



## **Examining and Dealing with the Issue of Reading Strategy Use by Iranian EFL Learners**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigated the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' performance on a reading comprehension test and their pattern of using cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies. Analysis of the data obtained from 190 Iranian intermediate EFL learners (70 males and 120 females, aged 17-25) revealed a strong relationship between reading proficiency scores and learning strategy use. Also, there was a significant difference between scores of more successful reading test takers and the less successful ones, showing that more successful readers use more strategies, particularly metacognitive, than the lower achievers. Based on the findings, specific strategy building activities are presented, as guiding procedure for teachers, to help enhance reading performance on the part of less successful learners.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the emergence of cognitive psychology, there has been a shift of focus in language education from teaching to learning believing that learners are not only the receivers of information, but also they play a role in processing that information. Thus, learners' individual characteristics could enhance the information processing. Such a trend has created an increase of research aimed at investigating learner characteristics, including individual differences, and the relationship with language acquisition. As such, the issue of language learning strategies (LLSs) has received a lot of attention in the recent years. The term has been defined by many researchers. For instance, Chamot (2005, p. 12) defines such strategies as "procedures that facilitate a learning task". To her, strategies are most often conscious and goal driven relating to processing, storage, and retrieval, that is, to taking in messages from others, processing that information and then using it at the right time. Oxford and Ehrman (1995, p.8) define second LLSs as "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques . . . used by students to enhance their own learning." Some other definitions highlight the deliberate and conscious intention and action taken by strategy users; for instance, Cohen (1998) refers to language learning strategies as "the conscious thoughts and

behaviors used by learners with the explicit goal of improving their knowledge of the target language” (p. 68) and MacIntyre (1994, p. 190) defines LLSs as “the actions chosen by language students that are intended to facilitate acquisition and communication”. So, there is a general agreement that LLSs are conscious and intentional.

Two main categories of strategies are cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies are the mental activities, encompassing linguistic and world knowledge, which are used by individuals to accomplish a reading task. Some examples are: translation, prediction, questioning, summarizing, guessing, inference, etc. Metacognitive strategies, on the other hand, use the information available in the memory to have control over cognitive behavior (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). These strategies include “planning”, “monitoring” and “evaluating”. Planning strategies are those strategies taken by the learners while reviewing and regulating the task in order to decide what to do, how to do and when. By using “monitoring” strategies, individuals take deliberate action to monitor and verify their performance to do the task successfully. “Evaluating” strategies refer to those strategies which involve some criteria for how well they have completed, or are completing the task, and what needs to be done in order to have a better performance in future (Kluwe, 1982).

As for the significance of LLSs, Skehan (1989) considers LLSs as the most important factors in language learning. Also, Chamot (2004) states that they are moment by moment techniques that teachers use to solve learners' problems. Knowledge of the students' preferences of strategy use helps the teachers with the understanding of their pupils, and assists them in the process of language learning. Studies on LLSs have also shown that they are useful in the development of communicative competence, language proficiency and learner autonomy (Oxford, 1990). It is important to note that both teachers and learners are to get involved in the process by playing dual roles. These two roles work together in a way that while teachers raise learners' awareness about strategies and scaffold them, learners notice the gap between their current performance and the way it is supposed to be. So, the learning process gradually shifts away from “transmission” model, where the teacher has the whole control, towards “learning in partnership” which allows for learners' taking responsibility, too (Gass, 1988).

Drawing on the concept of LLSs, some scholars have particularly focused on the important role these strategies play in the process of reading comprehension. For example, Baker and Brown (1984) stated that the ability to read in a second language is considered to be an essential skill for learners and it can be the primary way for independent language learning. They assert that reading is a process of constructing meaning via the interaction with the text. From the perspective of Vygotsky's theory, as individuals read, they use their prior knowledge along with clues from the text to construct meaning. This means that they have purposes for their reading and adjust their reading to each purpose and for each reading task.

So, being in tune with the perspectives of social constructivism, conscious raising (CR) approach in language learning can serve as an effective tool for shifting toward learner centeredness, where learners are actively engaged in their own learning by first noticing and then self-monitoring; thus, promising success. It was in the lieu of such trends in learning a foreign language that we were motivated to conduct this study, hoping to somehow deal with the issue of dependent learners, as a result of the predominant approach of “transmission” across the TEFL curriculum in Iran.

Reading comprehension has been found to have close relationship with strategies, metacognitive strategies, in particular. This is mainly due to the nature of reading processing as a mental activity. Empirical studies in the context of L2 learning show a significant difference

between successful L2 readers and less successful ones in using both cognitive and metacognitive strategies in that the former are well aware of appropriate use of strategies to improve their reading comprehension (e.g. Anderson, 2000; Phakiti, 2003; Purpura, 1999; Yang, 2006). On the other hand, as cited in Phakiti (2003), less successful learners neither use metacognitive strategies, in general (Anderson, 2000), nor are they aware of their appropriate use in reading, in particular (Baker & Brown, 1984). Such learners also lack them for the purpose of monitoring (Pitts, 1983).

In the recent years, educators in the field of language acquisition have shown interest in the issue of strategy use by test takers. One of the related studies is the quantitative study conducted by Purpura (1999) who investigated the relationship between 1382 L2 test-takers' use of cognitive and metacognitive strategy and their performance. Before taking a standard language proficiency test, the subjects answered an 80-item cognitive and metacognitive strategy questionnaire. The study found a significant direct and positive relationship between cognitive strategy use and the subjects' performance on the test while the relationship of metacognitive strategy use and test performance was indirect. In addition, it was found that there was a difference between the way successful and less successful test takers used strategies. For example, metacognitive strategies were used by successful test takers for comprehension while less successful ones used them for retrieving information.

Another related study is Phakiti (2003) that investigated the relationship between cognitive and metacognitive strategies and reading performance, as used by 384 Thai test takers. In this study, he used a cognitive and metacognitive questionnaire, retrospective interviews and an EFL achievement test. He found a positive relationship of cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies to reading performance indicating that cognitive and metacognitive strategies could explain variation on the language test performance. It was found that these strategies differed quantitatively and qualitatively across the achievement groups.

In another study, Riazi and Rahimi (2005) aimed to investigate how much Iranian EFL learners are strategy users. The result showed that Iranian EFL learners were medium strategy users and cognitive and metacognitive categories were used at high frequency. Memory and social strategies were used the least frequently and unlike most other studies, affective strategies were among the most frequently used strategies. The study did not find any significant difference between affective, compensation, and cognitive strategies. They attribute the findings to cultural background and the national originality of the students.

There are also some studies intending to investigate the effectiveness of reading strategies. As an example, Khaki (2014) focused on the effectiveness of cognitive strategies of "summarizing" and "student-generated questions" on Iranian EFL learners' performance in reading comprehension. She found that strategic readers, especially those who apply the strategy of "summarizing" gain better scores on reading comprehension test as this strategy involves looking for the main idea which is so crucial in comprehension.

It is believed that reading comprehension plays an important role in academic life of language learners. As pointed out by Nunan (2004), reading comprehension is considered an intellectual and interactive process as it involves not only the reader's linguistic competence, but also whatever knowledge they have of the real world. With regard to Iranian EFL context, in spite of the good attention the curriculum has paid to reading comprehension, it is surprising why our learners' level of reading proficiency falls behind. One assumption may lie in the fact that they are unaware of the existence and application of LLSs. So, one primary measurement to take is to identify those strategies and inform the readers. Accordingly, the application of LLSs by EFL

learners, particularly EFL test takers may enhance their ability to comprehend better; thus, leading to achieving success and higher level of proficiency.

There are numerous studies that have scrutinized the issue by quantitatively and qualitatively identifying the nature of LLSs used by EFL learners and the relationship with different aspects of language proficiency. However, there are only a few studies that deal with the problem of EFL readers' failing to use effective strategies. As informed by literature and following Dickinson (1987), we hypothesize that strategic readers who have learned how to develop autonomy and independency in the process of learning are more successful readers. To this end, the present paper aims at taking some steps forward to guiding teachers how to deal with the problem by practically providing them with some efficient strategy building activities, suggesting how to release responsibility as they move along the reading lesson.

Accordingly, this study tries to answer the following questions:

- What is the structure pattern of Iranian EFL learners' use of learning strategies while taking a reading comprehension test?
- What is the relationship among Iranian EFL test takers' reading comprehension performance, cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

The participants in this study consist of 190 Iranian EFL intermediate learners (70 males and 120 females), ranging in age from 17 to 25 years old. Their English proficiency level was intermediate. They were purposefully selected from some private language institutes in Mashhad, north east of Iran. They entered the study based on the placement criterion administered by those institutes. The participants' raw scores on reading test were used as criteria to stratify the participants into more successful and less successful readers. Those who obtained the half top scores ( $N = 63$ ) were identified as more successful achievers while the other half who gained the lower scores entered the study as less successful ( $N = 127$ ).

### **Instrument**

This study used a modified version of Phakiti's (2003) questionnaire which has been developed in an attempt to measure the cognitive and metacognitive strategy use as adjusted for reading tests. In order to test it for validity, two academic experts were asked to review the questionnaire in order to determine which strategy category the items fell in. The experts came up with 96% and 94% of agreement about categorization; thus, validating the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha was used to test the level of internal consistency (reliability) of the items within the questionnaire. In other words, Cronbach's alfa coefficient was used to determine whether all the items of the questionnaire measure the same underlying construct with the sample of this study. The results showed a high level of coefficient ( $\alpha = 0.852$ ), indicating desirable internal consistency for the present sample while its reliability value originally used by Phakiti (2003) has been reported as  $\alpha = 0.88$ .

As stated by Phakiti (2003), this questionnaire helps researchers to estimate how much learners use strategies in the process of reading comprehension. It takes approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete it. Table 1 presents a summary of the content items.

**Table 1.** Taxonomy of Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies (Adopted from Phakiti)

Processing	Subscale	N0. of items	Items
1. Cognitive strategies	Comprehending	4	7, 8, 9, 10
	Memory	4	11, 12, 13, 15
	Retrieval	5	14, 16, 17, 18, 19
	Subtotal	13	
2. Metacognitive strategies	Planning	6	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
	Monitoring	5	20, 21, 24, 29, 30
	Evaluating	6	22, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28
	Subtotal	17	
	Total	30	

Also a reading comprehension test was used in this study which was adopted from “The academic reading module of IELTS” consisting of three authentic passages with an approximate length of 2000 to 2750 words. There are 40 questions in different forms including multiple-choice items, short-answer, sentence completion, summary, diagram or flow chart, table completion, identification of the writer's claims, yes/no questions, classification, and matching lists or phrases. The overall time for completing the reading section is one hour (UCLES, 2000, as cited in Sadeghi, 2010). The test was checked for the rate of internal consistency reliability by Cronbach’s alfa. The correlation of .865 showed desirable internal consistency for the present sample.

## Procedure

First, the participants were requested to sign a statement of consent. Then, a reading proficiency test was administered. The participants’ scores on the reading test was also used to determine the level of homogeneity among the study subjects as well as their level of success to stratify the participants into more successful and less successful readers. Next, the questionnaire was handed out to the participants who were instructed to rate the items in the questionnaire in order to identify their structure of learning strategy use while they were taking the test. Care was taken to make sure everything was clear for the participants. It should be noted here that there was no interval between taking the test and completing the questionnaire since, as stated by Phakiti (2003), the idea was to investigate test takers’ use of strategies at the same time that they were taking the reading test, assuming that strategy use would have a more direct relationship with specific linguistic competence like reading comprehension.

## Data analysis

All the raw data were analyzed by using SPSS, Version 16.0. The following statistical operations were carried out for quantitative analysis:

- 1) Descriptive statistics, including mean percentage, standard deviation, minimum, maximum and frequency.
- 2) Pearson Correlation Coefficient in order to find out the correlation between the scores obtained by the learners on the reading comprehension test and the data gathered from their responses to different categories of learning strategies, as identified in Phakiti's (2003) questionnaire.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To have a clear picture about the overall rate of using each type of the strategies, either cognitive or metacognitive, Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics.

**Table 2.** Overall Strategy Results from the Questionnaire (N = 190)

Strategy	Cognitive			Metacognitive		
	Comprehension	Memory	Retrieval	Planning	Monitoring	Evaluating
Descriptive						
Mean	60.86	56.73	59.60	56.48	64.73	62.19
percentage						
SD	19.77	16.68	16.27	17.12	21.16	16.33
Total mean	59.06			61.13		

As the results of the descriptive statistics indicate, the participants of this study were among medium strategy users. They used metacognitive strategy ( $M = 61.13$ ) more than cognitive ones ( $M = 59.06$ ), partially providing an answer to research question 1.

In a similar study carried out by Riazi and Rahimi (2005), they, too, found that Iranian EFL learners were medium strategy users and cognitive and metacognitive categories were used at high frequency. So, it can be concluded that the participants of the current study are among "Strategic learners" who, as Chamot (2004) once put, "have metacognitive knowledge about their own thinking and learning approaches, a good understanding of what a task entails, and the ability to orchestrate the strategies that best meet both the task demands and their own learning strengths" (p. 14).

The results of data analyses in terms of strategy use and reading comprehension performance by success groups are tabulated in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Overall Strategy Use and Reading Proficiency by Success Level

Overall descriptive statistics		Mean percentage	SD
Variables			
Cognitive and metacognitive strategies	More Successful	92.61	20.00
	Less Successful	88.94	19.04
Cognitive strategy	More Successful	39.36	9.39
	Less Successful	37.95	8.73
Metacognitive strategy	More Successful	53.25	12.18
	Less Successful	50.99	11.57
Reading test	More Successful	52.38	23.39
	Less Successful	41.65	19.79

A comparison of the descriptive statistics obtained from data analysis for both more successful and less successful participants reveals that those who did better on the reading test used more strategies (N = 63; mean percentage = 92.61) while taking the reading comprehension test, as compared to the less successful ones (N = 127, and mean percentage of 88.94).

Also, participants' descriptive statistics were calculated in terms of each strategy. The information is tabulated in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Individual Strategy Use by Success Level

Strategies	Groups	Mean percentage	Std. Deviation	Std. Error mean
Comprehending	More successful	61.42	22.16	2.79
	Less successful	60.59	18.56	1.64
Retrieval	More successful	60.63	16.00	2.01
	Less successful	59.08	16.44	1.45
Memory	More successful	59.60	15.74	1.98
	Less successful	55.31	17.01	1.51
Planning	More successful	56.13	18.12	2.28
	Less successful	56.64	16.67	1.47
Monitoring	More successful	66.47	24.02	3.02
	Less successful	63.93	19.63	1.74
Evaluating	More successful	66.50	17.39	2.19

Less successful	60.05	15.41	1.36
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As Table 4 illustrates, each success group was analyzed based on three subcategories of strategies they used. The findings indicate their pattern of strategy use, providing an answer to the first research question of this study. Both success groups used the same pattern of cognitive strategies; i.e. the most frequently used cognitive strategy, regardless of reading proficiency level, was comprehending, followed by retrieval and last by memory. As for metacognitive strategy use, however, the patterns were different in that more successful group tended to use evaluating strategies the most frequently; monitoring and planning were respectively the second and the third frequently used metacognitive strategies used by them, whereas less successful readers used monitoring more frequently than evaluating. Interestingly, planning was the least frequently used metacognitive strategy for them, as well.

To fully answer the second research question, the relationship between participants' scores on reading test and overall strategy use was investigated using Pearson Correlation Coefficient. Table 5 presents the results.

**Table 5.** Correlation Coefficient Between Reading Performance and Overall Strategy Use

		Cognitive	Metacognitive	Reading scores
Cognitive	Pearson Correlation	1	.740**	.342**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	190	190	190
Metacognitive	Pearson Correlation	.740**	1	.362**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	190	190	190
Reading Scores	Pearson Correlation	.342**	.362**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	190	190	190

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As expected, the relationship between cognitive and metacognitive strategies was high ( $r = 0.740$ ) (Cohen, 1998, p. 79) which supports a strong positive relation between these two constrains. The table also presents a positive and moderate relationship of cognitive strategies and

metacognitive strategies to the reading test performance ( $r = 0.342$  and  $0.362$ , respectively;  $p < 0.01$ ), implying that the larger scores on reading test, the more usage of strategies. However, the reason why this relationship is not very high can be attributed to the degree of difficulty the test takers were experiencing.

As for the relationship between reading performance and each one of the strategies, Table 6 presents the Correlation Coefficient.

**Table 6.** Correlation Between Participants' Scores on Reading Proficiency Test and the Use of Each of the Six Categories of Strategy (N = 190)

Variable		Reading scores	Evaluating	Monitoring	Planning	Retrieval	Memory	Comprehension
Reading scores	Pearson Correlation	1	0.34**	0.23**	0.27**	0.29**	0.15*	0.34**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.034	0.00

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

As far as the use of each individual strategy is concerned, as illustrated in the table, the relationship between participants' scores on reading proficiency test and the use of each of the six categories of strategy (comprehending, memory, retrieval, planning, monitoring, evaluating) is significant at  $p < 0.05$ . As the table illustrates, each one of the strategies used by the participants, whether cognitive or metacognitive, shows positive direct relationship with their reading test scores. However, the strength of such value differs from one strategy use to another. For instance, both comprehending ( $r = 0.34$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and evaluating ( $r = 0.34$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) reveal the largest size, suggesting a medium relationship while memory ( $r = 0.15$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) shows to have the smallest size of relationship with reading proficiency (Cohen, 1988; pp. 79-81).

In sum, the results of the present study showed that Iranian EFL learners use strategies, especially metacognitive strategies, while taking a reading test which confirms other findings (e.g. Chamot, 2004; Phakiti, 2003; Purpura, 1999). This might be due to the informed choice employed by the subjects of the study who are supposedly among students who have learned to draw on their higher level of mental faculty. Such finding may testify to the fact that the participants of this study come from the educational background that calls for using metacognitive faculties to better understand and solve problems. As most of the Iranian school subjects are based on theoretical knowledge rather than applied knowledge, students are required to develop a good sense of understanding and develop their metacognitive awareness in order to deal with a lot of theoretical knowledge during their academic life. More use of metacognitive strategies rather than cognitive strategies may account for having to deal with tasks requiring higher levels of thinking, such as monitoring. EFL learners need to develop a sense of "thinking about thinking" when they encounter problems of academic nature (e.g. reading comprehension).

These results are in line with Phakiti's (2003) findings. He, too, pointed out that the proficient readers used more strategies than the non-proficient readers. Further, the findings of the present study are congruent with his findings in that the highly successful test-takers reported significantly higher metacognitive strategy use than the unsuccessful test takers.

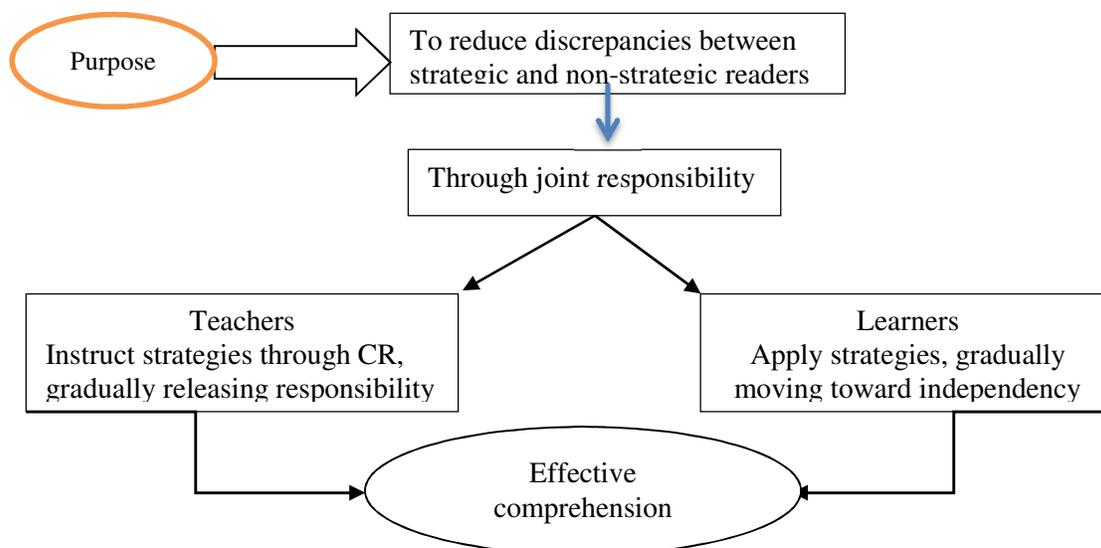
## CONCLUSION

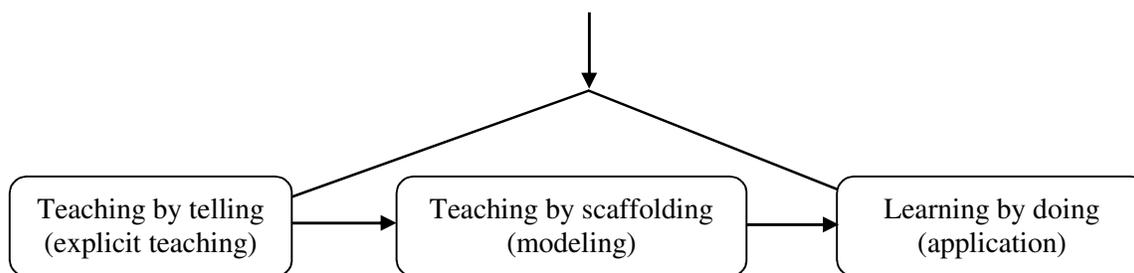
In sum, the findings of the study show that Iranian EFL learners use more of metacognitive strategies than cognitive strategies while taking a reading test. In addition, according to the present findings, the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies had a positive relationship to the reading test performance. Also, there was a significant difference in reading performance between more successful test takers and the less successful ones in terms of strategy use, indicating that more successful readers use more strategies than less successful ones.

It can be concluded, then, that reading comprehension, as an active mental activity demands a high level of thinking which can be satisfied by the use of metacognitive strategies as they supposedly facilitate learning through monitoring, evaluating and planning their learning processes.

### Implications

Thus, having found that strategy users are more successful EFL reading comprehension test takers, we may minimize the discrepancies by strategy instruction. There is a general agreement that the knowledge of what particular strategy is useful (awareness) precedes its routine use (application). Such an approach, inspired by CR, suggests that educators integrate teaching strategies into their teaching syllabus in an attempt to enhance reading comprehension achievement. However, knowing that one cannot expect the whole instruction (input) lead to application (intake), it is more useful to take the approach of conducting lessons on the basis of “gradual release of responsibility” so that the students themselves are involved, too. Accordingly, teachers change roles and lower their degree of control as the lesson proceeds, giving more opportunity to their students to take the responsibility. So, as once put by Dickinson (1987), a part of class time should be allotted to checking on their progress as they employ those strategies rather than just telling them what to do. In respect to this, this study presents a summary of the approach in Figure 1.





**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework for Helping Non-strategic Readers

The results of the present study may provide EFL teachers with some valuable information. One of the implications of this study can be drawn from the finding that reading scores and strategies have significantly positive relation. Students who had greater scores on reading used more strategies than the ones who had the least. Thus, teaching the students how to use the strategies while reading should be considered. For instance, being aware of their students' preferences in terms of strategy use, EFL teachers may develop better understanding of how to deal with potential difficulties their students face in reading comprehension. They may deal with such problematic situations by touching upon the strategies of their students' preference to make the task easier for them. For example, knowing that some of the variance in the students' scores on reading proficiency tests can be accounted for by the degree to which they engage in using particular strategies, the teacher can benefit by including those strategies in the required assignments. Teachers can also benefit from such information, especially about their students' use of metacognitive strategies, by raising their students' conscious about such particularities and how they may benefit from such individual differences.

More specifically, based on the model presented in Figure 1, the teacher can start the lesson by explicitly drawing his/her students' attention to what strategies are at work and how they can be employed to better understand the reading text. Doing so, the teacher actually raises the students' metacognitive awareness about strategic reading. Then, the students can gradually have control over their learning as the teacher provides them with necessary scaffold and feedback until they can independently employ the strategies.

Thus, having some insights into the learner's individual differences like their interest, background knowledge, strategies known and personal characteristics, teachers can well offer support to their students helping them to be more successful in reading comprehension by integrating some strategy building activities into the course. A suggested matrix for reading comprehension sessions follows.

### **Pre-reading stage**

*Teacher's role (releasing responsibility as the lesson proceeds):* Instructor-explains and demonstrates the strategies needed (CR); telling them: "these are the strategies that can help you with such and such tasks."

*Student's role (moving from low to high responsibility):* Active listener-actively participates by attending to the instructions.

*Activities:*

- Using students' background knowledge/brainstorming

- Explicitly explaining the references needed for building their background knowledge
- Explaining different elements of the text, like tables, pictures, graphs, headings, bold prints and telling them how they can use such organizing tools
- Teaching the most important and difficult vocabulary and structure explicitly, focusing on form-function relations

### **During-reading stage**

*Teacher's role:* Mediator/model and guide-provides scaffolds and feedbacks as s/he checks upon (monitors) students' progress; eliciting "what may be a better way for you to approach this task?"

*Student's role:* Self-reflector and doer-tries to practice and apply the strategies, appealing help as need arises

*Activities:*

- Finding relations between the organizing tools and the topic/content
- Providing an outline or grid of the most important information to be completed by the students as they proceed reading
- Getting students guess meaning from the context by providing clues
- Checking students' understanding by asking graded comprehension questions (starting with "display" and moving to "higher-thinking" questions; putting back in order the scrambled segments of the text)
- Asking them to summarize the text by including the most important/general information and leaving out the details

### **Post-reading stage**

*Teacher's role:* Facilitator/supporter-encourages as needed

*Student's role:* Independent strategic reader-reads and approaches the comprehension tasks on their own

*Activities:*

- Previewing the text autonomously via organizing tools
- Employing strategies such as, skimming, scanning, summarizing the text, distinguishing facts from opinions, distinguishing main ideas from specific information, following the gist and relating the contents, discussing and analyzing the points etc.

Other pedagogical recommendations for language teachers can be suggested, too. First and foremost, teachers may select texts for different levels of instruction so that they accommodate to a variety of reading strategies; thus, meeting individual learner's needs. Moreover, besides encouraging students to make more use of reading strategies, language teachers should include different types of texts in reading courses, requiring the use of variety of strategies, rather than using a single text type.

### **Suggestions**

Although the results of this study were found to be in line with some other studies, such as Phakiti (2003) and Purpura (1999), the researchers are well aware of the fact that researching on human minds is rather difficult and generalizing such findings warrants extra caution. In other words, we need to consider the fact that strategies may sometimes be unobservable due to the factors of "consciousness", "automaticity", "task difficulty", and "proficiency" (Purpura, 1999). So, we do not claim that the data collected from this study reflect comprehensive insight into

strategy use by EFL test takers. Nevertheless, one sure way to eliminate such limitations may be adopting a Mixed Methods Research technique with larger sample size to determine more confidently if a true correlation exists between what the participants select from a questionnaire and what they report in an interview, for example. Besides, further studies are needed to compensate for the limitations of this study and investigate the same problem on larger sample sizes. Moreover, some other variables can be considered for further research, such as the participants' different levels of proficiency or different social background, and their competency in other language skills, such as writing and oral proficiency. Additionally, test takers' other individual differences like age, gender, motivation and attitudes, intelligence, thinking styles, and learning styles as well as their level of affect like stress, anxiety and their worries should be further considered in relation to strategy use.

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