

STRATEGIES USED WHEN READING CONTEMPORARY AND  
SHAKESPEAREAN POETRIES BY ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE STUDENTS

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*To:*

*My Beloved Parents,*

with all my affection, for their never ending support and prayers,  
which acted as a catalyst throughout my life.

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Shirin Shafiei Ebrahimi,

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## ABSTRACT

Poetry, more than any other genre draws attentions of students and teachers. However, both students and teachers face challenges in reading and understanding poetry. Poetry for teaching English is widely adopted but understanding poetry is problematic. Reading strategies can address the problem. Therefore, this study investigated the strategies that students perceived they use, the actual strategies used and identified the different strategies that they used when they read Contemporary and Shakespearean poetries. In this research, the most common strategies that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) post-graduate students perceived they used, in comparison to what is actually used while they read poetry in English were studied. This study adopted the mixed method design which considers quantitative and qualitative data in the analysis. The instruments for data collection included a questionnaire (*Survey of Poetry Reading Strategies*) to identify the perceived strategies, and Think-aloud protocols to identify the actual strategies used while reading Contemporary and Shakespearean poetries. The participants were selected based on convenience random sampling. Sixty participants took part in the quantitative data collection and ten of them were purposely selected for qualitative data collection. Results from the questionnaire showed use of Problem solving strategies such as *re-reading* was perceived to be used more often than Global and Support strategies such as *analysing and evaluating*. In addition, results from the protocol showed that Global strategies were used more than the Support and Problem solving strategies. Analysis of the two types of poetry used in the study showed that readers did not use different strategies in reading them. As a conclusion, the results from the qualitative data showed that Global strategies are generally used for reading poetry. It is recommended that future research examines these strategies for reading of poetry from different era.

## ABSTRAK

Puisi, selain dari genre yang lain lebih menarik perhatian pelajar dan guru. Namun demikian, kedua-dua pelajar dan guru berhadapan dengan cabaran untuk membaca dan memahami puisi. Walaupun penggunaan puisi dalam pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris amatlah meluas, pemahaman puisi merupakan satu cabaran. Oleh itu, kajian ini mengkaji strategi yang pelajar rasa mereka gunakan, strategi yang pelajar benar-benar gunakan, dan perbezaan strategi yang digunakan antara puisi Kontemporari dan Shakespeare. Kajian ini mengkaji strategi pembacaan yang digunakan oleh pelajar pasca siswazah Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Asing ketika membaca puisi. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kaedah campuran yang mengambil data dari kuantitatif dan kualitatif untuk dianalisis. Instrumen yang digunakan untuk mengumpul data termasuk soal selidik (*Survey of Poetry Reading Strategies*) untuk mengenal pasti strategi yang digunakan dan protokol melisani pemikiran untuk mengenal pasti strategi sebenar yang digunakan semasa membaca puisi Kontemporari dan Shakespeare. Peserta kajian ini dipilih melalui persampelan rawak mudah. Enam puluh peserta mengambil bahagian dalam pengumpulan data kuantitatif dengan menjawab soal selidik, manakala 10 daripadanya dipilih untuk melaksanakan data kualitatif. Dapatan dari soal selidik menunjukkan bahawa strategi Penyelesaian-masalah seperti strategi pembacaan semula lebih digunakan daripada strategi Global dan Sokongan iaitu menganalisis dan menilai. Sebaliknya, dapatan dari kaedah protokol menunjukkan strategi Global lebih digunakan dari strategi Sokongan dan strategi Penyelesaian-masalah. Analisis daripada dua jenis puisi yang digunakan dalam kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pembaca tidak menggunakan strategi yang berbeza dalam pembacaan mereka. Kesimpulannya, dapatan daripada data kualitatif menunjukkan bahawa strategi Global lebih banyak digunakan dalam pembacaan puisi. Adalah disyorkan agar kajian seterusnya dapat mengkaji strategi ini untuk pembacaan puisi dari era yang berbeza.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Con	-	Contemporary
EFL	-	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	-	English as a Second Language
FL	-	Foreign Language
GLOB	-	Global strategies
L1	-	First Language
L2	-	Second Language
MARSI	-	Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory
PROB	-	Problem solving strategies
Shak	-	Shakespearean
SORS	-	Survey Of Reading Strategies
SPRS	-	Survey of Poetry Reading Strategies
SUP	-	Support strategies
TESL	-	Teaching English as a Second Language
UTM	-	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia



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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

In today's post-modern era, educationists mainly emphasise on improving reading and consequently reading strategies since recent reading strategy research made the attitude change from a focus on the reading product, or reading comprehension scores (Zare, 2013), to reading process or identifying the strategies that readers use while reading (Larijani et al., 2015).

In this regard, it is also important to know how poetry as a marginalised genre in English language classes can help in language learning and teaching; and how poetry can be taught more effectively in language classes. This study attempts to examine the significant role played by poetry to propose a more effective way of poetry teaching and reading by identifying the main strategies that readers use in their reading process since reading strategies are considered an inevitable part among all reading related tasks and activities (Zare and Mobarakeh, 2011). For this study, poetry is the subject of interest as it is very much different in essence with any other

texts.

Poetry is a great genre to learn about for many reasons. Poetry allows the reader to express emotions and feelings in such a way that no other genre does. It gives enough freedom to the poets to express as little or as much as they wish. Readers are also able to enjoy choosing topics that are of importance to them and their lives; therefore, readers try to connect poetry to the real world. It is an important genre to teach because poetry can be a wonderful source of enhancing reading and analytical skills. Students will learn to pay close attention to text, since meaning in poetry can often be hidden in the grammar and word choice that the poet used. The ultimate goal for this study is that the readers are able to recognize poetry, understand its purpose, and use their acquired knowledge in their lives.

Poetry provides the reader with a sense of aesthetic pleasure, it brightens senses, connects us with ourselves and other people, and makes us think synthetically because of the concise language that is used in making it, such a language makes poetry to convey a lot in a short form. That is why understanding poetry is not as easy as understanding other literary genres as the words in poetry have both denotative and connotative meanings. These words are informative as well as expressive to convey the poet's tone and attitude.

Robert Frost, the famous American twentieth century poet defined poetry as “the kind of thing poets write.” On the other hand, Louis Armstrong , another well-known American twentieth century poet wrote “Man, if you gotta ask, you’ll never know.” Therefore, there is no clear cut definition for the terms of poem and poetry since it is the language of experience (Thorne and Reinhardt, 2008); in this regard, the words have a sense that their meanings can be understood through the feelings and senses that the reader get while reading. However for this study, the word *poem* is used for one piece of literary work which is autonomously meaningful by itself using

the elevated language to express a highly imaginative subject. Whereas *poetry* is the general term for the whole genre of rhythmical and metrical forms or verses.

Brook (1999) states that reading poetry helps discover profound truths that we do not realize we knew. Poetry creates feelings and thoughts about complex issues. It is not only a means for expression, but also a way of knowing and viewing matters through a new perspective. Poetry illuminates, clarifies and states what is being said. It also intends to persuade, influence the attitude of the reader, move the emotions of the reader and in the end strive to alter convictions or points of view. The language use of poetry helps in viewing the world with new eyes. That is why poetry readers become skilful in language usage. They get an understanding of the way words hold complex and subtle meanings and experience the pleasure in stitching words together. The language skills they learn helps them a lot not only in area of literature reading but also in life.

For this study, poetry is the subject of interest as it is very much different in essence with any other texts. In poetry, as is mentioned in Zainal (2002), the focus is more on the linguistic features rather than content; the connotative meaning is bolder than the denotative one; several meanings can be taken from a simple word or phrase rather than only a single meaning; the internal structures are more important than the external structures; and there is a non-linear relationship between the elements of a poem than a linear relationship. Therefore, studying poetry can be intriguing.

The English reading instruction in Iran is based on the traditional approach. In Iran, English is taught as a foreign language beginning in high school and continues to the university level generally for three hours per week. English is one of the very influential subjects at school time at all levels.

The content of the EFL textbooks and Ministry of Education, Iran, guidelines reveals that EFL studies in Iran is based on the students' future need to read in English or translate English texts to Persian. Reading and translation are also the most emphasized skills at EFL studies at the university where the students study English for academic purposes (EAP). Accordingly, in Iranian system, the orientation tends to a combination of grammar-translation and audiolingual methods (Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh, 2004).

The curriculum in Iran is mainly top-down and product-oriented, directed by the Ministry of Education through monitoring “educational groups” at various organizational levels. There is not much exposure to English out of the class for Iranian EFL students as Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh (2004) explain that rare English programs are on social media in Iran but recently several factors like advancements in technology, rapid increasing use of the Internet and satellite, and a fast growth of interest in going to private language institutes affected people to learn English language.

In Iran, English teachers use reading strategies which usually include decoding of words with great emphasis on “correct” reading, and vocabulary definitions. The texts include a collection of passages from various contemporary and old authors and poets. Teachers emphasize on correct reading and use one of the students for demonstration. After such a long and tedious procedure, there are some comprehension questions that are answered by few students and are finalized by the teacher's 'correct' response. Iranian students are trained in such an educational system in which English class is mainly a reading course, therefore they are not as acquainted as the English as a first language readers to the reading strategies.

It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the reasons of such school-based practices; however, the important relevant issue to this study is to know how readers read literary texts, especially poetry. Therefore, the major objective of this

research is to explore the poetry reading processes.

As the researcher was an English lecturer at a university, it is natural that she becomes enthusiastic on the theories of teaching reading and knowing how to read for a life-long learning. In other words, she would like to understand the factors leading to more poetry understanding of Iranian postgraduate students, in particular and all EFL learners in general. During her teaching experiences in Iran, she observed her students' learning processes and outcomes. She assumed that several factors would lead to success or failure in their academic work. For example, motivation could be an influential factor in students' poetry understanding. Other factors would be students' aptitude, their innate ability, and their academic background. The question in her mind was whether there are other variables that could contribute to the learners' achievement; and if so, what they are.

The strategies that the learners use in reading the materials play a central role in their learning experiences and are a firm determinant of academic success. Concurrently, studies have shown a correlation between learners' beliefs about language learning and their choice of strategies (Hosenfeld, 2002). However, understanding learner beliefs about language learning is significant to understand strategies and plan appropriate instructions.

Although there have been a lot of studies on reading strategies in EFL/ESL context, only a few referred to the issue of reading strategies of poetry in a foreign/second language. The other issue is that as Mokhtari and Sheorey (2008) explain, the number of reading strategies that are used in second or foreign reading is more than that in L1, therefore this gap in the literature identified the research on this topic to gain an understanding of Iranian university students' reading poetry and their reading strategies.

This research investigates the strategies employed by EFL English postgraduate students while reading English poetries since learners employ these strategies to decide how to read more effectively. This study aims at examining the thinking processes. This research is one of the first few studies that, by using think-aloud method aims to recognize the reading strategies of poetic texts. The significance of the study is that there is not much research on reading strategies of poetry (Ebrahimi, 2011) but by this study, the practitioners and researchers are helped to design more appropriate poetry reading programs for the students.

The literature that the researcher reviewed, did not deal directly with reading comprehension and reading strategies of poetry. The reason can be the difficulty of reading literature and poetic texts in comparison to non-literary texts (Ebrahimi and Zainal, 2015). Using her experience as an English lecturer, the researcher knew that it is hard for Persian-native speakers to read English poetic texts (Sadeghi and Zarei; 2013). The researcher wishes that this study be useful for the English literature teachers in assisting the students to understand L2 poetry reading and provide teachers and students with knowledge in EFL students' thinking processes to improve their understanding. Moreover, at the end, this research offers solutions for second and foreign language teaching, literature teachers, and students.

The imposing breadth of the subject of this thesis is due to the researcher's huge interest in teaching English literature; however, the thesis itself is not on poetries but on the strategies that the readers employ while reading poetry. The reflections in this thesis starts from poetry at many angles, while at other points they come back to the nature of reading, especially literature reading with the aim of delineating and testing poetry. Although the main interest in this thesis is on poetries, reading of literary texts are discussed at some points of the work. Therefore, literary criticism of poetry might not always be the central point of the present thesis, but the main concern is the reading strategies of such pieces of aesthetic art.

Poetries like any other type of texts, are made of words. Poetry has the reputation of an esoteric art, but an effect on the constructedness of poetries is to

make them more accessible but not necessarily easy. Thorne and Reinhardt (2008) says that the function of poetry is to practice the mysterious power of language. This makes this belief in the poetry readers that they might not fully understand a poem, the meaning that it targets to communicate, and the language the poet uses to communicate the meaning. Therefore, comprehension seems difficult because of the richness of the language the poet uses. As a result, the readers might have various invention of meanings. This is the reason that makes reading of poetry different from the reading of any other kind of texts, and therefore, reading poetry can be considered as an art. In such an aesthetic triad of poet, poem, and reader, this thesis mainly follows the focus on the role of the readers and the strategies that the readers use in reading poetry, which are the main issues in the background of this study.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

There are several areas that need to be discussed for the background of this study including teaching poetry and reading strategies. Having a good command of English is considered a significant tool to communicate with others in today's global society. With such a demand for English language competence, the population of those learning English as a second/foreign language has increased. Those learning English as a second/foreign language are a diverse group including those from non-English speaking societies, or those from other countries who go to a university in an English speaking country. These English language learners present challenges to those charged with helping them master the English language due to limited English proficiency and different social and cultural contexts.

Iran is one of these societies where English as a foreign language is taught during high school for seven years for three hours a week. Although in Iran English courses are based mainly on reading, without much attention to other skills, the EFL learners still encounter serious problems with reading (Sadeghi and Zarei; 2013).



Past reading experiences affects EFL students' English reading and understanding. Research show that English instruction in Iran mainly consists of the following characteristics: it is test oriented, it is grammar and vocabulary based, and it is teacher centred; for example, most EFL teachers dedicate the time of the class mainly to linguistic knowledge, translation and grammatical analysis (Karbalaee, 2010). Accordingly, this kind of word to word translation and sentence to sentence analysis influenced EFL students' reading performance and behaviours. In these classes there is no involvement of deep meaning construction or critical thinking. That is the reason that most EFL students find English reading a time consuming task which needs a huge effort to read a text and this is more difficult once that it arrives to literary texts especially poetry which has connotative meanings besides its denotative meanings. Since such a struggle is harsh for many EFL students, especially with the increasing amount of reading content and vocabulary as well as increasingly complicated sentence structures in their higher levels of education, they loose their interest in English reading in general and English poetry reading in particular.

Studies reveal that using reading strategies leads to a great success in EFL reading comprehension. Research shows that although many attention has been absorbed to usefulness and teachability of reading strategies and its effectiveness on the students' performance (Zhang, 2008), reading strategy instruction and usage is not popular in Iranian educational system; therefore, the present study focuses on research in reading strategies as the basic element that improves comprehension of poetries.

In Iranian EFL context, reading is the most important way to learn English. Iranian students are not exposed to English language, the common teaching method is grammar-based, and the students do not have much interaction with native English speakers and teachers. University students, in Iran, have to read a lot of academic English texts to master their field. However, many students enter the university without being prepared in terms of English reading demands. Successful readers are

those learners who consciously use reading strategies at the right time for a better reading comprehension experience. In order to have strategic readers, it is essential to develop their reading strategies which have a very significant positive relationship with reading ability and learners' academic achievement (Ahmadi and Gilakjani, 2012; Mokhtari and Sheorey, 2002).

Strategic learning and reading are growing topics in Iran and recently many researchers tend to study on these areas which result in a huge interesting findings regarding EFL learning in Iran. However, the Iranian community who live abroad are of the groups of English learners as well who did not study on them so far. As the population of this study is the Iranian postgraduate students who had studied English Literature in their undergraduate studies in Iran and are busy doing their postgraduate in English major in Malaysia, here we concentrate on their literature background. In all branches of English major in Iran (such as English Literature, translation, or English teaching), students have to pass a number of compulsory literature courses including English poetry along their main courses. Therefore, all English graduates are more or less familiar with the literary concepts and English literary works, especially English poetry.

On the other hand, as Persian (Iranians' mother tongue) is known as a poetic and melodious language itself, Iranians tend to read and know more poetries of other languages. Literature and poetry which dated back to several thousand years, are the most common literate materials used in present Iran. Students of English language in Iran are among the most lucky undergraduates in this regard, as they have more chances during their academic studies to read poetry which is of most Iranians' taste. Studying poetry is one of the main courses that these students have to take to know more about poets like Shakespeare or contemporary poets.

As reading is so important in academic success, it is problematic for the increasing number of students whose first languages are those other than English (Mokhtari and Sheorey, 2008). Researchers and educators continue to investigate learning issues and characteristics of these groups. Learning knowledge in English,

which is not their first language, is problematic for this group of students (Grabe and Stoller, 2013). Limitations in English vocabulary, inadequate knowledge of reading strategies, and application of those strategies are some of the challenges the ESL/EFL students experienced (Hudson, 2007). Because of the strong relationship between strategies and reading comprehension, it is important for learners to develop reading strategies and awareness in order to improve one's reading comprehension (Anderson, 2005, 2008; Mokhtari and Sheorey, 2008).

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

The relationship between language learners' reading comprehension and reading strategy use has been of interest for scholars. In particular, many scholars have been interested in understanding what readers typically use while they read, how they employ strategies, and in what conditions they use them (Sheorey and Mokhtari, 2001; Phakiti, 2003; Wu, 2005; Lee, 2007). However, the gap exists for the case of poetry which we still do not know if the students tend to use different strategies to read poetry or not. This is important to know since it can reveal useful information for more effective poetry reading and teaching.

From all that have been written on the problems of teaching poetry, poetry, more than any other genres, elicits attentions from students and teachers. The literature classes are mainly teacher-directed and meaning-driven; as a result, the students have the following dubious assumptions about literature and poetry: a piece of poem has one correct interpretation; the teacher possesses the correct interpretation; and any differences between their interpretation and the teacher's are a result of a lack of close reading and understanding of the text on their part (Ebrahimi, 2011). Therefore, the issue of one interpretation of the teacher on one hand and the multiple interpretations of the students on the other hand counts. As a result this study two different types of poetries to identify the reading strategies. Shakespearean

and contemporary poetries have been selected since they are of the two definite types of poetries that one can find in any literature classes. Moreover, the difference between the two types of poetries might show the strategy differences more clearly.

In literature classes, teachers face some challenges to teach poetry, either because they do not know how to teach it effectively, or because they find it elusive, as they do not have enough knowledge about the strategies the students use and so they cannot choose a useful strategy to teach poetry in a way that is more understandable for the poetry readers. Therefore, not much knowledge of strategies use in reading poetry is reported either among teachers or students but having this knowledge is essential to either teachers or students for a more effective reading (Zare and Othman, 2013). However as many research (Tavakoli, 2014; Ebrahimi, 2012a) suggest, explicit teaching of reading strategies to the readers is a great step forward to have a more comprehensive reading and read to learn rather than learn to read.

The dominant model of poetry teaching for students is to teach poetry focusing on finding a meaning. However, poets' consensus is that the poem has to be read aloud to be involved to understand the deep meaning (Hughes, 2006). To understand literature and poetry deeper, teachers have to engage the students with poetry. In other words, either the students do not know the strategies or do not know how to use them (Zare, 2013). In this study, the researcher seeks good strategies that most learners apply in understanding a poem to recommend them to all teachers to apply them in their literature classes.

Most of the times, readers are not aware of these strategies that they have to apply while reading poetry. It is crystal clear that by applying these strategies while reading literary works such as poetry, students can understand and interpret the texts easily and fluently (Ebrahimi, 2012b).

English literature instructors tend to claim that they use these strategies to teach poetry according to the postmodern language teaching approaches. Wang (2009) concludes that teacher-centred approach empowered the habit of dependence on teachers and made independent reading almost impossible. As a result, it is still difficult to find a social interaction in English classes. Modern language teaching approaches emphasise on learners' rather than instructor's role in teaching poetry. These learner centred approaches focus on interaction of the readers while they are reading poetry in the classroom. The teacher's role is like a coach or facilitator to explain the meanings and literary terms of the poem after the students discussed the poetry.

Although Iranians are fond of literature and poetic language, there are some shortcomings in English poetry teaching in classes in Iran like all the other parts of the world. One problem might be that because English is a foreign language for Iranians, therefore English poetries sometimes have to be translated into Persian to be taught in the literature classes. This is the first big shortcoming by itself, because the translated text from one language to another is usually not as comprehensive in the meaning that the literary work itself conveys. As a result, the translated text would be apt to have limited number of meanings among several layers of interpretations of the authentic text. Consequently, the students tend to hold on to one type of interpretation, especially the one given by the teacher.

Because English is not their first language, non-native speakers of English trying to read an English text in an ESL/EFL context experience differences in content in addition to those challenges that they experience when reading in their native languages.

In short, the research gap for this study is that the reading strategies of English poetry by EFL students are not identified; therefore, to explore these strategies in reading poetry, the researcher decided to conduct this research to widen the body of knowledge of English poetry reading. Accordingly, the following issues are raised in doing this research:

- 1) The need to understand what readers do and what strategies they use in order to understand a poem.
- 2) The need to understand the different era of the poetries, Shakespearean as well as Contemporary poetries need an understanding of the era itself, the properties of each era has to be discussed with the students before reading a poem rather than reading them directly with no background knowledge of the era.
- 3) The need to understand deep level meaning. Reading poetry ranges in a dichotomy of surface and deep level of understanding. Problems of understanding deep level meaning may be solved by the strategy use; while poor readers read the surface level in comparison to good readers who read at the deep level.
- 4) Lastly, the need to put consideration in English poetry reading in university curriculum; therefore, the strategies that these students use in reading poetry can be significant in pursuing this study.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

In short, the main objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1) To identify the strategies that the EFL students use while processing Shakespearean and contemporary English poetry.
- 2) To compare and contrast the strategies that the EFL students use while reading Shakespearean and contemporary English poetry.
- 3) To compare and contrast the actual strategies that the EFL students use while reading English poetry with strategies that they perceive they use.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

Knowing about the importance of reading strategies and their effect on learning, and considering that rarely any research has been done about reading strategies among EFL university students who are different with ESL learners in terms of cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds, this research serves as the focus of the present study. This research is conducted to find answers to the following questions concerning students' usage of reading strategies while reading poetry:

- 1) What strategies do EFL postgraduate students generally perceive they use for reading English poetry?
- 2) How different or similar are the actual strategies that the EFL postgraduate students use while reading English poetry with those that they perceive they use?
- 3) How different or similar are the strategies that the EFL postgraduate students use while reading Shakespearean and Contemporary English poetry?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in this understanding that literature readers need proper reading strategies to improve their reading skill. This study is important since its aim is to discover these useful strategies. Therefore, the focus of this study is mainly on the strategies that EFL readers employ to read poetry as a piece of literary text. The data of this study is elicited from EFL university students and the poetry reading strategies are mainly the focus. The observed strategies support the

understanding that it is beneficial to familiarize them to the students in order to have a more effective poetry reading.

This study contributes to providing a comprehensive picture of EFL postgraduate students' reading strategy use when they read poetry in English. This study helps literature teachers understand how the EFL postgraduate students employ the reading strategies. It also provides literature teachers with information on what reading strategies their students use when reading poetry in English. Furthermore, the teachers will recognize how English readers use reading strategies differently, especially in terms of types and frequency. This information is useful to the literature teachers, who consequently could modify their teaching to incorporate training on those reading strategies when reading poetry, and thus help their students, especially low proficiency students, achieve higher levels of reading poetry comprehension.

The focus on reading strategies for non-native English speakers in this study is intended to inform those investigating about these students to improve reading comprehension of English poetry. It is not easy to believe that how students will be able to achieve their academic goals without a high level of reading proficiency (Sheorey and Mokhtari, 2008). This study may be helpful to determine effective reading strategies of poetry for these students. It provides literature teachers and faculty at institutions of higher education with guidance for better English literature reading instruction for non-native English speaking students. Exploring reading strategies and a relationship between the first and foreign languages in reading strategies may aid these educators in improving their teaching approaches and pedagogies. This may enhance the ESL/EFL students' reading comprehension.

Due to the objectives, this study is useful for several groups of people, who can benefit from the results: one group is students to express their ideas, difficulties, and challenges about different reading strategies. The second group is literature teachers to express their ideas about effective reading strategies, this knowledge provides literature teachers with a better understanding of their students' satisfaction with their language classes. The knowledge helps English instructors in incorporating



in their teaching effective reading strategies to help learners develop their procedural knowledge. In this regard, the students become more effective and proficient literature readers who are able to employ good reading strategies while processing English poetries. Third group is the administrators who can use the results of this study to provide a perfect curriculum for poetry studies.

As stated earlier, this study is expected not only to identify what strategies EFL postgraduate university students use when they read poetry in English, but also to provide insights on their actual use of those strategies to foster poetry reading. Since the findings of this study reveal how the readers use strategies to construct meaning from literary texts, especially poetry, students will benefit from the findings of this study by reflecting on their own reading and realizing some of the hindering factors which impede their reading. They will also understand the usefulness of strategies that proficient readers use and apply them to relieve comprehension problems.

The findings from this study can be used as a guideline for teachers to figure out what strategies are more effective in teaching as well as reading poetry, therefore they would know how to teach students a repertoire of reading strategies that would facilitate students' adjustment to the different types of poetries that they read. In addition, teachers will understand different types of difficulties their students encounter during the literary reading process so that they can address them accordingly. Findings can also assist English language and literature teachers to better provide much needed support for their students when they are learning English language and literature.

The findings might help provide more effective EFL/ESL pedagogy and so motivate students to read more English texts such as literary or poetic texts. These insights may help policy makers and educators to better understand the situation of EFL/ESL students and therefore develop programs with the aim of providing better support for EFL/ESL students and increase their success in reading English literary texts such as poetry. The study also invites more researchers to extend the scope of

the current study and continue to offer significant advantages for the sake of both teaching and learning practices. Taking all these into consideration in practice, the research have to be based on a number of theoretical platform which follows in the next section.

### **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

This study situates itself within theories of reading (Schemata theory) and theories of understanding literary texts (Transactional theory and Reader response theory). It is deemed critical that the three types of theories are integrated for a number of reasons as follows:

The area of reading strategies is well developed and current research tends to use top-down and bottom-up information processing as the thematic framework (Schemata theory).

Studies of literary texts tend to focus on analysis of genres, stylistics, and general understanding of the literary text. However, study on strategies of reading poetry is rare, this researcher acknowledges the importance of Transactional theory and Reader response theory, and believes that these theories are able to explain the behaviour of learners in reading poetry.

To describe the above mentioned theories, it is worth explaining each briefly as there are some studies, which describe the strategies that L2 readers use: “top-down” and “bottom-up” information processing. Block (1986) also categorizes strategies into general *comprehension strategies*, which deal with comprehension

gathering, and monitoring that are top-down reader-centred strategies, and *local strategies* which involved in the readers' intention to comprehend linguistic units, and are known as bottom-up text-centred strategies.

In this study, reading strategies are illustrated based on Block's (1986) assumption that good readers have the ability to think aloud and verbalize their thoughts while they are completely aware of their use of different strategies. The method which is decided to be applied while doing this research is the think-aloud method which is widely popular and known in this type of research as the suitable method in gathering data on the process of reading.

One theory related to this study is Reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1978). According to the reader response theory, readers are active creatures in producing their own unique interpretation of the text. Reader response theory points out that reading process is both subjective and objective. Some critics of this theory believe that reading is a bi-active process in a way that it can be affected partly by literary work and partly by the readers' controlling part.

Reader response theorists can be categorized in three different groups; the first group (individualist) usually focuses on the individual reader's experience, the second group (experiments) usually does psychological experiments on special kind of readers, and the third group (uniformist) usually expects uniform response from all kinds of the readers. In this research, the researcher applies the theories which has been posed by the first group of the theorists as the focus in this research is the reader.

The other point about Reader-Response theory is that it explains that the work is actually the reader's experience. Reader-Response theorists expect the reader to sense the text in a way that is relevant to his experiences. The researcher believes that such kind of sources of information clarifies the vision as the interpreter. Since this study focuses on individual poetry reading of the students it can be related to Reader

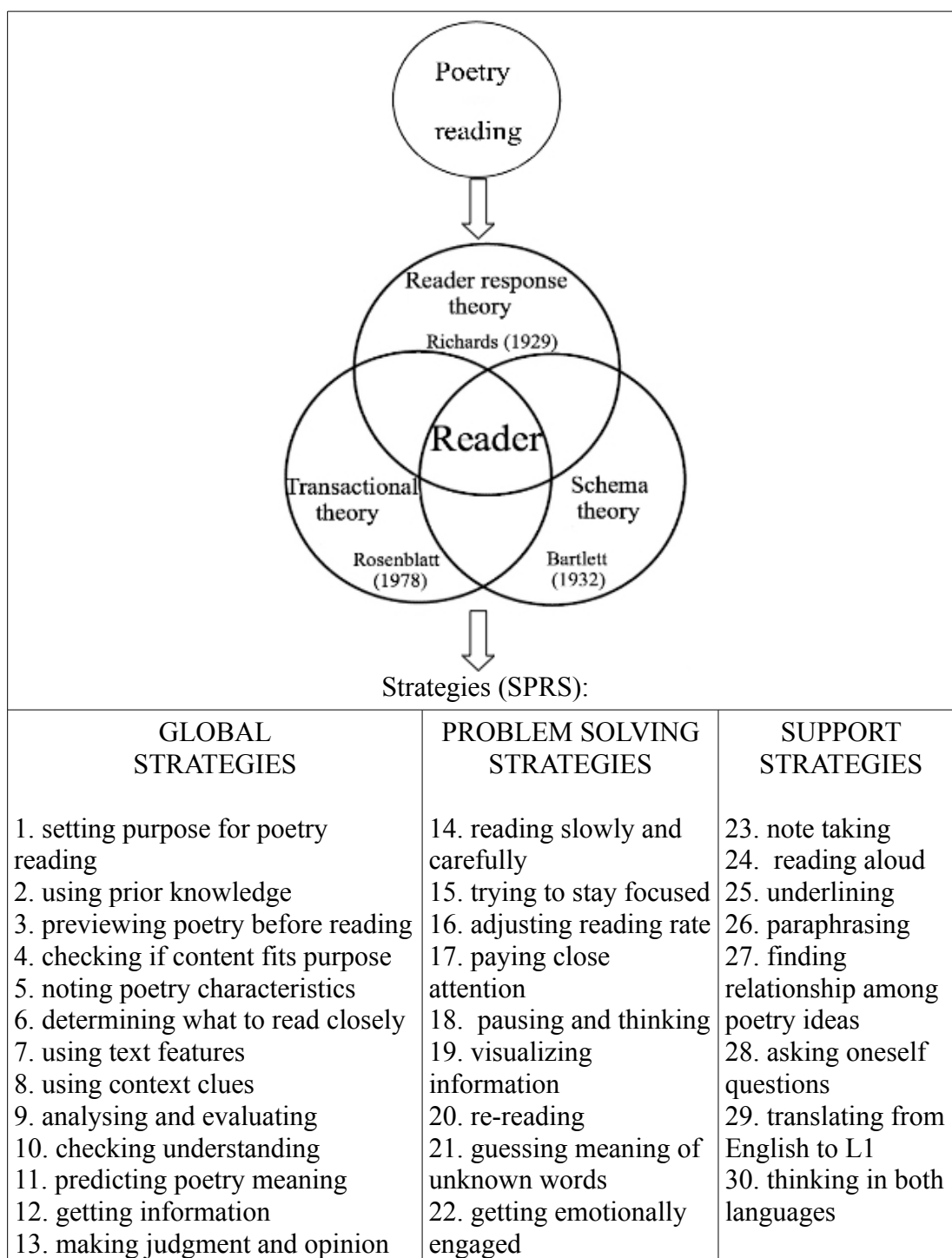
Response theory since the individual readers would use their own experience in their interpretation of the poems.

The next theory is Transactional theory which applies to literature teaching. According to Rosenblatt (1988), the meaning does not reside ready-made in the text or the reader, but it happens in the course of the transaction between the reader and the text. It means that without this relationship between the reader and the literary text, no meaning would be constructed. The act of reading is a transaction involving a particular reader and particular words at a particular time in a particular context. According to transactional theory, interpretation of a text depends on the context in which reader reads the passage as well as his/her background knowledge about that specific issue. Therefore, interpretation of the same text for different readers in different contexts may be different from each other because of their background knowledge and their special knowledge about their special context that they live in.

Based on this theory, the transactional nature of language and the concepts of transaction and selective attention illuminates reading process. In simpler words, this theory emphasises on the relationship between the reader and the literary texts or poems in case of this study. Based on this theory, the *poem* is what happens in the mind of the reader and it is processed after he reads the prints. This is the time when the words start functioning in the mind and transact with the text. Reading strategies are a part of this process in the mind.

The other theory is Schema theory. According to Rumelhart (1985) based on the schema theory reading comprehension is an interactive process between the text and the reader's prior knowledge. This theory modifies a psycholinguistic model in which EFL/ESL reader's background knowledge interacts with conceptual abilities and process strategies to produce comprehension. According to the Schema Theory, any text, either spoken or written, does not by itself carry meaning, rather a text only provides directions for listener's or readers to retrieve or construct from their own, previously acquired knowledge.

As can be seen in Figure 1.1 below, the three literary theories are interconnected to each other by the significant role of the reader as the main element in meaning making of the text. In this study also, the role of individual readers is emphasised by the separate think aloud sessions for each poetry reader. As a result of the elaboration above, the following theoretical framework is suggested for this study in Figure 1.1. Further elaborations of the theories are provided in Chapter 2.



**Figure 1.1:** Theoretical framework

## 1.8 Definition of Key Terms

This section provides a short operational definition of major key terms that are used in this study. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to explain the precise meaning of terms that are used in this work. As there may be different possible meanings for these terms, this section provides the definition that mostly suits this study. They are listed based on alphabetical order. More in depth explanations of these terms are provided in Chapter 2.

**Contemporary poetry:** Contemporary poetry is difficult to define, but it is the one written in the last century and has some characteristics that distinguish it from traditional poetry. The most important characteristics is the use of free verse or unrhymed lines. It means that it does not follow the old structures and it talks about modern and post-modern issues (Leech, 2014).

**English as a Foreign Language (EFL):** The use of English by non-native English speakers in a place where English is not spoken natively and English is primarily learned in a classroom setting, such as Iran (Kachru, 1985).

**Poem:** For this study, the word *poem* is used for one piece of literary work which is autonomously meaningful by itself using the elevated language to express a highly imaginative subject. Whereas poetry is the general term for the whole genre of rhythmical and metrical forms or verses (Leech, 2014).

**Reading strategy:** The definition of reading strategy that is followed in this study encompasses Mokhtari and Sheorey's (2002) descriptions as reading strategies mean intentional, carefully planned techniques by which readers monitor or manage their reading comprehension, actions and procedures that the readers use while working directly with a text, and basic support mechanisms intended to aid the readers in comprehending the text.

**Shakespearean poetry:** The poetry of or like the works, themes and style of Shakespeare is considered as Shakespearean poetry (O'Brien, 1995).

**Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS):** This questionnaire is a tool measuring adult non-native students' "awareness and perceived use of reading strategies while reading academic materials such as textbooks" (Mokhtari and Sheorey, 2002).

**Text:** A text is the literary work that is acted by a particular reader in a particular time and particular conditions. The text is a passive agent that acts as a stimulus for a reader to experience a transaction that may be aesthetic or efferent in nature (Rosenblatt, 1988).

**Think-aloud protocol:** The definition given by Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) is the one that suits this study most. They explain that in think-aloud studies, participants report their thoughts while they are doing a given task. They believe that protocol analysis is a "methodology for examining thought and action" in "investigations of reading past and present".

Further explanations for these terms are provided throughout the work. There is a continued use of these terms in this thesis. As the next chapters show, these terms represent ideas on which the purpose and procedures for this study are based. These terms and their roles are revisited in the study.

## **1.9 Summary**

This study provides a deep investigation on the process of reading while the participants interact with poetry. The readers' responses during the think-aloud sessions show how they read and understand poetry. The assumption in this study is that readers' expressed words and actions provide information about their thinking as well as the belief of the significance of reading strategies in teaching and comprehending literature.



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