‘actual situations’ consisted of exploring blank fields where people don’t have data, with the aim of collecting data to discover research problems and to prepare deep research. It is the first step of scientific research therefore, results from this investigation are only raw data, and need further treatment. Thus, this fieldwork is in incomplete works and does not have scientific significance, particularly in the educational sciences. In reality, it is possible to transform this fieldwork into research subjects if they are undertaken on a large scale, but they cannot constitute the full research process as is found in the natural sciences.

The dissertations on ‘solutions’ and ‘measures’ consist of building measures for problematic situations appearing in the educational field. These measures are often based on experiences and known knowledge because they are not findings of new causes, nor premises of new knowledge. Thus, these are daily tasks that people often do in their life, not scientific activities.

The dissertations on ‘actual situation and solutions’ used two research methods. These do not involve a scientific process because they consist of describing a problematic situation, making a list of known causes, and then choosing measures. This is the process of solving problems of practitioners in the service or problems of day-to-day living, because it follows the cycle of operations: identifying problem – consulting experiences or official texts – proposing measures.
In empirical research, the researcher has to find out deep causes of the problematic situation, and justify and generalise results in order to build knowledge so that it can explain the same phenomena. In principle, writing dissertations involves training students to solve problems \textit{theoretically}. Academic objectives and originality in scientific research is also an aim.
According to Prof. Nguyen Van Tuan, *International Scientific Reviews* often refuses articles because of bad research methods: ‘around 70% of refused articles are due to weakness of research methods’ (Nguyen Van Tuan, 2013b).

Dissertations on ‘application’ occupy an important quantity (225 subjects, 35.54%). They aim at the application of knowledge or theory to reality. This category is only considered as applied research if the researcher can provide new procedural knowledge which is capable of being applied to many similar cases. As contents of these dissertations were not read as part of this study, it is not possible to evaluate their research methods. This will be one of the aims of future work.

In summary, after analysing titles of masters’ dissertations, it can be concluded that there is a tendency for researchers to want to solve daily problems in their dissertations, instead of following scientific processes to meet academic standards, i.e. ‘scientific method’, to use the words of Cohen et al., (2007). This aberrant tendency is dangerous for training and research in higher education, because it induces misunderstanding and causes stagnation of scientific activities in Vietnam. In a future research project, we will systematically analyse the content of those masters’ dissertations in order to identify weakness in terms of research methods and to elaborate on pertinent solutions for improving the situation.

**Some permanent measures**

The important thing is for the scientific community to adopt common criteria. Based on the analysis undertaken in this study it is possible to establish some fundamental measures in order to improve the quality of scientific activities of teaching staff. Including:

**Lifelong learning about scientific research methods**

Weakness of research quality of Vietnamese scientists is evident, especially in educational sciences. The first cause is that researchers lack knowledge on research methods and do not possess adequate research competencies. Therefore, the basic and sustainable solution is to learn about scientific research methods. As research methods relate to scientific disciplines, we have to have lifelong learning about them. Departments and faculties must organise many activities such as drawing up and/or translating documents on scientific research methods, opening seminars to help each other in scientific research, and enhancing research competences of young lecturers.

**Reorganising the system of reviewing scientific projects and dissertations**

Reviewing research projects must be based on scientific procedures such as identifying problems, including a literature review, designing research, and generalising results, not just considering applied aims. According to Professor Harry W. Kroto, Nobel Prize Winner for Chemistry in 1996, before conducting scientific research, the majority of scientists often do not wonder if the results of their research can be applied to life.
Innovative system for the assessment of scientific works

To improve the quality of scientific works objective assessment criteria must be developed, i.e.: first, collecting anonymous pre-reports from experts in the field when dissertations or scientific works are completed; second, if the pre-reports are favourable, the faculty will establish an evaluation committee.

Conclusion

This analysis of 633 titles of masters’ dissertations in educational sciences, concludes that topics unsuitable to the standards and procedures of the international scientific community predominate. This tendency consists of solving daily problems of practitioners, but without any new findings. In regards to research methods, these dissertations do not investigate the actual causes of phenomena, and are therefore not able to generalise results from the research. This weakness is due to the misunderstanding of research methods by students and their supervisors. This helps explain why scientific activities in Vietnam are far from reaching the levels of other countries.

In addition, we have also proposed some solutions: lifelong learning about research methods; improving research competences of scientific researchers by disseminating documents on research methods; and developing an innovative system of reviewing scientific projects and dissertations. In other words, we can’t wait for changes of national policies, but should change ourselves first. Vietnamese education is facing extreme high risk. It is compared to a boat that drifts towards bankruptcy (Pham Toan, 2013). Thus, we have to improve our scientific knowledge and research competences, in order to contribute to changing the situation before it’s too late. To finish this article, I want to borrow an advice of Darriulat made for Vietnamese scientists:

Today, pride prevents us from facing reality; humility prevents us from being ambitious. We should behave the very opposite way: pride should give us the ambition and the confidence; humility should give us the courage to face reality.

(Darriulat, P., 2012).

References


Tran Thanh Ai. (2013). Tình khoa học và nghiên cứu khoa học xã hội - nhận văn, In Tập chí Khoa học, Can Tho University, number 2, July 2013.


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Dr Kevin Laws
Faculty of Education and Social Work

Coordinator
Developing Educational Professionals
in Southeast Asia (DEPISA)

30 April 2014

Dear Muchlas Suseno

I wish to invite you to the next meeting, conference and workshop of DEPISA which will be held at the ASEAN Study and Development Centre at Suratthani Rajabhat University on June 25 and 26, 2014. This meeting will be an integral part of The International Conference on Educational Management to Meet ASEAN Academic Standards.

As you know DEPISA is a network of educational institutions and individuals dedicated to the continuous professional development of those who work in the area, and at all levels and fields, of education. One major purpose of the meeting is to assist participants to produce papers suitable for publication in a third and fourth monographs.

I would like to invite you to attend the meeting and participate in DEPISA activities.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Laws

Kevin Laws
Certificate of Appreciation

In recognition of your participation in

"The Seventh DEPISA: The International Seminar on Educational Management to Meet ASEAN Standards"

from Wednesday 25 June to Thursday 26 June 2014

Given on: 26 June, 2014

Presented to

Dr. Muchias Suseno

Assistant Professor Dr. Banjong Jaroenakul
Dean of Faculty of Education
Surathani Rajabhat University, Thailand

Acting Director of ASEAN Study Center
and Development
Surathani Rajabhat University, Thailand

Faculty of Education and Social Work
The University of Sydney, Australia
Examining the Effectiveness of Visual Imagery Classes on Authentic and Modified Texts in EFL Reading

Muchlas Suseno
State University of Jakarta, Indonesia
muchlas-suseno@unj.ac.id
susenosaja@yahoo.com

Abstract
This research was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of visual imagery in reading activities practised by Junior High School students in Jakarta. In the investigation two classes were chosen in which both practised visual imagery in reading but one class read authentic texts whereas the other studied modified ones. For that purpose, two authentic, narrative texts and their modified equivalences were carefully selected and used as the material of instruction. At the completion of the study both classes were tested using the same instrument. Scores of the tests were calculated and compared using an independent t-test. In addition, classroom observations were conducted to analyse varieties of imagery practised by students in both classes. The research reveals the following:

1. Students who studied modified texts received higher scores compared to those who read authentic materials.

2. Kinds and forms of imagery made by students using modified texts varied from one student to another.

3. Students using authentic texts tend to practise less interesting imageries.

4. Students in the reading class with modified texts show higher activities compared to those using authentic materials.

5. There is significant difference in achievement between students in the class using authentic texts and those in the class using modified texts.

Introduction
An early study of imagery in education was conducted by Norton (2001), and Kanno & Norton (2003) who claimed that a conception of imagined communities (IC) might affect the understanding of learning in two forms: temporal and spatial dimensions. The first refers to the notion that IC facilitates learners to pull forward their visions of the future to their prevailing actions and identities. The latter examines inter-relationship between individual learner’s identities and the influence of globalisation and transnationalism on language learning and identity construction.

It was Anderson (1991) who first coined the term imagined communities arguing that what we think of as nations are imagined communities because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. The example below might help to render our comprehension more concrete.

Norton (2000) describes the story of Katarina and the investment by her IC professional community. Katarina was an immigrant from Poland who wished to take a computer course
in Canada after having attended English as a second language (ESL) class for some period of
time. Discouraged by her ESL teacher, saying that her English was not adequate to take the
course, Katarina was insulted and never returned to her ESL class. The degree to which
Katarina reacted seemed to appear extreme and destructive. However, Norton argued that
such a reaction was significantly comprehensible related to Katarina’s investment in her IC,
that is a community of professionals in her home country.

For Lave & Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) what happened to Katarina relates to what is
the so called non-participation engagement, a situation in which learners cannot fully and
physically engage with their surrounding in class activities. In respect to non-participation
engagement, Lave and Wenger point out two conditions: peripheral and marginal
engagement. The distinction between peripherality and marginality is useful to explain
Katarina’s case. According to Lave and Wenger peripherality refers to the fact that some
degree of non-participation can become an enabling factor of participation, while the term
marginality refers to a form of non-participation that prevents full participation. I believe it is
the first condition - peripheral engagement - that Katarina decided to choose so that she could
overcome her case and finally succeed.

The above argument might draw one significant conclusion saying it is the imagination that
drives people to succeed under any circumstances. This is no wonder why Einstein stated that
imagination is more important than knowledge and I believe it is in this respect that Covey
put one of his seven habits saying ‘Begin with the end in mind’. It is the ability to envision in
our mind what we cannot at present see with our eyes (Covey, 1989). When it is taken for
granted that imagination, when properly managed, might facilitate success, there must be
something teachers could do to drive their students to gain success in learning.

How imagination facilitates learning is complicated but possible to explain because humans
are capable of making connections with communities that lie beyond the local and direct
environment (Anderson, 1991). It is in this connection that Picasso once said, ‘I paint what I
think, not what I see.’ What Picasso stated is comprehensible for Lave & Wenger as they
argue that learning actually takes place in two forms of activities called engagement and
imagination. The first refers to a tangible interaction between learners and their concrete and
immediate environment, and the latter is an imaginative interaction (Lave & Wenger, 1991;
Wenger 1998). In the field of language learning, however, empirical evidence showing the
relationship between imagery and language acquisition in EFL or ESL classes is scant
(Canning, 2001). Therefore, it is appropriate to investigate how imagery might facilitate
learning in students.

The researchers (Belcher, 1994; Casanave, 1998; Toohey, 2000; and Kano and Norton, 2003)
claim evidence that imagery facilitates language learning. More specifically Keene &
Zimmermann (2007) stated there is ample evidence that visual imagery, the ability to build
mental pictures or images, facilitates students in a reading class. Such is possible when they
associate words on the page with images and memories of their lives. It is evident that their
own visualisations would greatly depend upon their prior knowledge and engagement with
the topic. In addition, if we are able to construct any mental image from what we read, it is
likely that our understanding of the material will be greater than had we not (Gambrell &
Jawitz, 1993). In this respect, Chamot calls imagery a metacognitive strategy which is
characterised by the application of prior knowledge to comprehend new problems, whereas
Brown (2004) calls it schemata in which background information and cultural experience is
always present to carry out interpretation effectively in a reading activity.
In this regard, Keene & Zimmermann (2007) identified seven principal comprehension strategies practised by good readers when they read, three of which strongly relate to imagination or mental activities. The strategies include:

1. monitoring for meaning—knowing when you know, knowing when you don’t know;
2. using and creating schema—making connections between the new and the known, building and activating background knowledge;
3. asking questions—generating questions before, during, and after reading that lead you deeper into the text;
4. determining importance—deciding what matters most, what is worth remembering;
5. inferring—combining background knowledge with information from the text to predict, conclude, make judgments, and interpret;
6. using sensory and emotional images—creating mental images to deepen and stretch meaning, and
7. synthesising — creating an evolution of meaning by combining understanding with knowledge from other texts or sources.

In this article, Keene & Zimmermann’s three strategies related to mental activities are elaborated to facilitate students in EFL reading classes. Below is the elaboration taken from the same resource (Keene & Zimmermann (2007)).

1. **Using and creating schema**
   Schema is the way students connect the new to the known, recall relevant information, and further their comprehension, with prior knowledge. Researchers have shown that students will understand what they are reading better if they think about their own experiences as they read. To arouse experiences, teachers might apply helpful hints, such as (a) use an excerpt or extract of any passage as material for discussion, (b) raise probing questions, (c) discuss the importance of personal connections with the text content.

2. **Inferring**
   To infer is to create a personal and unique meaning from a text. A proficient reader creates meaning that is neither stated explicitly in the text nor is shown in the illustrations. Inferring also deals with the ability to think aloud to involve activities of modeling and demonstration in day-to-day comprehension instruction. Inferences are based in part on individual life experience and knowledge of the reader.

3. **Using sensory and emotional images**
   Creating images while we read allows us to bring the text to life. Images originate in our senses and combine with our emotions. The images that we create while we read have little meaning unless we associate them with words on the page along with other images and memories of our lives. Students need explicit instruction to develop their image-making abilities. They need to understand how their images help them to better comprehend what they read.
In line with the above description, Draper (2010) identified six characteristics of proficient readers – all of which relate to the activities of imagery, as follows:

Proficient readers

- spontaneously and purposefully create mental images while and after reading;
- use images to immerse themselves in rich detail as they read;
- use images to draw conclusions, to create distinct and unique interpretations of the text, to recall details significant to the text, and to recall a text after it has been read;
- adapt their images as they continue to read;
- understand and articulate how creating images enhances their comprehension; and
- change and modify their images in response to images that other readers share.

In addition, the following ways might be practised by smart readers before, during and after reading. Before reading, students visually organise their thinking by visualising possible content, linking background knowledge and forming predictions. During reading, they visualise the content by comparing predictions with ideas, themes and information in the text. This is to form a visual representation of what they are reading. After reading they visually link new information with prior knowledge, visually represent what they have read in a graphic summary, and build new understanding.

In more specific steps, Draper (2010) summarised some techniques of visualising, three of which are discussed and used to empower students to benefit from their power of imagery in reading. The three techniques of visualising are presented in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think aloud.</td>
<td>To demonstrate when, why and how students visualise while reading.</td>
<td>• Explain how to create images in the mind when reading. This is done by taking a part of the text to read aloud.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Begin reading, pause to verbalise thinking to create images.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Reveal how images are created in the mind.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Explain how to select words and phrases in the text to connect with own personal experiences and prior knowledge.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Involve five senses to create visual images.</td>
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<td>• Describe how creating the image helped them to understand and enjoy what is happening in the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Steps</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gallery images.</td>
<td>To create mental images while reading.</td>
<td>• Explain the concept of using images to represent information by showing examples of different images representing different content concepts.</td>
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<td>• Discuss in small groups how images correspond to information.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Have students read a section of chosen text and create 2 to 4 images to represent the content.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Start a gallery on a classroom or hallway wall to exhibit images.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story wheel.</td>
<td>To help students visualise story.</td>
<td>• Teacher prepares story wheels prior to lesson. It is a circle divide into 6-8 pie segments with a smaller circle in the centre of the larger circle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students read a story.</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• After completing the story, students list the important events in the story. Remind them that the events should be chosen from the beginning, middle and end of story.</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Next, have students divide the list of events into a list of 6-8, depending on pie pieces.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Students write the events on the pie segments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To assess the activity of visualisation in reading class, a scoring rubric is used, adapted from Draper’s compilation. Table 2 is such a rubric.

### Table 2. Scoring rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score criteria</th>
<th>0=M=Minimal</th>
<th>1 = Basic</th>
<th>2= Proficient</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Picture show communicates literal understanding of the text.</td>
<td>No images or images bear no relationship to text.</td>
<td>Images illustrate one or two items directly mentioned in text, may be peripheral details.</td>
<td>Images illustrate key elements of character, setting and events in text.</td>
<td>Images illustrate key element of charter, setting and events in text. Images are detailed and students can describe additional details from mental image.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture show communicates main concepts and demonstrate ability to understand and acquire information from text.</td>
<td>No images; or images that illustrate only literal understanding of words in text.</td>
<td>Images illustrate more than simple objects mentioned in text. Images demonstrate some understanding of concepts or relationships, but main concepts are missing.</td>
<td>Students combined the author’s words with own background knowledge to understand the text. Images illustrate understanding of key concepts and relationships.</td>
<td>Images extend or enhance the text with student’s own interpretation. Students can explain his/her inferences and communicate what was learned from the text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology

This mixed methods research was conducted using a sequential explanatory design in which qualitative data were used to enhance, complement, and follow up quantitative findings (Creswell, 2008). In this design quantitative and qualitative data were collected sequentially in two phases.

Quantitative data were collected using a teacher-made test to assess students' achievement in EFL reading class. For that purpose two classes of Junior Secondary Schools, in which one class consisted of 29 students and the other 27, provided the empirical data related with the topic. Both classes were taught using steps and procedures of visual imagery in reading but the reading texts were different; one class read authentic texts and the other class modified texts. During the process of teaching reading the three Keene & Zimmermann’s strategies were applied, i.e., creating schemata, inferring, and using sensory and emotional images. These strategies were carried out in Activity 1, think aloud, as proposed by Draper. This is to say that students were asked to think aloud, while reading, to demonstrate how they visualised the three mental activities: making schemata, making inferences, and using sensory and emotion.

Steps to practise think aloud activity, as proposed by Draper, are presented as follows:

- Teacher explains to students how to create images in mind when reading a text.
- Teacher chooses a part of a text to read aloud.
- Begin reading. Pause to verbalise the thinking and the images that are being created in mind.
- Reveal how images are created in mind.
- Explain to students how to select rich words from the text, connected with personal experiences and prior knowledge. Teachers might pull phrases from the text that connect to the five senses to create visual image.
- Describe to students how creating the image can help understand and enjoy what is happening in the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score criteria</th>
<th>0 = Minimal</th>
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<th>2 = Proficient</th>
<th>3 = Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student is able to go beyond pictures, to use all senses to understand text.</td>
<td>Images illustrate only visual elements of text. No emotional illustrations, such as color, are involved.</td>
<td>Images or student explanations illustrate some use of multiple senses or emotions.</td>
<td>Picture show illustrates use of multiple senses through use of color, composition, and rotation of objects. Student can describe a “mind movie” that includes more than visual images.</td>
<td>Images come from all the senses and emotion. Students describe a rich “mind movie” that includes sound, smell, movement and feelings and can explain how mental images enhanced comprehension.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The other two activities of visualisation - story wheel and gallery images - were used to illustrate the end products as far as visual imagery in a reading class is concerned.

Qualitative data were collected using a rubric, as earlier discussed. Forms of a story wheel and a gallery images used by students to express their imagery in reading can be found in the appendices. Steps and procedures to operate a story wheel and gallery images are presented below.

1. Steps and procedures to operate story wheel:

   - Teacher prepares a story wheel prior to lesson.
   - Students read a story, reading text.
   - Students list important events chosen from beginning, middle, and end of the story.
   - Students divide the list of events into the pie segments.
   - Students write the events on the pie segments.
   - Students start to illustrate the events on the corresponding segments.
   - Students write the story title and author’s name in the centre circle.
   - Students might post the story wheels in the reading centre or on a classroom kiosk or booth.

2. Steps and procedures to operate gallery walls:

   - Teacher explains the concept of using images to represent information. S/he can show 2 or 3 samples of different images representing different content area concepts. Discuss how images correspond to information.
   - In small groups, have students read a section of text and create 2-4 images to represent the content. Students share images with classmates.
   - Start a gallery on a classroom or hallway wall to exhibit images.

The quantitative data were analysed using an independent t-test formula. This is to confirm if there is significant difference between mean scores of both classes under level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$) and degrees of freedom = 54. For such confirmation two hypotheses were formulated, i.e. $H_0$, saying there is no difference between mean scores of the class with authentic text and that with modified text, and $H_1$ saying there is difference between mean scores of the class with authentic text and that with modified text. The confidence level of statistical significance is based on the following ‘p’ values, such as that ‘p’ < .05 which means the difference is significant and $H_0$ should be rejected.
Results

1. Quantitative data

The use of t-tests presented a ‘p’ value = .000 which is lower than that of .05 (‘p’ < .05). This means that the hypothesis, saying there is no difference between mean scores of the class with authentic text, could be rejected. In other words there is significant difference between mean scores of the two classes being studied in this research.

2. Qualitative data

Using the scoring rubric to assess students' imagery in reading, the research reports the following results:

- Kinds and forms of imagery made by students in class with modified reading text vary from one student to another.
- Students in class with authentic text made less interesting imagery.
- Students in class with modified text show higher activities than those of authentic text.

Discussion

The statement by Gambrell & Jawitz (1993), that creating mental images while reading will facilitate comprehension, is not surprising when it is related to schema theory. Only after the schema is activated is one able to see or hear what he/she is reading (Harmer, 2001). Visual imagery or imagination in a broader context deals with the involvement of prior knowledge to build mental pictures. In a reading activity such an involvement might be articulated by associating words in the text with images and memories of the readers' lives (Keene & Zimmermann, 2007). The notion of association in this regard is central and will be effective when it is personally meaningful to individual learners (Oxford, 1990). Since each reader has different background knowledge, it is culture specific (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). This implies, in a broader context, that certain reading texts might facilitate readers to generate their schemata by which visual imagery appears.

Therefore, this research deliberately set apart two different kinds of text, one is authentic and the other modified.

Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, including the previous explanation, some conclusions can be stated as follows:

From the quantitative analysis

1. Scores of student achievement in the class with modified text are different from those in the class with authentic text. Mean score of the first class is 81.44 and mean score of the second class is 65.59.

2. The ‘p’ value is less than .005 which means there are significantly different scores of achievement between the classes.
From the qualitative analysis

1. Kinds and forms of imagery made by students in class with modified reading texts varied from one student to another.

2. Students in the reading class with modified texts showed higher activities compared to those using authentic materials.

3. Students in the class with authentic texts practised less interesting imageries.

References


Appendices

1. A Story Wheel (Draper, 2010)

![Image of a story wheel]

Notes:

1. Student's name and the story title are written in the small circle in the middle.
2. Imaginary events are drawn in the pie segments.
3. Teachers may have their students number the events.

Procedure:

1. Teacher prepares a story wheel prior to lesson.
2. Students read a story, reading text.
3. Students list important events: chosen from beginning, middle, and end of the story.
4. Students divide the list of events into the pie segments.
5. Students write the events on the pie segments.
6. Students start to illustrate the events on the corresponding segments.
7. Students write the story title and author's name in the centre circle.

8. Students might post the story wheels in the reading centre or on a classroom kiosk or booth.

2. **Gallery Wall (taken from Draper (2010))**

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</tbody>
</table>

**Legend:** 1 = Title and student name; 2 = Imaginary illustration; 3 = Description.

**Procedure:**

1. Teacher explains the concept of using images to represent information. S/he can show 2 or 3 samples of different images representing different content area concepts. Discuss how images correspond to information.

2. In small groups, have students read a section of text and create 2-4 images to represent the content. Students share images with classmates.

3. Start a gallery on a classroom or hallway wall to exhibit images.