

# The Role of Reading Strategies in the Process of Reading

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## Abstract

In recent years, reading strategies have become essential factors in literacy education. Existing literature has indicated that in the process of comprehension reading strategies have received particular attention. Furthermore, understanding the role of reading strategies in the process of reading and teaching could be beneficial for the students. The current study discussed the importance of reading strategies and indicated the potentials for future researches in reading strategies.

## Introduction

On the basis of the two interrelated categories, namely, teaching and testing, the term reading comprehension can be defined. From teaching perspective, Urquhart and Weir (1998) argued the change from decoding to comprehension which causes crucial changes in the process of teaching of reading. From testing perspective, the first assumption is only possible in terms of scoring hundred percent in tests of comprehension (Fry, 1963). However, when a reader reads a short text, many questions remain unanswered. This indicates that even by reading carefully, complete and perfect comprehension may not achieve. The second assumption may also have significant consequences on teaching, where one skill is “superior” to another skill, for instance, employing skimming and scanning skills in comparison to heedful reading. According to Urquhart and Weir (1998) despite these two skills justifying “a drop in comprehension in return for an increase in speed” (p. 86), a careful reading, may “result in slow, laborious reading when it is not, in fact, necessary” (p. 87).

However, the process of reading includes both the reader and the text. In assimilating the text contents, readers’ strategy knowledge is the factor that could influence their process of reading. According to Alderson (2000) readers comprehend text differently. Moreover, text itself does not carry the meaning but has potential for meaning. This means that the interpretation of text is developed by the readers based on their interaction with the text. Since readers have various perspectives, knowledge, and experiences, the meaning that comes from their interaction with the text may differ.

## Reading Strategies

In the process of learning, reading strategies play a vital role. Since late 1970s to the early 1980s, the studies investigating reading strategies focused on reading in L2 or FL. While reading strategies contribute to effective reading, the investigations of reading strategies are still ongoing.

It is obvious that in educational system, one of the skills that comprises of a huge proportion is reading comprehension, which is a complex process and requires several strategies. Therefore, ensuring that students achieve comprehension deliberately and adequately is indispensable. Achieving this goal is dependent on students’ success in developing reading strategies to comprehend and accomplish the text effectively. Hence, studying the reading strategies becomes a central attention of the psycholinguists and cognitive linguists around the world.

Learner strategies are the cognitive tools employed by learners for the processing of L2 input including the retrieval and storage of new information. Brown (1994) perceived strategies as actions launched by learners in self-defense when they face a problem. In general, reading is viewed academically as a significant input source and EFL learners have to deal with a variety of both general and specialized reading materials in their learning process. How well learners succeed in their reading comprehension is largely dependent on how they are able to use the reading strategies they know (Block, 1986).

However, in literature, the term reading strategy has been defined in various ways. For instance, Garner (1987) defined reading strategies as deliberate action which is rapidly employed by learners to fill up their lack of success in cognitive process. Paris et al. (1991) addressed strategies as a conscious action to attain a specific target. Carrell et al. (1998) explicated the deliberate use of strategies that readers employ to attain their target successfully. Additionally, Brantmeier (2002) portrayed reading strategies as interpretation process that is utilized by a reader to generate the meaning of what he or she reads. Koda (2005, p. 205) on the other hand, portrayed reading strategies in three factors, namely, “deliberate, goal/problem oriented, and reader-initiated/controlled”. Similarly, Afflerbach et al. (2008) elucidated that reading strategies are the conscious action that readers display to make sense of the text.

Tierney et al. (1997) emphasized that readers rely on the sources given in the text such as graphics when reading text in science. In other words, they rely heavily on their previous experience when reading general topics. This indicates that in order to succeed in dealing with various natures and information provided in the text,

readers from different areas of study require various skills and strategies in reading.

Reading strategies were categorized by Block (1986) into general and local strategies. General strategies are applied when a reader attempts to monitor his or her comprehension, while local strategies assist reader to cope with difficulties he or she faces in text language. Block provided a list of general strategies such as anticipating content, recognizing text structure, integrating information, questioning information in the text, interpreting the text, using general knowledge and experience, commenting on behavior or process, monitoring comprehension, correcting behavior and reacting to the text (the reader reacts emotionally to information in the text), and local strategies such as paraphrasing, rereading, questioning meaning of a clause or sentence, questioning meaning of a word and solving vocabulary problem.

Another categorization of reading strategies proposed by Johnston (1983, in Block, 1986) in which one furnish the reader to perceive the text with a framework, and the other is the strategies that assist a reader to take an action whenever it is necessary. The way readers are assigned to their reading process is another categorization approach for reading strategies. Hosenfeld (1977) categorized these strategies as “main meaning line” and “word-solving strategies” and Olshavsky (1976-1977) categorized them as “clause-related” and “word related” strategies. The “main meaning line” is implemented when a reader employs top-down reading approach, while “word-solving strategies” are executed when a reader utilizes bottom-up reading approach. This categorization is similar to Block’s (1986) categorization of reading strategies into general and local strategies.

To conclude, both of the categorization of reading strategies provided by Block (1986) and Hosenfeld (1977) explain two reading approach called top-down and bottom-up approaches that complement each other. Top-down approach requires general strategies implementation and explains the global approach of reading that reader’s background knowledge and text-based meaning interact to achieve high level of understanding. Top-down process of reading is also called knowledge based process. Bottom-up approach requires local strategies implementation to demonstrate decoding or word-level approach of reading for readers to obtain the meaning assigned by lower level of text unit. Bottom-up process of reading is also called language-based process (Block, 1992).

In most of the investigations on reading strategies in L2 reading, making a distinction between the two terms: top-down and bottom-up, was ran in parallel to the terms of global and local strategies (Abbott, 2006; Barnett, 1988; Block, 1986, 1992; Carrell, 1989; Young and Oxford, 1997). Organization of the discourse, main idea, and role of background knowledge are the center of the top-down reading strategies, while the level of word meaning, the structure of the sentence, and the textual details are the focus of bottom-up strategies. Aebersold and Field (1997) proposed that when an individual reads a text, his or her mind engages deliberately in several processes. When readers process the information at sentence level they employ local strategies. On the other hand, when they process the information in each sentence, they attempt to fit the information given in the text with their background knowledge by employing global strategies such as skimming, predicting, and achieving the main idea.

### **Studies on Reading Strategies**

The aim of the studies conducted in reading strategies was mainly to highlight different types of reading strategies employed by readers, and to find out how readers process the text. Individuals were reported to utilize various reading techniques and strategies in the process of reading. Even so, similar strategies in L1 and L2 were reported by Block (1986). Due to the importance of defining reading comprehension and its possible implication on teaching of reading, interest has been drawn to investigate reading strategies.

The study conducted by Doha (2013) looked at the impact of explicit instruction of reading strategies on the process of reading comprehension among sixty Egyptian university students who study EFL. Results demonstrated that discourse organization knowledge enhanced respondents’ reading comprehension. The findings also illustrated that students who received instruction and those who did not received such training, performed differently, in which the former outperform the latter. Moreover, knowledge of structure and reading comprehension was reported to have a positive correlation.

Hijikata et al. (2013) by focusing on readers’ language proficiency, reading strategies and text rhetorical patterns, examined the way Japanese students read academic text. To obtain the data, they employed various instruments such as recorded observation, think-aloud protocol, analyzing the notes taken by the students, and post interview. The identified reading strategies through think-aloud protocol procedure were categorized into three strategies group, namely, local, global, and metacognitive. The results illustrated that students frequently employ local and global strategies, and their usage of these strategies depended on various factors such as their competence in L2, background knowledge regarding the topic, and familiarity with the content. Moreover, the results confirmed participants’ difficulty in identifying academic discourse, which caused inefficient reading.

Madhumathi and Ghosh (2012) studied the existence of a relationship between the use of reading strategy and achievement in the reading comprehension of Indian ESL learners. The instruments used in the investigation were included in test of reading comprehension which was the modification of reading comprehension sources in

TOEFL, and survey of reading strategy. The reading strategies were categorized into the global, problem solving and support strategies. The findings indicated that the students used problem solving strategy most frequently and global strategies sparingly. The variances in the use of strategy were statistically significant with the exception of the supporting strategy. The results indicated that language proficiency was a strong determiner in the use of reading strategy. However, the study showed that highly proficient students carried out the process better than students with low proficiency in the use of reading strategies. In general, the reading strategy utilized had a moderate correlation with the reading comprehension performance of the participants. There was a meaningful difference in the strategy used by the two genders, with females employing more strategy compared to males. As such, the study identified the reading strategy preferences of the participants, and suggested remedial measures for classroom teaching.

Hannon and Frias (2012) in their study reported the progress of apparently stimulated assessment that presents approximate ability of the students at preschool level to verbalize their thought of the displayed audible text, to construct inference of the text, to utilize their long-term memory to achieve knowledge, and to incorporate such command with recent information from audible text. The findings indicated that the new task was appropriate to understand how higher level procedure contributed to execute as a determination of language comprehension which seem to provide a better prediction of comprehension achievement than assessing of working memory. Additionally, its elements of knowledge merger provided a good prediction of performance on a composite measure of intelligence. Finally, a quantitative analysis showed three different groups of capacities: the expertise to interpret a word, making a connection between higher level and text-based procedure, and establishing a connection between background knowledge and higher level procedure.

Kolahi et al. (2013) conducted a study to determine whether utilizing contextual clues has an important effect on Iranian awareness of unfamiliar vocabularies. The data analysis showed that knowledge and contextual clues use has an important effect on guessing the vocabularies meaning. Also, these researchers studied the impact of various textual clues on learners' forecast of the meaning of unfamiliar vocabularies. The results showed that equivalent meaning of words at the initial stage were the most effective, followed by explanations (definitions) and antonyms alternatively, which affect learners' ability to predict the meaning of unknown vocabularies.

Wilawan (2012) focused mostly on the combined application of cognitive and meta-cognitive processing strategies to enhance EFL readers' main idea of comprehension. To be competent and achieve greater success in understanding the central theme of the text, EFL students need help to promote both categories of reading processes. Building on earlier studies, this research posited that for EFL students, there is a need for more support in knowledge and skills in the basic elements of text comprehension at the lower level in the process of developing main ideas. Equally important are higher-level cognitive processes and meta-cognitive strategies. The study showed some possible guidelines to teach main idea in comprehension at all levels of processing.

The study by Hung and Eslami (2013) provided an idea of dictionary use and guess of contextual clues of learners who were considered to be in advanced language level. Their investigation showed that both strategies of employing dictionary and guessing of the contextual clues were employed by participants respectively. The respondents were one hundred graduate students from a prestigious university in Southwestern United State. The outcomes showed that dictionary was mostly employed to check the pronunciation of unfamiliar word, while rarely used to understand the proper usage of an unknown word. Respondents frequently estimated the meaning of the word by referring to the main ideas and drawing from the background information. The least used purpose of guessing strategy was to find the meaning of single parts of an unknown mixed word, for example note-book, and the part of speech of unknown words.

Perry (2013) investigated the comprehension strategies used during the process of reading expository texts in Spanish (L1) and English (L2). The study endeavored to explain the use and awareness of comprehension strategies by small group of university students comprising of three females and four males. The respondents were requested to report the efforts made in trying to comprehend while being engaged in transfer tasks involving expository texts in Spanish and English. All of the students are native speakers of Spanish. In obtaining the data, the study employed two methods: think-aloud and retrospective interviews. The result showed that firstly, the readers used more or less similar strategies to carry out the reading tasks in both Spanish and English and were able to control their use. Secondly, it was found that lack of vocabulary was the main cause of their difficulty in understanding what they read but it appears that in such a situation, the students knew what strategies they could use despite the fact that their lexical limitations did not allow them to apply the strategy successfully. Thirdly, when reading in an L2, readers did not turned off their L1, but used it to help in their comprehension, to describe the meanings of words and sentences, to assist them to form propositions and to integrate these into a macrostructure of the text. It was in fact a form of intellectual rendering or the conversion of the ideas into Spanish. Fourthly, most known cases of strategy use indicated two or more strategies being combined. Finally, aspects of language seem to have affected the use of some strategies, while in other cases the use of strategy was largely influenced by 1) the type of task; 2) characteristics of the text other than the language

in which it was written (such as density of information); 3) demands of the task; and 4) how motivated the readers were and how they perceived reading in general to the task at hand.

Hagaman et al. (2012) explored the impact of the paraphrasing strategy on the reading comprehension of young students. Six third graders identified as fluent in their reading but who had problems with comprehension, were the selected participants. The participants were all provided their instruction one-on-one. Results demonstrated that using paraphrasing strategy enhanced reading comprehension based on the percentage of text recall and short-answer questions.

Karbalaei and Azimi (2011) established a study among sixty three Indian college students majoring in English. By looking at the participants' reading comprehension performance, the authors attempted to find out the impact of paraphrasing strategy. Two factors of language proficiency and gender were also taken into consideration. Using proficiency tests, the students were classified into two groups, namely, high and low. The findings showed that gender and reading performance were not correlated, and students' comprehension improved after developing their paraphrasing skills through explicit instructions.

Fatmawati (2014) identified the impact of utilizing skimming and scanning strategies on the students' reading comprehension at grade eight. Data collection was carried out in two pre-tests and two post-tests among both groups called experimental and control group. Treatment was administered for the experimental group employing skimming and scanning strategies, but the control group received traditional teaching. The results indicated the effect of using skimming and scanning strategies on the students' reading comprehension and it was recommended that teachers should utilize skimming and scanning strategies in teaching reading.

In the investigation conducted by Shokrpour and Nasiri (2011) cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies were examined among ninety two Iranian students, who were required to take IELTS academic test. Respondents were grouped into two categories, namely, good readers and poor readers. The result of the data analysis indicated that in terms of using cognitive strategies, no difference occurred between good and poor readers. On the other hand, in utilizing metacognitive strategies, good readers outstripped the poor readers. Moreover, between employing cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies, positive correlation in both groups was reported.

Motallebzadeh and Mamdoohi (2011) carried out a study to examine the potential impact of cognitive learning strategies, in improving comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners. After a month of instructing the control and experimental groups, the results were compared and it was found that the participants who had received instructions in cognitive strategies significantly outperformed those in the control group. There was clear evidence to prove that the strategies had significant impact on enhancing the subjects' EFL reading scores.

Mahmoudi (2014) conducted a study to discover the reading strategies utilized by Iranian EFL students and to indicate their metacognitive awareness level in reading strategies. One Hundred and fifteen students took part in the experiment and were required to answer the inventory of metacognitive awareness, proposed by Mokhtari and Reichard's (2002). The inventory consisted of statements to reflect an individual's thoughts, and the strategies and exertion associated with text comprehension. The result demonstrated that problem solving strategies was employed frequently when compared to global and support strategies. The strategies employed most frequently in each subscale include guessing of the meaning of the unspecified words in context, focusing on the activity purpose before starting and regulating reading, and utilizing of dictionary.

Takallou (2011) used inventory of strategies for learning language (Oxford, 1986) and the approach of cognitive academic learning of language (Chamot and O'Malley, 1996) to study the impact of metacognitive learning strategies' instruction (planning and self-monitoring) on ninety three university students in Iran. Analysis of the data indicated that the two experimental groups, who were given the instructions, performed more satisfactory than the control group in the reading comprehension text. Also, the type of text had a significant impact on enhancing the respondents' comprehension ability. The respondents showed better performance on authentic texts compared to inauthentic texts. Additionally, the results indicated that the awareness of the experimental groups of metacognitive reading strategies increased to a significant extent after instruction.

Al-Rasheed (2014) also placed emphasis on the importance of reading strategies in a study which investigated the impact of pre-reading strategies on forty six Saudi EFL college students' reading comprehension. A quasi-experimental design was employed, and twenty three students placed in the category of experimental group were provided with one pre-reading strategy such as teaching vocabularies, and the other twenty three students were given another pre-reading strategy such as pre-questioning. Both groups of participants first had to execute the pre-reading strategy by reading a printed work, and subsequently replied questions of comprehension. Results showed no evidence of any meaningful difference between the performance of the two groups.

Aghaei and Pillaie (2011) examined the impact of direct instruction of cognitive and meta-cognitive reading strategies on Iranian students' reading performance and self-efficacy. One hundred and twenty university students participated in the study. The study investigated both groups of experimental and control group. The experimental group showed superior performance to the control group. Quantitative analyses were employed and

the results indicated that comprehension ability, use of strategy and self-efficacy could be enhanced through strategy instruction. These researchers were also made aware of the fact that in certain cases, strategy instruction could help to enhance the effectiveness of independent reading. Further analysis revealed that the experimental group was able to develop a positive attitude following the strategy instruction and could affect strategy transfer to other languages and reading materials.

### Summary of Findings on Reading Strategies Studies

The very important part played by learners has been duly acknowledged in current teaching approaches. This is because the extent to which the readers interact with the text will influence the degree of their understanding of what is being read. It is essential for the readers to have the knowledge to use the reading strategies, if they wanted to efficiently comprehend what they read. Previous studies that explored the impact of using reading strategies on the level of reading comprehension have led to the inevitable conclusion that being aware of reading strategies is crucial for effective reading comprehension and cannot be ignored in the process of reading.

However, in summarizing the findings on reading strategies there were two concerns that require further investigation. First, despite the fact that in Iran the process of reading has been investigated from various perspectives and several findings have been identified in these studies, to the best of the knowledge of the researcher, there were no studies that investigated and explained reading strategies in reading authentic academic text, which instructors need to take into consideration and place greater emphasis on achieving better understanding. Second, the role of background knowledge on reading strategies used in the process of comprehension has not been addressed.

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