

# READING STRATEGY USE AMONG IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS ACROSS DIFFERENT PROFICIENCY LEVELS

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## Abstract

This study investigated the type and the frequency of the use of strategies in reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners with varying proficiency levels, that is, Advanced versus Intermediate learners. It was hypothesized that there was no significant relationship between learners' proficiency level and the type and the frequency of use of reading strategies. Sixty learners, aged 15-27, were selected from the intermediate and advanced EFL learners in Omid Language Center of Marand. Preliminary English Test (PET) and Original Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) Questionnaire were used as the main data collection tools. The result reveals that there are differences between Intermediate and Advanced learners on the use of global and problem- solving strategies because Advanced learners use these strategies more than Intermediate learners. But there are no differences between Advanced and Intermediate learners on the use of support strategies. It is believed that the present study can have insightful implications for EFL learners and teachers.

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**Keywords:** High proficient readers, low proficient readers, strategies, reading comprehension

## INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the main skills in learning any language in general and EFL and ESL in particular. Because it is one of the means of data collection. Research in ESL and EFL reading suggests that learners use a variety of strategies to assist them with the acquisition, store, and retrieval of information (Rigney, 1978). Strategies are defined as learning techniques, behaviors, problem-solving or study skills which make learning more

effective and efficient (Oxford and Crookall, 1989). Reading strategies are the processes used by students to increase their comprehension or overcome comprehension failures.

So many attempts have been made to develop and make students aware of reading strategies that they use while studying. Meta-cognitive awareness is the awareness of whether or not comprehension is occurring and the conscious application of one or more strategies to overcome comprehension failures (Baumann, Jones, and Seinfort-Kessel, 1993). Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) developed Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) based on the Metcognitive-Awareness-of-Reading-Strategies Inventory (MARS-I) to identify the perceived use of the type of frequency of strategies by students while reading materials in English. SORS categorizes reading strategies used by learners into three categories of global, problem-solving, and support. Global strategies are those strategies learners use to monitor their progress, plan for reading, and set reading strategies. They include 13 strategies as: setting purpose for reading, using prior knowledge, previewing text before reading, checking how text content fits purpose, noting text characteristics, determining what to read, resolving conflicting information, confirming predictions, using context clues, using text features, predicting or guessing text meaning, evaluating what is read critically, and using typographical aids (e.g. italics). Problem-solving strategies aid the reader in constructing meaning from the text. These strategies include 8 items as: guessing meaning of unknown words, trying to stay focused on reading, rereading for better understanding, paying close attention to reading, reading slowly and carefully, pausing and thinking about reading, adjusting reading rate, and visualizing information read. Support strategies are those means learners employ when text comprehension eludes them even after the use of global and problem-solving strategies. They include 9 items: underlining information in the text, paraphrasing for better understanding, thinking both in English and mother tongue while reading, going back and forth in the text, taking notes while reading, translating into mother tongue, using reference material, asking oneself questions, and reading aloud when text becomes hard.

The importance of using reading strategies is highly critical for English language learners since high levels of English language literacy have been found to correlate with frequent and complex strategy use (Anderson, 1999; Shoerey and Mokhtari, 2001).

Researchers argued that there is a relationship between the use of strategies and proficiency levels (Monos, 2003; Mc Namara and o'Reilly, 2007). There is difference between high and low proficient learners in the frequency of application of meta-cognitive strategies which in turn affect their academic achievement (Oxford, 1991).

Oxford (1996) investigated the relationship between meta-cognitive strategies and proficiency level of Korean students. Students who rated their proficiency as excellent and those who considered English as very important were more meta-cognitive users than those who didn't.

Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) examined the native and non-native readers' meta-cognitive awareness of reading strategies based on their self-reported reading strategy use in the US. Meta-cognitive, cognitive, and support strategies were three categories of reading strategies. Both ESL and US students used cognitive strategies more than cognitive and support strategies.

Monos (2003) carried out a study to examine the meta-cognitive strategy use by high and low proficient EFL learners of Hungarian. Monos' findings confirmed the previous studies that high proficient learners used more meta-cognitive strategies.

Zhang and Wu (2009) conducted a research to find out the meta-cognitive awareness of Chinese EFL students based on their self-reported reading strategy use. They showed a preference for problem-solving followed by global and support strategies.

Behbudian (2011) examined the relationship between proficiency level and reading strategy awareness of Iranian EFL learners. He found that on global strategies the differences between advanced and elementary groups were significant and on problem-solving strategies the differences between advanced group and elementary and intermediate groups were significant. However, on support strategies there was no significant difference among elementary, intermediate, and advanced groups.

Despite these studies about awareness of reading strategies, there have been few studies on the use of reading strategies of Iranian students. So this study tries to identify the possible difference between high versus proficient learners in terms of the type and the frequency of use of reading strategies. In order to meet this goal, Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) developed by Mokhtari and Sheorey's (2002) based on the Metcognitive-Awareness-of-Reading-Strategies Inventory (MARS-I) was used. In order to find the type and frequency of reading strategies used by Iranian EFL learners, two research questions are considered:

*1) What reading strategies are frequently used by Iranian EFL learners at intermediate and advanced levels?*

*2) Is there any statistical difference among reading strategies used by intermediate and advanced learners?*

These research questions gave way to the following hypotheses:

1) All of the reading strategies are used with the same frequency by intermediate and advanced learners.

2) There are differences in reading strategies used by intermediate and advanced learners.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

The participants of this study were sixty EFL learners who were studying at Omid Language Center in Tabriz. They were 20 males and 40 females. The age of learners ranged from 15 to 27. The participants fell into two proficiency levels, namely; intermediate and advanced learners. They were 30 in each group and Interchange, Passage, and 504 Essential Words were their course books.

### INSTRUMENTATION

The researcher used Preliminary English Test (PET) to make homogeneity of the learners in two groups of intermediate and advanced. The other instrument was a questionnaire. The questionnaire used in this study was Original Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) composed of 30 questions about the reading strategies the learners used while reading. A scale of 1-5 was used to measure the students' use of reading strategies. The numbers show the frequency of students' use of reading strategies in reading: 1= never or almost never, 2= occasionally, 3= sometimes, 4= usually, 5= always or almost always. SORS contains three types of strategies: global (13 questions), problem-solving (8 questions), and support (9 questions).

### RESULTS

The present study was designed to explore the use of reading strategies in reading among EFL learners of intermediate and advanced proficiency levels. Two research questions were translated into the following hypotheses: 1) all of the reading strategies are used with the same frequency by intermediate and advanced learners, and 2) There are differences in reading strategies used by intermediate and advanced learners.

To investigate the hypotheses, a t-test was used in order to determine whether the possible differences were statistically significant. Table 1 shows the results related to the use of reading strategies among the participants. The mean scores for the use of reading strategies show that problem-solving is the most frequent strategy followed by global and support strategies respectively by advanced learners. The analysis indicates that there are differences between intermediate and advanced learners on the use of global and problem-solving strategies because advanced learners use these strategies more than intermediate students. But there is no difference between advanced and intermediate students on the use of support strategies.

Table 1 Independent sample t-test: the two groups' use of reading strategies

	Group	N	Mean	St.D	St.E	Sig.
G	Intermediate	30	57.1713	8.16923	1.49149	.001
	Advanced	30	62.4040	2.59661	.47407	.002
P	Intermediate	30	51.7887	4.45318	.81304	.000
	Advanced	30	65.6290	3.15396	.57583	.000
S	Intermediate	30	55.7690	5.53570	1.01068	.333
	Advanced	30	57.5063	8.01500	1.46333	.333

G= global strategy

P= problem-solving strategy

S= support strategy

## DISCUSSION

The main aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between the type and the frequency of reading strategies and proficiency levels of language learners. It was hypothesized that there was no relationship between the levels of proficiency and students' use of reading strategies.

This study showed that two groups of learners were active meta-cognitive strategies users. But there are differences between Intermediate and Advanced learners on the use of problem- solving and global strategies because Advanced learners use these strategies more than Intermediate learners. But there are no differences between Advanced and Intermediate learners on the use of support strategies. These findings are consistent with the findings of some studies (Zhang and Wu, 2009; Behbudian, 2011; etc.) that the frequency of the use of meta-cognitive strategy use increase as learners become more proficient. Proficient learners show greater awareness and higher tendency to use meta-cognitive strategies than low proficient learners.

## IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have pedagogical implications for students and teachers. Teachers should become aware of the kind of strategies that their successful students are using and also of the strategies that their less successful students are using and are not using. Teachers can aid the less successful students by helping them use the most effective reading strategies. The learners themselves can become aware of the strategies that successful learners use and try to employ them while reading. Finally, it is the duty of all instructional and educational environments including language centers, universities, and schools, etc. to provide training programs on reading strategies.

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