The Two EFL Reading Comprehension Ability Groups' (High vs. Low)
Differences in their Use of EFL Reading Strategies

Section A-Research paper

THE TWO EFL READING COMPREHENSION ABILITY GROUPS' (HIGH VS. LOW) DIFFERENCES IN THEIR USE OF EFL READING STRATEGIES

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Abstarct:

The reading strategies are a sub branch of language learning strategies; consequently, this section started with the general concept of language learning strategies and moved on to the reading strategies which are the focus of the present study. This study aimed to investigate the two EFL reading comprehension ability groups' (High vs. Low) differences in their use of EFL reading strategies. The study sample consisted of 200 male and female university and high school students, who were selected conveniently from 4 high schools and 2 universities in the city of Kerman in south east Iran. As a matter of the study being a survey and not following an experimental procedure also the fact that the study was only checking the possible relationships among the dependent and independent variables, the data were processed through SPSS. There existed no significant difference between the two high and low EFL reading comprehension ability groups in their use of SORS subscales. Based on the results, the existed no significant difference between the two high and low EFL reading comprehension ability interviewees in their use of SORS EFL reading strategies (P=.568>.05). Also, the same as the quantitative phase participants, the 16 interviewees were all moderate strategy users. The tests (T-test and Pearson correlation) findings in the qualitative and the quantitative phases of the study supported each other; although they contradicted the viewpoints of all the 16 interviewees who thought a person's EFL reading comprehension ability improvement will result in his/her using more EFL reading strategies.

Keywords: EFL reading strategies, language learning strategies, Reading Comprehension Ability

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Introduction

The reading strategies are a sub branch of language learning strategies (Maolin & Xiaoxin, 2010); consequently, this section started with the general concept of language learning strategies and moved on to the reading strategies which are the focus of the present study.

There has never existed any agreement among the researchers in the field over a common definition for reading strategies. This diversity has been the result of the way the term has been used in different contexts such as first, second, or foreign language learning (Hoang, T. T. V., et al., 2022). Even though, research in the field of second/foreign language reading strategies indicates that strategies refer to conscious reading behaviours (A. D. Cohen, 1998). While reading comprehension is of grand importance in both first and second/foreign language learning, reading strategies, as the most important shortcut to enhance reading comprehension are of specific interest in the field of reading research (Zare & Mobarakeh, 2011).

Strategic reading is a prime characteristic of expert comprehends because it is an indispensable building block of 'reading for meaning'. Reading strategies allow readers to elaborate, organize, and evaluate information derived from a text. Because of strategies' being controllable by readers, they are personal cognitive tools that can be used selectively and flexibly. Also, reading strategy use reflects both metacognition and motivation, because readers need to have both the knowledge and the inclination to use strategies (Carrell, 1998).

In the process of reading, one needs to understand both the text's direct and implied meaning and ideas (Nguyen et al., 2022). If students comprehend what they are reading through a variety of strategies, they will create an interested and self-regulative attitude toward the path of academic achievement (Amoli & Karbalaei, 2011).

The study of English as a major subject in Iranian schools begins in the second year of junior high school (secondary or guidance school) (Van Nguyen, T., et al., 2022). After that, English is studied at the rate of three to four hours a week up to pre-university level (Fallahi, 1991). Basically, the textbooks used for teaching English, predominantly, utilize reading activities and grammar with minimal focus on oral-based or writing skills (Tajadini, 2002).

This study aimed to investigate the two EFL reading comprehension ability groups' (High vs. Low) differences in their use of EFL reading strategies.

Methods

The population, from which the sample was drawn, was the Iranian students in Kerman, a city in southeast Iran where the researcher lives now. The sample number was 200 (400 questionnaires were spread; however, only 200 were filled properly by the participants and were useable in the study).

The sampling procedure used in the present study was convenience sampling (L. Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 88). The researcher collected the data from the schools and classes to which she was introduced by the department of education in Kerman, in addition to the co-workers', who agreed to cooperate, classes at universities. To calculate the sample size the researcher was introduced to online sample calculation software in http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm, through USM statistician consultant in IPS. Since the population of 3rd grade male and female students at Kerman high schools and university students who were passing general English course at Kerman universities at the second semester of the educational year 2012-2013 (when the researcher gathered the data) equalled about ten thousand, the sample size needed to gather the necessary data to answer the present study's questions equalled 196. The researcher rounded the number and made use of a sample of 200 high school and university female and male students. Consulting the statistician, the confidence interval was decided to be 7 (the proper number for confidence interval ranges from 5-10) and the confidence level was decided to be at 95%. The confidence level can be at 95% (usually used in all research areas other than medicine) or 99% (usually used in medical studies). The researchers mostly design the studies based on 95% level of confidence which is more logical and common. The pilot study sample consisted of 50 participants which equalled a quarter of the main sample.

As a matter of the study being a survey and not following an experimental procedure also the fact that the study was only checking the possible

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relationships among the dependent and independent variables, the data were processed through SPSS.

Results

An independent samples T-test was conducted to see whether there existed any significant difference between the members of the two high and low EFL reading comprehension ability groups in their use of SORS EFL reading strategies. The results of this independent samples T-test are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. The descriptive statistics related to the comparison between the two EFL reading comprehension ability groups (high vs. low) in their use of the SORS strategies in general.

EFL reading comprehension ability	Low=1, High=2	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading	1	140	3.17	.044
Strategy				
Use	2	60	3.27	.068

Table 2. The results of the independent samples t-test to compare the two EFL reading comprehension ability groups (high vs. low) in their use of the SORS strategies in general.

EFL reading comprehension ability		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Reading strategy use	Equal variances assumed	.008	.927	-1.220	198	**.224**
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.224	112.667	.223

As seen in Table 2, there existed no significant difference between the two EFL reading comprehension ability groups (high vs. low) in their use of SORS EFL reading strategies in general. Also, both groups' participants were moderate strategy users based on Oxfords' (1986) classification (2.41-3.49) of moderate strategy users. The members of the two EFL reading comprehension ability groups (high vs. low) were also compared in their use of any of the 30 metacognitive reading strategies on SORS.

In addition to the mentioned analyses, the two EFL reading comprehension ability groups were also compared in their use of any of the subscales of SORS (GLOB, PROB, SUP). The T-test results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. The descriptive statistics related to the comparison between the two EFL reading comprehension ability groups (high vs. low) in their use of the SORS subscales.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
GLOB	Low	140	3.14	0.59
	High	60	3.28	0.59

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PROB	Low	140	3.35	0.63
	High	60	3.49	0.65
SUP	Low	140	3.06	0.66
	High	60	3.06	0.63

Table 4. The results of the independent samples t-test to compare the two EFL reading comprehension ability group (high vs. low) in their use of the SORS subscales.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
GLOB	Equal variances assumed	0.08	0.78	-1.56	198	0.12
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.56	111.32	0.12
PROB	Equal variances assumed	1.34	0.99	-1.45	198	0.15
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.42	107.91	0.16
SUP	Equal variances assumed	0.15	0.7	-0.002	198	0.1
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.002	115.82	0.1

As it is clear from Table 4, there existed no significant difference between the two high and low EFL reading comprehension ability groups in their use of SORS subscales.

Was there any significant difference between the two EFL reading comprehension ability groups (high vs. low) in their use of the EFL reading strategies?

All the 16 interviewees emphasized the role of EFL reading comprehension ability of any EFL learner in his/her use of EFL reading strategies. They believed that a learner becomes proficient in reading texts in a language either through being taught the language or by personal effort and repeated reading, and both these reasons result in the person's getting familiar with useful reading strategies or discovering the best methods that increase his/her speed in reading.

"Of course, I cannot think of any more important factor in someone's being a successful reading strategy user than being a successful reader and comprehender of the target texts." one of the interviewees thought.

Also, independent samples T-test was used to see whether there existed any significant difference between the members of the two high and low EFL reading comprehension ability group interviewees in their use of general SORS EFL reading strategies. The results of this independent samples T-test are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

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Table 5. The descriptive statistics related to the comparison between the two EFL reading comprehension ability group (high vs. low) interviewees in their reported use of the SORS strategies in the interview.

EFL reading comprehension ability	Low=1, High=2	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading	1	8	3.13	.68
Strategy				
Use	2	8	3.32	.59

Table 6. The results of the independent samples t-test to compare the two EFL reading comprehension ability (high vs. low) groups of interviewees in their reported use of the SORS strategies in the interview.

EFL reading comprehension ability		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Reading strategy use	Equal variances assumed	.000	.99	-.585	198	.568
	Equal variances not assumed			-.585	112.667	.568

Based on Tables 5 and 6, the existed no significant difference between the two high and low EFL reading comprehension ability interviewees in their use of SORS EFL reading strategies (P=.568>.05). Also, the same as the quantitative phase participants, the 16 interviewees were all moderate strategy users.

The tests (T-test and Pearson correlation) findings in the qualitative and the quantitative phases of the study supported each other; although they contradicted the viewpoints of all the 16 interviewees who thought a person's EFL reading comprehension ability improvement will result in his/her using more EFL reading strategies (Lee, J. H. 2022).

Discussion

The independent samples T-test results showed no significant difference between the two high and low EFL reading comprehension ability groups participating in the study.

In the qualitative phase of the study, all the 16 interviewees emphasized the role of EFL reading comprehension ability of any EFL learner in his/her use of more and better EFL reading strategies. They believed that a learner becomes proficient in reading a language either through being taught the language or by personal effort and repeated reading, and both these reasons result in the person's getting familiar with successful and useful reading strategies or discovering the best methods that increase his/her speed and comprehension while reading (Mehrzad, K., et al., 2022). However, all the participants, regardless of their EFL reading comprehension ability, also emphasized the important role of vocabulary knowledge as the most important booster of success in EFL reading comprehension. They thought that nothing was more important in reading comprehension than vocabulary knowledge and reading strategies were not of that much importance to them. Though, they agreed that the more proficient one gets the more EFL reading strategies s/he learns or discovers and uses. When being questioned about their idea regarding the benefits of focusing on separate skills to improve in them, they all rejected this view and believed that to improve in any of the skills the best method is to invest time and energy on the four skills together to improve in any of the four language skills. As a result, the

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results of quantitative data analysis contradicted the views of the interviewees.

In the qualitative phase, the interviewees were also asked to answer SORS orally. These results were also analysed through T-test, whose results were in the same path with the quantitative findings.

Most of the reviewed studies in chapter two were inconsistent with the present results e.g. the higher EFL reading comprehension ability participants in Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) and Yin and Agnes (2001) studies were more aware of metacognitive reading strategies such as the ones on SORS and used more strategies; also, Dhieb-Henia (2003), Zhang (2001), Shokrpour and Nasiri (2011) and Swanson and De La Paz (1998) found that good readers use more metacognitive strategies than the weaker readers. The reason at the back of the present study's contradicting these studies might lay in the fact that most of the participants in this study belonged to low and mid-levels in their EFL reading comprehension ability, and very few participants got marks over 15 out of 20. Also, most of the participants comprising the high group got the marks near the borderline (the mark 10 out of 20). As a result, the comparisons might not have been as clarifying and distinction making as had to be. So, further studies in this field might fall pretty useful.

On the contrary, some researchers reported results similar to the present study findings, e.g., N. J. Anderson (1991) and Kern (1997) based on their study findings argued that use of special strategies cannot be the main reason of being successful or unsuccessful in reading comprehension. They believed that the successful readers use more strategies and more frequently; however, the less successful readers may use the same strategies but less frequently.

One of the other analyses conducted under the third research question, was comparing the two EFL reading comprehension ability groups in their use of any of SORS subscales, which showed no significant difference between the two group participants in their use of any of the subscales.

Though, these results could not talk the last words, they might show that mere improvement in one skill might not increase reading strategy use. The same as what the interviewees believed, concentrating on one skill may not

help the learner to improve even in the instructed skill as much as focusing on the four skills together will benefit the learners in any of them separately. Also, mere skilful strategy use might not be the only reason at the back of the EFL learners' success in reading comprehension, and many other factors (such as what the interviewees' emphasized the most (vocabulary knowledge)) might play important roles too.

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