

## **The effectiveness of awareness and instruction of reading comprehension strategies in EFL Context**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Reading comprehension in EFL context is one of the most challenging and difficult tasks that most EFL readers face in their process of learning, because of their lack of acquiring the needed reading comprehension strategies that would help them to understand the comprehension texts efficiently. For this purpose, this Pilot Study aims at investigating the impact of teaching reading strategies on reading comprehension improvement of EFL readers. It also intends to find out whether the teaching of reading strategies would help readers to use more reading strategies so as to overcome their difficulties in reading comprehension. A sample of 11 University students in EFL context was chosen. They were taught through the reading comprehension course ten reading strategies. The findings of the study have indicated that reading strategy training was effective in improving the reading ability of EFL readers. Another major finding was that reading strategy training affects the frequency use of reading comprehension strategies as students become aware of them, how to use them and how they are important tools to understand a text independently. In this respect, three reading theories have been adopted, including the Bottom-up, Top-down and Interactive ones, so as to select the appropriate teaching material for teaching ten reading comprehension strategies. These latter shall help readers to read and acquire the needed and exact information from the text, rapidly and effectively. Thereby, educators shall teach reading strategies to students from the beginning of their university career so as to become autonomous readers.

**KEYWORDS:** reading comprehension strategies; instruction; training; awareness; frequency; use; improving reading comprehension ability; English as a Foreign Language.

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Date of Submission: 09-07-2021

Date of Acceptance: 24-07-2021  
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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

This article is about the result of a Pilot Study held to evaluate the feasibility of the instruments that are going to be used to extract reliable data about the students' awareness and use of reading-comprehension strategies and the effect of teaching these strategies on students in EFL contexts.

This pilot study has helped to check the feasibility of the use of the adopted Survey of Reading strategies in the Moroccan context and to collect the materials used in teaching some specific reading comprehension strategies, after being adapted to the objective of this study.

After the teaching of each reading comprehension strategy, the students were invited to express orally their attitudes towards the structure and content of the Reading Strategies Survey (Mokhtari and Sheorey, 2002), the material used in the instruction, and also about the Pre- and Post-tests they took. Moreover, they were also exposed to the description of each reading comprehension strategy to make them more aware about each one and invite them to participate in its development for better acquisition and frequent use later.

By doing so, the instruments of this study which are deemed infeasible or unsatisfactory should be modified or removed altogether in the main survey.

The subjects involved in this piloting are students of the Ph.D degree in political sciences whose main concern is to understand efficiently some research articles in English about international relations and political sciences.

The population of this research were eleven 11 students. All of them attended classes regularly, filled in the needed Survey of Reading Strategies and took the Pre-test. However, two of them did not take the post-test and did not fill in the questionnaire after receiving the treatment. The participants received, thirty (30) hours of explicit practicing of ten reading comprehension strategies, namely Scanning, Skimming, Inferring, Predicting, Activation of Prior Knowledge, Visualizing and Graphic Organizing, Questioning, Vocabulary Learning, Paraphrasing and Summarizing. Before they benefited from classes of the instruction of the reading comprehension strategies, the 11 participants were

aware about the objectives of my research and they accepted to take part in this survey deliberately, as it would be very beneficial for them to read articles and books in English for remarkable progress in their Ph.D. researches.

### ***I- Research Questions of the Pilot Study:***

- 1- Shall the readers' awareness of reading-comprehension strategies, instruction and practice help them to have higher scores in reading-comprehension tasks than before the treatment?
- 2- Shall the readers' awareness of reading-comprehension strategies, instruction and practice help them to use more reading strategies than before the treatment?
- 3- What effect does explicit reading strategy instruction have on the reading comprehension of EFL students?
- 4- Is there any significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores, after exposing students to explicit reading comprehension strategies?

### ***I-2- Data Collection***

There are three methods of data collection used in this study, mainly the Survey of Reading Strategies adopted from Mokhtari and Sheorey, 2002, the Pre- and Post-Tests that are selected from Toefl Test Books and Websites, the grades of the students who took the reading comprehension Pre- and Post –tests, and then the think-aloud teaching materials or lessons. Moreover, concerning the treatment, a number of texts, activities, exercises and tasks were collected from books and websites to serve the objectives of this research.

The main aim of collecting this data is to evaluate the students' use of reading-comprehension strategies and instruct them to EFL students so that they become successful readers.

### ***I-3- Data Analysis***

The collected data was processed by using the SPSS version 25, mainly the Paired Samples Correlation technique.

To find out the relationships between variables in this pilot study, the Paired Samples Correlations is used to compare two means that are from the same individual, object, or units. Moreover, it aims at representing statistical evidence about the mean difference between paired observations on a particular outcome. In this respect, the Paired Samples Test is a parametric test which can be used to evaluate the effect of treatment on the students' scores and frequency of reading strategies after both the Pre- and Post- tests.

## **II. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### ***Introduction***

The main objective of reading is comprehension, and a lot of studies have proved that reading comprehension strategies are effective in achieving and advancing the readers' understanding of articles or texts. (Anderson, 1991; Carrell, 1989; Paris, Lipson and Wixon, 1983). In this respect, Cekiso (2012) revealed that teaching reading comprehension strategies shall help learners to become strategic and autonomous readers who are responsible for their own reading and comprehension. Therefore, teachers should focus on the enhancement of the readers' metacognitive knowledge about reading comprehension strategies so as to become successful readers (Mokhtari and Reichard, 2002).

### ***II-1- Models of Reading Comprehension***

According to Gunning (1996), there are three main theories of reading comprehension, namely Schema Theory, Mental Models Theory and Propositional Theory. The first kind of theory refers to the fact that learners can relate the new information they encounter in the text to the information they have already saved in their minds before. The second theory referred to by Gunning(1996), is the Mental Model, which states that during reading, the learner develops a mental model of situations that reflects him. This theory has been used in my research in terms of many reading strategies that needs the intervention of the teacher to keep the reader on the right track and help him/her to reach the accurate meaning. This should be done through opening discussions, making questions, picturing, checking, and confirming or rejecting. This technique helps the reader to learn how to reconstruct the correct meaning and monitor it. Moreover, the last theory suggested by Gunning (1996), is called the Propositional theory and it refers to the reader's construction of the main idea or ideas of the text and organizing them in terms of importance. This theory is also applied in my research through different reading strategies such as skimming, graphic organizing, and questioning, etc.

Later on, Eskey (2005) stated three kinds of reading comprehension models. The first model is called Bottom-up and it relies on decoding words to understand meanings. Then, the second reading model is called Top-down model and it shows that the reading process is based on the reader's prior knowledge and experience. Then, the third model of reading comprehension is the Interactive one, as it involves the interaction between the information provided by a text, the reader's background information, and the various metacognitive reading strategies adopted.

Keeping in mind these above mentioned theories of reading comprehension have been implemented by Gunning (1996), in terms of four main reading comprehension strategies. Firstly, the Preparational strategies which involve Predicting, Guessing, Inferring and Questioning shall help learners to activate their background knowledge about the topic of the text, and become more familiar with the text and have a better tendency to understand it.

Secondly, the other main reading strategies are called organizational strategies as they refer to the reader's process of selecting details, identifying the main idea or ideas, classifying them, re-writing them and summarizing a part of the text or all of it. This category of reading strategies refers to skimming, scanning, graphic organizing, paraphrasing and summary. Thirdly, the Elaboration strategies help the reader to connect the information he/she has got from the text with his/her background knowledge about the topic of the text, mainly the use of inferencing, visualizing and questioning.

The last type of reading strategies determined by Gunning (1996) are called Monitoring Strategies. They refer to the reader's ability to think about how and what to do to understand a text. In other words, monitoring strategies are concerned with knowing what, when and how to use the other types of reading comprehension strategies to better understand the accurate meaning of a text.

### ***II-2- Reading Strategies and the Importance of their Instruction***

Reading strategies are the actions adopted to develop meaning, Garner (1987). That is, as Barnett (1989) suggested, they are the mental operations or actions used by a reader to deal with a text and make sense of what he or she was reading. Thus, reading strategies are the specific actions or operations used consciously by the readers to understand a text.

In the same respect, Paris, Wasik and Turner (1991), referred to reading strategies as the actions that a reader chooses to achieve the determined objective of reading a text which mainly understands it, through the use of certain strategies, and which are the following:

- 1-Skimming to get the general idea of a text;
- 2- Scanning to get a specific piece of information;
- 3- Making contextual guesses to get the meaning of unknown words;
- 4-Skipping unknown words;
- 5-Tolerating ambiguity;
- 6-Making predictions;
- 7-Confirming or disconfirming inferences;
- 8-Identifying the main idea;
- 9-Re-reading;
- 10- Using cognates to understand;
- 11- Activating prior knowledge;
- 12- Recognizing text structure.

Furthermore, reading strategies as defined by Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008), are the "deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode a text, understand words, and construct meanings out of a text", P : 368. Keeping this in mind, it is worth saying that reading strategies are the behaviors or the actions that readers consciously use to understand a given text.

Respectively, Singhal (2001), stated that reading strategies "indicate how readers conceive a task so as to help him and her to understand and comprehend a text" P:1, and they are referred to by Carrell, Devine, Eskey 1988, as the expert readers' use of "rapid decoding, large vocabularies, phonemic awareness, knowledge about text features and a variety of strategies to aid comprehension memory" P:1 .

To conclude from the above-mentioned studies, reading strategies refer to a wide range of tactics, both cognitive and metacognitive processes, which readers use to engage in the process of reading and comprehend a text. However, the readers' failure to master the above-mentioned processes or use them inappropriately might result in failing to achieve comprehension or understanding the provided text.

Therefore, students who benefitted from reading strategies training shall be more efficient readers than the ones who did not. Accordingly, Carrell (1998) declared that reading strategy training shall have positive effect on readers. In other words, the students who received strategy training in addition to the usual curriculum shall engage actively and successfully in the reading comprehension task given to them, more than the students received only the usual curriculum and finally failed to be successful readers. Accordingly, the main objective of the study held by Carrell, (1998), was to make the teachers giving much focus on the process of training students on reading comprehension strategies through the following stages:

1. Developing students' awareness about the reading process and reading strategies by asking the students to think and talk about how they read loudly;
2. Allowing students to choose their reading materials;
3. Showing the learners, the strategies that they will work best for the reading purpose;
4. Encouraging students to use the reading strategies practiced in the class with their teachers, outside the class in their reading assignments or for pleasure;

5. Encouraging students to evaluate their own use of strategies;
6. Understanding that the transfer of strategy use to another task is relevant and something to be encouraged.

To conclude about the results of the different studies on the teaching of reading strategies have shown that learners who engage actively in learning reading strategies result in being successful readers.

In fact, the use of reading strategies shall enhance the learners' level of understanding and memorizing of the reading materials provided. The mentioned above reading strategies shall be used simultaneously by the learners and be helped by the instructor to show them when and how to employ the given reading strategies in order to achieve better understanding of the text and gets it right meaning.

Respectively, Mokhatri and Sheorey (2002), discovered that the readers investigated were aware of different types of reading strategies and they use them in different frequency. Furthermore, the effectiveness use of these strategies helped learners to understand texts easily and efficiently. In other words, Mokhatri and Richard, (2002), concluded that low level of awareness of reading strategies means low ability to understand a text, and thereby the wide use of reading strategies indicated the high abilities of readers in understanding a text.

Accordingly, Anderson (2002), Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), Oxford. R, (1994), stated that reading strategies awareness helped readers to understand mostly the text. Once the learner becomes a strategic, his or her reading comprehension ability improves. The reading strategies investigated shall be referred to in three groups. The first category is composed of thirteen (13) items of the S.O.R.S, and they are called Global reading strategies because they deal with the text in general. The second category of the S.O.R.S is called the Problem-Solving reading strategies. It is composed of eight (8) items and it aims at helping the reader to deal with the problems that he or she faces while reading a text. The third group of the nine-reading strategies left of the SORS is called Support Reading Strategies. This category of reading strategies refers to the techniques adopted by readers through using outside reference materials. Similarly, Wang Xuan. (2008), conducted a study whose results indicated that there was a significant relationship between the use of metacognitive reading strategies and the learners' scores in reading comprehension tasks.

Moreover, Takallou, (2011), found that the students who benefitted from instruction on planning and self-monitoring had high scores in reading comprehension tasks, rather than the ones who did not receive any instruction in reading comprehension strategies.

Later on Ahmedi, Hairul and Kabilan, (2013), showed that successful readers used more metacognitive reading strategies than the ones who were less successful readers, while Zhang and Seeph,(2013), demonstrated that there was a significant positive relationship between the use of metacognitive reading strategies and reading comprehension tasks.

Thereby, all the above-mentioned studies confirm the relationship between metacognitive strategy use and reading comprehension achievement.

In the same respect, Mina Rastegar, Ehsan Mehrabi Kermani, Massoud Khabir (2017), aimed at exploring the relationship between EFL students' metacognitive reading strategies use and their reading comprehension achievement. The researcher used both S.O.R.S and TOEFL tests as instruments to collect data. The results of that research stated that there was significant relationship between the metacognitive reading strategies and the students' achievements in reading comprehension tasks.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

In a nutshell, successful reading comprehension necessitates a repertoire of strategies that helps EFL readers to understand a text. Furthermore, the use of both bottom-up and top-down reading strategies alternately and interactively helps readers to achieve effective comprehension of a text (Sha Huang ,2018).

Therefore, instructors shall expose their students to a wide range of reading comprehension strategies and encourage them to use these strategies interactively so as to raise their metacognitive awareness and effective self-organization of strategies use. Simply, readers should be strategic in using certain strategies to process a text positively, monitor their comprehension and connect their background knowledge to what they read, are reading and will read in a text.

According to Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983; Van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983 and, Eskey,1988, readers should use both Bottom-up and Top-down strategies interactively to achieve efficient and effective second language reading mastery.

#### **I- THE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

##### **III-1-The Results of the Pilot Study**

The results of this pilot study were taken from the scores of the pre-test and post-test administered to the treatment group and their filling in of the Mokhtari and Sheorey's Survey of Reading Strategies(2002), instrument that measure their frequency use of reading strategies to understand a text.

III-2.1.The Pre-test and Post-test Scores

**Table 1 : Paired Samples Statistics for pre-test and post test**  
**Paired Samples Statistics**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test score	25,8589	9	19,11659	6,37220
	Post -test score	49,6500	9	14,01398	4,67133

Table 1 shows the comparison of means scores between the pre-test and post-test for the students of the treatment group. The mean result of the pre-test was 25,85, while the mean result of the post-test was 49,65. Therefore, this result shows that there is a statistical evidence for the comparison between the results of the pre-test scores and post-test scores.

**Table 2 : Paired Samples Correlations for pre-test and post test**  
**Paired Samples Correlations**

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pretest score & Post test score	9	,810	,008

In table 2, the paired samples correlation is very high (.810), thereby there is a statistically significant correlation between the results of the pre-test the post-test.

**Table 3 : Paired Samples Test for pre-test and post test**

		<b>Paired Samples Test</b>							
		<b>Paired Differences</b>							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-test score – Post-test score	-23,79111	11,29952	3,76651	-32,47669	-15,10553	-6,316	8	,000

The above table 3 refers to the comparison of the two means of the pre-test and post–test that the treatment group students took. This table shows also that the T-test result is (.000), and thereby there is a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the treatment group.

III-2.2.The Reading Strategies Frequency before and after treatment:

In the following table 4, the mean result of Reading Strategies Frequency before treatment was 2,78, while the mean result of Reading Strategies Frequency after treatment was 3,62. Therefore, this result shows that there is a statistical evidence for the comparison between the results of the Reading Strategies Frequency before and after treatment.

**Table 4 : Paired Samples Statistics for Reading Strategies Frequency**

		<b>Paired Samples Statistics</b>			
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Reading Strategies Frequency before treatment	2,7856	9	,59555	,19852
	Reading Strategies Frequency after treatment	3,6244	9	,36367	,12122

In addition, the below table 5 showed that the paired samples correlation was very high (.372), thereby there is a statistically significant correlation between the results of the Reading Strategies Frequency before and after treatment.

**Table 5 : Paired Samples Correlations for Reading Strategies Frequency**

		Paired Samples Correlations		
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Reading Strategies Frequency before treatment & Reading Strategies Frequency after treatment	9	,372	,325

Then, the table 6 showed the comparison of the two means of the Reading Strategies Frequency before and after treatment. This table shows also that the T-test result is (.002), and thereby there is a statistically significant difference between Reading Strategies Frequency before and after treatment concerning only the treatment group.

**Table 6 : Paired Samples Test for Reading Strategies Frequency**

		Paired Samples Test							
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Reading Strategies Frequency before treatment - Reading Strategies Frequency after treatment	-,83889	,57086	,19029	-1,27769	-,40008	-4,409	8	,002

*III-2.3. Paired Samples Test for both pre-test and post scores and Reading Strategies Frequency before and after treatment*

By looking at the results provided by table 7, there are two main results, concerning the students of the treatment group. First, there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the pre-test and post-test scores. Second, there is also a statistically significant difference between the means of Reading Strategies Frequency use before and after treatment.

**Table 7 : Paired Samples Test for both pre-test and post scores and Reading Strategies Frequency before and after treatment**

		Paired Samples Test							
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest score - Post test score	-23,79111	11,29952	3,76651	-32,47669	-15,10553	-6,316	8	,000
Pair 2	Reading Strategies Frequency before treatment - Reading Strategies Frequency after treatment	-,83889	,57086	,19029	-1,27769	-,40008	-4,409	8	,002

**III-3-The Discussion of the Results**

The first finding of the study referred to the fact that there was a positive significant relationship between the instruction of the reading strategies and reading comprehension achievement. Moreover, the second main result of this research was that the teaching of reading strategies enabled the readers to become more aware of these strategies and use the maximum they know to understand a text. Accordingly, this frequent use of reading strategies helped to better understand a text.

Keeping this in mind, it is worth noting that the pilot study has answered all the research questions and resulted in the mainly findings:

- 1- Readers who are aware of reading strategies, score highly in reading-comprehension tasks;
- 2- Readers who are taught various reading strategies are expected to get high scores in reading-comprehension tasks.
- 3- Readers' awareness of reading-comprehension strategies, instruction and practice help them to use more reading strategies than before.

Briefly, this pilot study has indicated that the instruction of the reading strategies shall help students to improve their reading comprehension competencies and effectiveness.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS**

As results, making the readers aware of reading-comprehension strategies, and benefitting from instruction and practice in this field help them to have high scores in reading-comprehension tasks, and using large number of reading strategies that help them to better understand reading comprehension texts. Furthermore, by becoming aware of these reading comprehension strategies, the treatment group students who revealed to me that they had encountered some phonological, semantic, and syntactic difficulties in reading before the treatment came to overcome these difficulties and become good readers.

Nevertheless, these results were not enough as they could change by the change of circumstances. Therefore, this pilot study should be completed and these results should be confirmed by creating a control group who shall benefit from reading comprehension classes without treatment. Furthermore, the main coming survey shall also take into consideration the students' English language proficiency, motivation to read, texts difficulty and the choice of the themes tackled, and also the time and setting factors.

#### **V. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The development of an efficient taxonomy of reading-comprehension strategies that could be taught efficiently shall help Moroccan students who are learning English so as to be autonomous successful readers. In this respect, the instruction of comprehension reading strategies shall be done through direct explanation, teacher modeling, guided practice and gradually application so that an EFL learner becomes a successful reader.

However, many studies, such as the one held by AD-Heisat; Syakirah; Krishnasamy and H.Issa (2009), showed that teachers do not use reading strategies in teaching reading, and they do not also encourage readers' interaction with texts. Thus, they recommend "to organize workshops for teachers to expose them to activities that can be used to teach reading strategies during reading lessons", (P:1). Furthermore, they also call the curriculum planners and textbooks writers to "include activities which utilize reading strategies in the materials used with students" (P:1). In other words, the instruction of reading-comprehension strategies should be the main objective for the teachers, curriculum designers, textbooks writers, academic researchers and decision-makers in the field of education so as to strengthen the students reading abilities to be effective and successful readers. In addition, textbooks writers should develop tasks that gradually help EFL learners to become successful and autonomous readers.

Furthermore, and due to the pandemic circumstances nowadays, computer science specialists should work with educators to develop some interactive software and computer applications that can help EFL learners to acquire the basic and the most efficient reading-comprehension strategies from a distance.

This shall be done, without forgetting the fact of sharing the results of this research with other languages departments for the purpose of developing a universal taxonomy of reading-comprehension strategies that shall be taught in all languages.

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EL MALIHI Anouar. "The effectiveness of awareness and instruction of reading comprehension strategies in EFL Context." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 26(07), 2021, pp. 58-65.