

A Review of Reading Strategies and Models in Learning and Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract: Reading skill is a text-oriented cognitive capability applied when interacting with the written text. It is an essential skill that affects language learning and even academic achievement. Despite research on language learning has focused and contributed to the expansion of English language reading research, EFL students and even teachers are often unaware of the reader-oriented strategies used in learning and teaching reading. Existence of this gap, however, does not justify the idea of having a sole model for reading across various genres and types of assignments as it seems unrealistic. Therefore, highlighting the key models in the area, this article critically reviews the previous studies conducted on reading strategies and reading comprehension skill and proposes a framework for exploring reading strategies in teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language. This review may have some theoretical implications for the learners, instructors and researchers in learning, teaching, and conducting research on reading strategies.

Keywords: English Language, language learning, model, reading strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Reading skill is important to learners' success in school as it grants them the opportunity to enhance their language and communication skills. According to Chastain (1971), students who learn English as a Second (ESL) or Foreign Language (EFL) should read a lot to apply the language proficiently. Reading is also fundamental for communication in everyday life by accessing new information and practicing it. Noor (2011) stated that reading is perceived by higher education institutions as the most fundamental academic skills. In a school context, although ESL/EFL students are required to read and comprehend texts relevant to their studies and equip themselves with sufficient information for exams, they mostly struggle in understanding the content of lectures or textbooks (Alavi, Voon Foo, & Amini, 2015).

As an intricate process of understanding a written source and comprehending its meaning, a fluent reader, must equip themselves with skills for comprehensive reading (Sattar, & Salehi, 2014). If students are unable to understand a text due to failure in adopting suitable comprehension approach, they may face issues in understanding the tasks assigned to them. Thus, reading strategies could be one of the important factors affecting students' academic performance and achievement (Amini, Ayari, & Amini, 2016).

Likewise, by using the suitable strategies to answer comprehension questions, students will have higher chances of becoming autonomous readers. Strategies play an important role in helping students to plan and monitor their comprehension while reading. Moreover, students who use reading strategies when answering reading comprehension become more active in their learning (Scheid, 1993). Reading strategies are essential to students' comprehension besides enhancing their reading comprehension. The strategies can also help to differentiate good readers from poor ones (Dole, Brown, & Trathen, 1996). Reading is fundamental for EFL/ ESL learners in order to graduate from US academic institutions (Sheorey, & Mokhtari, 2001). In addition, the use of reading strategies can expedite reading comprehension at different segment levels (Aarnoutse & Schellings, 2003) as readers need to understand the connection between ideas in a passage (Yang, 2002). Reading is also a cognitive process that needs readers to relate the text with their prior knowledge, cultural background (Huang, 1997), texts' genre, type of text, and reader's language proficiency (Alderson, 2000).

Reading is defined as the ability to understand the meaning from printed sources and decipher the information accordingly (Smith, 2004; Moreillon, 2007) According to McKay (2006), reading process includes the interactivity between the readers and the text, whereas product of reading refers to the comprehension of text.

Significant increase of interest in strategies in language learning during the 1970s and 1980s led to more research on reading strategies. According to Olshavsky (1977), strategy is "purposeful means of comprehending the author's message". Pritchard (1990) reported that strategy is "an intentional action that readers take on their own accord to comprehend what they read". Differences are generally accepted even though there is uncertainty in the literature as to what differentiates a strategy from a skill. The difference between skills and strategies is highlighted by Williams and Moran (1989):

- i. Strategies are reader-oriented. Skills are text-oriented.
- ii. Strategies represent conscious decisions taken by the reader. Skills are used unconsciously.

- iii. Strategies represent a reaction to a problem. A skill is a capability which has been automatized and operates largely subconsciously, whereas a strategy is a conscious process carried out to resolve a problem

"General strategies" refer to comprehension assembly and comprehension surveillance whereas "local strategies" are efforts to comprehend distinct linguistic units (Block, 2005). A reading skill is a cognitive capability that a person is able to apply when interacting with the written text. According to Grabe (1988), reading skills include automatic recognition skills, structural knowledge and vocabulary, content/ world background, metacognitive knowledge, evaluation skills/ strategies and synthesis, formal discourse structure knowledge and also skills monitoring. Grabe's taxonomy uses universal classification to break it into different categories of component skills levels. Williams and Moran (1989) suggests a difference between "language related" and "reason related" skills. Some efforts have been made to organize skills according to rankings. The taxonomy of Lunzer, Waite and Dolan (1979) is devised with the lowest level skills on top. Skills are correlated and are attained at distinct rates and for a variety of reasons. The following are characteristics for ranking skills (Bojovic, 2010):

- i. logical implication – one system element can be considered to entail all components below it;
- ii. pragmatic implication – a reader displaying one skill in the system can be assumed to acquire all the "lower" skills;
- iii. difficulty – the elements are organized in order of increasing difficulty;
developmental – some skills are acquired earlier than others (it is unwise to suppose that readers pass through a period of comprehending direct information before they arrive at the stage of inferencing).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading strategies are learning skills, performance, problem-solving skills or study techniques which can result in a more efficacious and productive learning (Oxford, & Crookall, 1989). The difference between strategies and skills is explained by Grabe and Stoller (2002) as while reading skills are usually used deliberately, a language strategy could be rather involuntary in its use by an eloquent reader.

EFL reading strategies are voluntary and involuntary processes, skills, effort or techniques that readers use to solve their problems with understanding and interpretation. According to Carrell, Gajdusek and Wise (1998), ESL/EFL reading strategies are what readers divulge; the method that they use when interacting with a text and how they apply the strategies to attain effective reading comprehension.

Goodman (1967) divided reading strategies into two types of processing model which are top-down and bottom-up. Bottom-up strategies includes identifying a variety of linguistic signals such as syllables, letters, grammatical cues, discourse markers, morphemes, words and phrases followed by using the linguistic data-processing mechanisms to impose order on the signals. Top-down strategies, on the other hand, involves applying one's knowledge and schema to comprehend a text by guessing the meaning to determine what to keep and what not to keep (Amini, Alavi, & Zahabi, 2018).

Duke and Pearson (2002) stated that there are six reading strategies: prediction or background knowledge, using think-aloud strategies to observe comprehension, applying text structures, utilizing visual models not excluding graphic organizers and imagery, summarizing and questioning and answering questions as they read. El-Kaomy (2004) further divides reading strategies into metacognitive and cognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategies are further divided into three levels;

- i. Planning: learners have a reading goal in mind and comprehend the text according to this goal.
- ii. Self-monitoring: learners modulate the reading process and apply the suitable strategy when needed.
- iii. Self-evaluation: the reform phase whereby readers modify strategies if needed to determine whether the aim is achieved or vice versa or rereads the text.

Second language metacognitive strategies include regulating, planning for organization, selective attention, goal setting, monitoring, and self-assessing (Chen, & Chen, 2015). Cognitive strategies are those applied by learners to enhance language learning in terms of analyzing, summarizing, using context cues and paraphrasing (Singhal, 2001). According to Akyel and Ercetin (2009), cognitive strategies could aid readers in establishing meaning from written text.

Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) classifies reading strategies into three categories;

- i. Metacognitive Strategies: Techniques which were consciously, and meticulously planned skills applied by learners to manage their reading.
- ii. Cognitive Strategies: Definite actions and steps used by learners while working with the written text.
- iii. Support Strategies: Readers using instruments to understand the text such as taking notes, highlighting or underlining the text or using a dictionary.

EFL reading strategies are made up of three different divisions: problem-solving, global and support. Problem-solving strategies refers to the use of strategies when reading complex parts of a text. Global strategies involve outlining how to read and managing comprehension. Problem-solving strategies require the use of devices and techniques to understand a text. Metacognitive strategies were renamed as global reading strategies and cognitive strategies as problem-solving reading strategies (Sheorey, & Mokhtari, 2002).

Other researchers classify reading strategies as contextual guessing, skimming and scanning, reading for meaning, employing background knowledge, identifying text form and etcetera (Cohen, 1998; Hsu, 2006).

It is fundamental to acknowledge that there cannot be a sole model for reading across different genres, assignments and aims. Research has contributed to the development of three main reading strategies;

a. Bottom-up strategies

The conventional bottom-up model was influenced by Behaviorist Psychology in the early 1950s and 1960s. According to Omaggio (1993), learning is established upon habit construction brought about by the repeated connection of a stimulus with a response. He further describes language learning as a feedback system which humans acquire through natural conditioning process, where some patterns of language are strengthening, and others are not and only those patterns rewarded by the community of language users will

remain. Reading was regarded as a continuous process in the mid-1960s whereby readers first decipher letters in a written text into sounds, then, listen to these sounds and comprehend the words. Reading was considered as a skill identical to listening whereby the eyes function as a decoder of the printed text and comprehension occurs through listening.

In bottom-up model, meaning is deciphered in a text at the word and sentence level, i.e., identification of words and ability to pair the word with its sound and knowledge of sentence construction and syntax. It is a text-oriented or text-based model of reading (O'Donnell, 2013). The bottom-up model emphasizes on text-based processing whereby letters are put together to form words, words are connected to form sentences and sentences are linked to form ideas. The component of reading is put together to create the whole (Alderson, 2000).

b. Top-down strategies

Top-down model includes linking ideas from different segments of the text. A top-down point of view assumes background knowledge of basic word identification skills and stresses on the fundamental of the reader's prior knowledge in the comprehension process. With readers' knowledge, anticipation, presumption and inquiry to the written text and given a basic comprehension of vocabulary, they proceed to read as long as the text substantiate their expectation. Communication of prior knowledge and the written text is crucial in this approach. Alderson (2000) emphasized the role of the reader as indispensable participant in the reading comprehension process. However, one of the disadvantages of the top-down model is that for many written texts, readers have insufficient knowledge of the topic to generate assumptions (Alderson, 2000).

c. Interactive models

Interactive models are the most popular models of the reading process (Day, & Bamford, 1998). Interactive model is the combination of bottom-up and top-down models in the comprehension process. During the interactive process, readers are capable of decoding, and deciphering words and grammatical form. According to Grabe (1988), in this model the term "interactive" deals with opposing conceptions. It may refer to the communication that happens between the reader and the text whereby the reader composes meaning based on the knowledge retrieved from the text and partly from the existing prior knowledge. It can also refer to the interaction which happens simultaneously between several skills required for reading comprehension. This reading process involves automatic identification skills, and interpretation skills in an interactive model. This model focuses on the reader with four interactive functions of "composer", "monitor", "planner" and "editor". The reader looks for coherence to fill in gaps with deduction about the relations within the written text as a composer. As a "planner", the reader builds goals, assemble existing knowledge and make decisions on how to align him/herself with the text. As an "editor", reader observes his/her own developing interpretations. The function of "monitor" instructs the three mentioned roles and decides which role should take over during the reading process.

Hamza and Nur Salina (2018) investigated the reading comprehension strategies among EFL learners in higher education institutions. The study used a qualitative method and 10 Arab students were interviewed from three Malaysian public universities. Inductive thematic approach was used to analyze the data. The results showed that the most frequently applied reading strategies among the EFL learners were logical knowledge (under linguistic schema), formal construction (under formal schema), cultural knowledge (under cultural schema), prior knowledge, and conceptual knowledge (under content schema). It was found that reading strategies enhances EFL learners' understanding in English reading materials.

Al-Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2015) explored the reading problems and strategies of EFL in the Omani context by administering a questionnaire about EFL reading problems and strategies. The participants were 1114 students from grade 11 to 12 in a post-basic school, and 317 university foundation programme students. The findings showed that students in both contexts faced several problems with reading, especially because of lack of vocabulary. The findings portrayed a higher use of reading strategies by foundation programme students when compared to school students. Nonetheless, both groups preferred more support and problem-solving strategies than global/ meta-cognitive strategies.

Yusof, Shah, & Bataineh, (2007) examined the use of reading strategies by Malaysian ESL students. Thirty-two respondents were selected and were required to read a text and answer a questionnaire regarding reading strategies. It was reported that some of the strategies were used more frequently by the respondents. This study suggested that more reading strategies should be utilized when teaching EFL students.

Chen and Chen (2015) investigated high school students' use of EFL reading strategies in Taiwan. The instrument was Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS). The result indicated that students were aware of the reading strategies that they applied in their readings. Participants showed a preference towards support strategies, problem-solving strategies and global reading strategies.

Meniado (2016) conducted a quantitative study (t-tests) on Saudi EFL students' reading strategies, reading comprehension performance and motivation. The respondents were 60 randomly selected EFL students. The study revealed that when reading a text, the respondents used metacognitive reading strategies moderately. The problem-solving strategies (PROB) was found as one of the most commonly used among the three categories of the metacognitive reading strategies. No relationship was found between metacognitive reading strategies and reading comprehension. Reading strategies and reading motivation had positive relationship.

Sattar and Salehi (2014) investigated the role of teaching reading strategies in enhancing reading comprehension. All the participants were Persian university students. The participants had studied English for seven years in their high schools. Students were randomly put into two groups and were taught using two different reading strategies. Both groups were taught by the same teacher using the same syllabus, materials and textbooks for 12 weeks. Students who were taught reading while the teacher gave instruction were reported to be better readers.

Muayanah (2014) explored reading comprehension questions developed by English teachers of senior high schools in Surabaya. Twenty teachers from senior high schools in Surabaya participated in the study. The teachers were required to produce 10 questions

from three texts provided by the researcher. The data were later analyzed and classified based on Barrett's Taxonomy. Teachers preferred *wh*-questions to Yes/No or and other question types.

Solak and Altay (2014) conducted a survey on the reading strategies used by 130 English teachers at a university in Turkey. This survey consisted of 130 English teachers. Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARS) instrument was employed to collect data. The results portrayed that participants utilized reading strategies efficiently. The most widely applied strategy was underlining information in the passage to remember information.

Mahmud (2008) investigated reading strategies used by 191 ESL teachers in secondary schools in Kuching and Samarahan in Malaysia. Respondents completed a questionnaire and were interviewed. The majority of the respondents reported that they activated students' background knowledge and scanned for specific details. The teachers believed that activating students' prior knowledge and answering comprehension questions are efficient strategies.

Despite evidence of the benefits of reading strategies, teachers are not usually familiar with all the relevant strategies to improve students' reading comprehension. This could result in depriving learners of the strategies they need to know in the process of making meaning in reading text. Moreover, if the reading strategies are taught explicitly, it does not often focus on all types of reading comprehension skill categories. While suitable reading strategies facilitate students' reading abilities, some teachers need to search for external materials from other sources such as the internet since they face difficulties in generating ideal reading materials and strategies for their students. The limitations or the drawbacks of the studies, especially the older ones do not make them redundant or less useful, and they can still provide a significant improvement in the area. Some teachers face problems in the selection and use of reading strategies to develop students' reading comprehension in English effectively or do not fully utilize them in teaching reading. Some learners could hardly comprehend the assigned texts, while others misunderstand, take too long to understand, use the wrong techniques to identify keywords or even summarize the text. Therefore, if this problem is not addressed, it might consequently affect their performance and academic achievement negatively, not only in the English preparation courses but also other courses that are taught in English.

Nevertheless, in view of the above discussion and considering the methodological deficiencies in the previous studies, a framework is proposed in this paper for exploring reading strategies based on Barrett' (1972) taxonomy.

Barrett's (1972) Taxonomy

This taxonomy deals particularly with reading comprehension. Barrett's Taxonomy (1972) classifies reading comprehension strategies into five levels of comprehension; literal, reorganization, inference, evaluation and appreciation. The levels of comprehension related to language learning skills are literal, reorganization and inferential comprehension, whereas the last two levels are relevant to teaching of literature.

A Framework for Exploring Reading Strategies

In order to explore reading comprehension strategies among EFL teachers and students the following framework is proposed. Adopting Barret’s taxonomy that consists of literal, reorganization, and inferential questions, a mixed methods study could be conducted to identify the strategies that are used and not used by the teachers and students. For data collection, it is suggested in this paper to administer a questionnaire for students, followed or preceded by interviews and observations of the teachers. The type of the mixed methods research design should be determined based on the sequence of collecting the quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire items consisting of five-point Likert scale (*often, regularly, sometimes, rarely, never*) can be categorized according to the three types of reading comprehension strategies, i.e., literal comprehension, reorganization comprehension and inferential comprehension. Eventually, a comparison of the strategies used and not used in learning and teaching reading could have theoretical and practical implications for the students and teachers.

Reading strategies can be further explored by conducting experimental studies on reading comprehension strategies used and not used by teachers and students tailoring the suggested framework in this review in different EFL contexts.

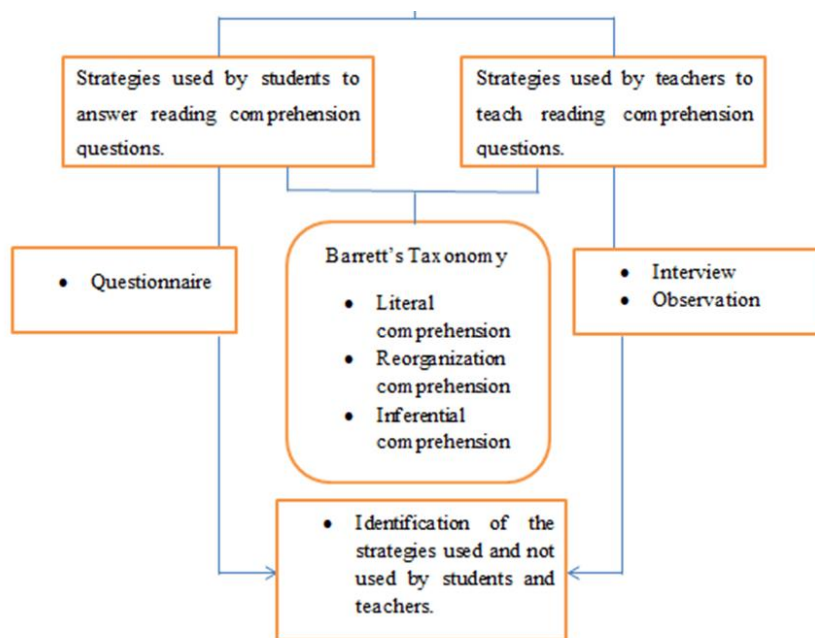


Figure.1 Proposed framework for exploring reading comprehension strategies

CONCLUSION

Reading comprehension is an important skill which not only affects language learning. Academic achievement could be improved through enhanced reading comprehension. Therefore, reading comprehension strategies are considered significant to both teachers and students. Despite this, not implementing the appropriate strategies may discourage students

from learning and this could lead to their loss of interest in the class and result in failure in the exams.

Instructors and students' implementation of reading strategies in teaching or answering reading comprehension questions may vary and it is highly dependent on the level of proficiency of the class. It is suggested to use reorganization and inferential strategies more frequently. For example, IELTS materials mostly consist of reorganization and inferential questions rather than literal comprehension type of questions. Therefore, there is still a need for more diverse reading strategies for teaching or answering reorganization and inferential questions to enhance the reading comprehension abilities and higher order thinking capabilities of EFL learners.

In an EFL context, majority of students are usually unaware of the strategies that teachers apply when teaching reading. Hence, identifying the strategies that their students apply in answering comprehension questions could help to improve students' reading comprehension abilities (Amini, Alavi, & Zahabi, 2018).

One important factor could be taking students' weakness into account and using the appropriate teaching method in accordance with the students' needs and preferences. A repertoire of reading materials may play a substantial role in upgrading students' reading comprehension. However, not all strategies are applicable or useful for different types of students (James, Amini, & Yaqubi, 2020). The use of effective inferential comprehension questions by teachers could raise the awareness of the unused strategies and draw the students' attention towards the less utilized yet effective strategies. Students' unfamiliarity with the strategies, or the "too new" strategies for both students and teachers could procrastinate them from applying the strategies in answering and teaching reading comprehension questions for students and teachers, respectively. For instance, the use of reorganization and inferential comprehension strategies by providing more exercises in the syllabus may have optimum result, i.e., students' proficiency in reading. Students are more likely to engage in class and the majority aim to perform well during exams.

Another important factor could be the close relationship with teachers and the psychological factors that can promote the students' enthusiasm to learn about reading comprehension strategies (Amini, & Amini, 2012). For this, policy makers could organize training camp in which teachers and students attend to improve their reading comprehension abilities and at the same time foster closer relationship and sharing their uncertainty when answering reading comprehension questions.

Finally, identification of reading comprehension strategies which are used and not used by teachers and students when answering and teaching reading comprehension questions, particularly those strategies that are unfamiliar to both, can help to explore teachers and students' difficulties and fill in the gaps in enhancing reading comprehension by discovering the possible holistic or individualistic reasons or problems in dealing with reading texts.

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A Review of Reading Strategies and Models in Learning and Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

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