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Iranian EFL Teachers' Perception of Teaching Reading Comprehension and Reading Comprehension Strategies across Gender and Experience

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate Iranian English teachers' perception of teaching reading comprehension and reading comprehension strategies and their use which can be influenced by individual factors such as gender and teachers' teaching experience. To serve this purpose, 78 EFL teachers were selected in a stratified manner from West and East Azerbaijan's language institutes and schools in the second semester of the academic year 2021. This sample included 54 females (=22 experienced, 17 developing, and 15 novices) and 24 males (=1 highly experienced, 6 developing, and 7 novice). To collect the research data, the first three sections of a five-point Likert scale standardized questionnaire was employed to tap teachers' perception of reading comprehension and the importance of reading strategies. The obtained data were analyzed through Two-Way between Groups Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to investigate the significant main and interaction effects of teachers' gender and their teaching experience on their perception of teaching reading comprehension and reading strategies. The results showed that the gender and teaching experience had no significant main or interaction effect on their understanding of the way reading comprehension should be taught or the paramount of reading comprehension strategies. Moreover, the findings unraveled some uncertainties in teachers' perceptions of reading comprehension skills and misconceptions regarding the significance of reading comprehension strategies. The findings are pedagogical significant and will be discussed in length.

Keywords: teachers' perception, teaching reading comprehension, reading comprehension strategies, teaching experience, gender

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1. Introduction

One of the essential language skills for countless students, especially those who are interested in continuing their academic studies, is the ability to read and comprehend English texts. Reading comprehension is a psychological and active process in which a person interacts with the author by using various reading and comprehension strategies to reconstruct the written message by using his background knowledge and recognition of textual signs. The results of extensive research have shown that the use of reading strategies is effective not only in improving reading comprehension but also in motivating elementary-level learners to read (Liao et al., 2022). Because reading skills and specifically using reading strategies expose the learner to a wide body of linguistic input which improves language knowledge and turns the reading process into a pleasurable activity that increases motivation.

Reading plays a secondary role in ESP courses and functions as a source of content input from original resources and it is often said to be the main concern of learners in countries in which English is taught as a foreign language (Farhady, 1998). The main source of this concern is rooted in the education that language learners receive during their general learning in institutions and schools, which is often done without paying attention to reading strategies and emphasizing the translation of texts. By teaching this practical skill with its strategies, students' attention is drawn to the lexical, grammatical and structural features of the text (Nation, 2009) so that they can understand the meaning of the texts and in the next steps can use them in their language learning. Reading strategies are problem-solving operations, such as predicting the text, using previous knowledge, scanning and skimming the text with the aim of recognizing information, recognizing the relationship of elements within the text and the structure of the text, asking questions, summarizing and paying attention to text signs and other cases (Hsu, 2006).

Using such strategies can determine the level of readers' interaction with the text and boost also their understanding of that text. In addition, it is emphasized that when students approach a text, they do not establish a close relationship with it; they do not interact with the text to understand the meaning beyond vocabulary translation. There is a low commitment to advance in higher thinking processes and move toward the Ministry of Education standards regarding EFL reading. These standards include the enrichment of language skills and the use of reading strategies such as previewing the text, questioning to monitor reading, relating information to personal experiences and background knowledge, inferring or determining importance within a text to enrich existent processes and improve levels of comprehension (MEN, 2014, as cited in Molina Ramos, 2018).

Researchers and experts in the field of applied linguistics, including Machado (2010), have paid attention to the role of reading strategies and consider these strategies as an inseparable part of the reading process (Amiryousefi et al., 2012). The studies show that awareness and application of these strategies have a significant impact on improving reading comprehension (Mahmoudi,

2014) and achieving autonomy in learning (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). Subsequent attempts to explore the exact nature of reading strategies required for more efficient comprehension of written language have produced mixed results. One of the measurement tools that has been widely employed in further research investigations has been Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSİ) that was designed by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) and further modified by Mokhtari et al. (2018). MARSİ classifies reading strategies into three types of global, problem-solving, and support reading strategies, all three of which require the creation of metacognitive awareness (Mokhtari et al., 2018) so that students can use them to understand the materials that they read. Using these questionnaires, researchers have investigated the level of students' awareness of reading strategies in different contexts of English as a foreign language (Sheikh et al., 2019). This questionnaire was also used in the context of Iran and showed the impact of these strategies on the critical thinking and understanding of Iranian language learners (Mohseni et al., 2020). Recent views on the relationship between learning strategies and the autonomy of language learners in the limited concept of teaching how to read and learn and the broader concept of liberating the learner emphasize the social dimensions of strategic performance particularly in reading as a prerequisite for critical evaluation of the input one is exposed to.

As said by Hurst et al. (2013), there has been a common perception among teachers that being a skilled reader is a prerequisite enough to being a skilled teacher of reading. He goes on to discuss that being a skilled reader does not mean one has an explicit consciousness of the structures of written and spoken language that is necessary to effectively teach reading. In response to this problem, the reading literacy literature has revealed that in order to teach the reading components (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics and alphabetic code, and comprehension), effective reading strategies can be taught and learners benefit from such type of instruction (Cekiso, 2012; Zare & Maftoon, 2015). Likewise, according to Cekiso and Madikiza (2014), teachers' awareness and use of reading strategies instruction is important to improve learners' reading proficiency.

Besides, teachers have many responsibilities and their perceptions towards priorities in teaching vary. McGuire (2016) declared that teachers' attitudes, experience and perspectives towards literacy instruction play a critical role in their performance in terms of reading instruction. Similarly, Friesen and Haigh (2018) proposed that the significance of mastering the use of strategies by the time they reach the fourth grade is quite evident and the reason that this goal is difficult to accomplish relates to the way strategies are taught. That is, when the content of the written input surpasses students' current abilities and knowledge, any other form of strategic training apart from explicit may fail. What is more, Friesen and Haigh (2018) proposed that modeling the use of reading strategies is among teachers' roles, and they should be effectively utilized at all grade levels particularly if the readers are encountering a new text structure.

Two important features of reading strategies are their being unconsciousness and teachable (Harmer, 2015). In other words, those language learners who unconsciously use reading strategies are more successful than countless language learners who need explicit teaching of these strategies.

Conversely, those language learners who are not capable of subconsciously using strategies are in crucial need of strategic investment in order to take a more strategic orientation and improve their educational achievements.

Multiple circumstantial theoretical and empirical evidence allude to the prominent role of teachers' accurate and clear understanding of the role of strategies in resolving learners' problems and maximizing instructional in various aspects of language learning including reading comprehension. However, a superficial look at how reading comprehension is taught at different levels in institutions and schools, especially in foreign language contexts such as Iran, shows the lack of attention to strategies in teaching reading comprehension, and it is not surprising that many language learners are rarely willing to read which also reduces the amount of exposure to linguistic input (Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2010). This neglect may be attributed to a yawning gap in university teacher training programs and teacher training courses conducted in schools and educational institutions between what is presented and what the trainees need to perform in actual classrooms in order to boost instructional outcomes. According to the Knowing, Analyzing, Recognizing, Acting and Seeing model (KARDS) (Kumaravadivelu, 2012), the goal of teacher training courses should be to improve the professional, personal and process knowledge of teachers in the field of language, education and teaching, increase the ability to analyze the needs of their learners and to assist them know how to take action in order to address the identified needs and to critically observe and assess their teaching practice. Identifying the identity, perceptions and individual values of teachers also needs more attention because the research has shown contradictions in teachers' perceptions and performance (Lee, 2009). Emphasis on knowledge and the ability to analyze and recognize and promote teachers' perceptions is a prerequisite for realignment of teaching procedure towards more interactive and research-based practice which can enable them to critically observe the teaching and learning processes from the teacher's, learners' and colleagues' perspectives.

Empirically, the new and critical models of teacher education need to explore teachers' perceptions and understanding of educational factors according to their individual characteristics such as gender (Talebi & Fallahi, 2021) and their teaching experience to interpret their class performance and the rate of students' success. Different results have been reported some of which indicate a significant relationship between teacher characteristics such as gender, teaching experience, and teachers' educational qualifications with students' academic progress (Akiri & Ugborugbo, 2008) and others violate this relationship (Rivkin et al., 2005). The difference in the results can be attributed to various contextual variables like cultural factors that affect teachers' perception of educational elements. For this reason, the necessity of examining teachers' perceptions is understandable regarding the role they play in the learning process (Jia et al., 2006) and the impact they have on the formation of teaching methods (Estaji & Khosravi, 2015; Ha & Lee, 2019; Malmir & Bagheri, 2019; Soodmand Afshar, & Ghasemi, 2017).

Literature is replete with exploration of various interventions to enhance language learners' reading comprehension (e.g., Derakhshan & Malmir, 2017; Estaji & Khosravi, 2015; Saghaieh Bolghari et al., 2017; Sarani & Lotfi, 2010) and scrutiny of variables such as the task-oriented collaborative teaching method (Bagheri et al., 2020). The findings highlight a significant difference among control and experimental groups' reading comprehension.

However, very few studies have delved into teachers' perceptions of the very nature of reading comprehension instruction, which is one of the most important language learning skills, especially in the foreign language context such as Iran. Therefore, the current study set out to fill this gap by examining Iranian English teachers' perception of the process of teaching reading comprehension as well as the importance of strategies in this education according to their gender and professional experience. To this end, the following research questions were proposed:

1. Does Iranian EFL teachers' gender have any main effect on their perception of teaching reading comprehension?
2. Does Iranian EFL teachers' teaching experience have any main effect on their perception of teaching reading comprehension?
3. Do Iranian EFL teachers' gender and teaching experience have any interaction effect on their perception of teaching reading comprehension?
4. Does Iranian EFL teachers' gender have any main effect on their perception of teaching reading comprehension strategies?
5. Does Iranian EFL teachers' teaching experience have any main effect on their perception of teaching reading comprehension strategies?
6. Do Iranian EFL teachers' gender and teaching experience have any interaction effect on their perception of teaching reading comprehension strategies?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

To achieve the aim of the study, a sample of 78 Iranian English teachers, 54 female (=22 experienced, 17 developing, and 15 novice) and 24 male (=11 experienced, 6 developing, and 7 novices) were selected based on the purposive sampling method in the second semester of 2021 from the language institutes and schools of West and East Azerbaijan. That is to say, the participants were selected on purpose based on their gender and the teaching experienced characteristics so that they could be divided into two groups of male and females each comprising three groups of novice, developing and experienced ones with teaching experiences of up to three years, between four and nine years and 10 years or more, respectively. The participants consent was obtained prior to the study as well.

2.2. Instruments

In order to collect data, teachers' perception questionnaire (Maingi, 2015) was used, which measures the teachers' perception of four factors related to reading comprehension skill with 39 items in four sections, which include the nature of reading instruction including 4 items, teachers' general perceptions of reading instruction including 6 items, language teachers' perception regarding the importance and necessity of reading comprehension strategies for better comprehension including 17 items and the use of reading strategies in teaching includes 12 items. In this study, which is a part of the ongoing research, only the first, second and third parts of this questionnaire were used to determine the teachers' perception of reading comprehension skill and how to teach them, and the third part was analyzed to measure the teachers' perception of the importance of reading strategies with regard to the two intervening variables of teaching experience and gender.

The content validity of this instrument was checked by Maingi (2015) and results supported that the scale was valid for eliciting foreign language teachers' perception of reading comprehension and reading strategies and the construct validity of the questionnaire was confirmed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The obtained data from parts one and two of the questionnaire were quantitatively analyzed in order to answer the first three questions about teachers' perception of reading instruction according to their gender and teaching experience. These two sections comprised a total of 10 items the sum of which would render the score of 50 which would reflect the respondents' transparent and accurate understanding of the way reading comprehension was to be taught. Scores between 40 and 50 reflected a clear understanding of the reading skill and its teaching, and scores between 30 and 40 indicated teachers' positive understanding of this skill although with some uncertainties. On the other hand, scores between 20 and 29 were assumed to indicate the participants' unclear understanding. Finally, if the participants total score was lower than 20, it would signal a vague understanding. In the third part of the questionnaire, in the same way, agreement with the items was considered to indicate a correct understanding of the importance of reading strategies if the participants' score were within the range of 51 and 85; scores below 51 were considered to reveal a poor understanding.

2.3. Instrument Reliability

Because the questionnaire of teachers' perception of reading instruction has not been investigated in Iran, to ensure its reliability, before collecting the data, this questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 30 female and male English language teachers in three randomly selected levels of teaching experience and Cronbach's alpha test was used to check its reliability. Since the value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient in all the factors of the questionnaire is .832, therefore the factors of the questionnaire were at an acceptable level in terms of reliability, as a result, all the items of the questionnaire were confirmed.

2.4. Procedure

The participants were asked to read each of the 39 questions in the questionnaire and answer each item on a five-point Likert scale in the first three parts and a four-point Likert scale in the last part. There was no time limitation for completing the questionnaire, in other words, they could take as much time as necessary to answer the questions. However, only the answers to the first three parts of the questionnaire were related to this study and were analyzed statistically.

2.5. Design

The present descriptive ex-post-facto study was conducted with the aim of researching Iranian English teachers' perception of teaching reading comprehension skill and its strategies with a focus the participating teachers' gender and teaching experience. Having checked the construct validity of various parts of the questionnaire, the data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed through a two-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) in order to answer the research questions.

3. Results

To answer the research questions, the responses of the teachers on the questionnaire (Maingi, 2015) were analyzed quantitatively to investigate if gender and teaching experience have any main or interaction effect on teaching reading comprehension and reading comprehension strategies or not.

3.1. Construct Validity of Meaning of Reading

A factor analysis using the principal axis factoring method and varimax rotation was carried out in order to probe the underlying constructs of the four items related to the meaning of reading. Before discussing the results, it should be mentioned that factor analysis has three specific assumptions; sampling adequacy, lack of singularity and lack of identity which are reported in Table 1. The KMO index of .616 was higher than the minimum acceptable criterion of .60; indicating that the present sample size was adequate to run the factor analysis. The significant Bartlett's test ($\chi^2(6)=39.10, p=.000$) showed that the correlation matrix was not an identity one; that is to say, there were not zero correlations among all items. The opposite of identity is the singularity; i.e., too high correlations among all variables. The determinant value of .593 ($>.00001$) indicated that the correlation matrix did not suffer from the singularity.

Table 1

KMO and Bartlett's Test; Meaning of Reading

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.616
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	39.100
	df	6
	Sig.	.000
Determinant		.593

The SPSS extracted one factor as the underlying constructs of the four items related to the meaning of reading. This single-factor model accounted for 32.17 percent of the variance (Table 2).

Table 2*Total Variance Explained; Meaning of Reading*

Factor	Initial Eigen-values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	1.870	46.743	46.743	1.287	32.175	32.175
2	.977	24.413	71.156			
3	.666	16.656	87.812			
4	.488	12.188	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

And finally; Table 3 displays factor loadings of the four items under the only extracted factor. All factor loadings were higher than .30. That is to say; the four items related to the meaning of reading had moderate to large contributions to their construct.

Table 3*Factor Matrix; Meaning of Reading*

	Factor
	1
q3	.822
q1	.507
q2	.477
q4	.356

3.2. Construct Validity of Views on Teaching Reading

Since principal axis factoring did not converge, a factor analysis using the principal component method¹ was carried out in order to probe the underlying constructs of the next six items; i.e., items 5 to 10, related to the views on teaching reading. Before discussing the results, it should be mentioned the KMO index of .678 was higher than the minimum acceptable criterion of .60; indicating that the present sample size was adequate to run the factor analysis. The significant Bartlett's test ($\chi^2(15)=99.765, p=.000$) showed that the correlation matrix was not an identity one; that is to say, there were not zero correlations among all items. The opposite of identity is the singularity; i.e., too high correlations among all variables. The determinant value of .261 ($>.00001$) indicated that the correlation matrix did not suffer from singularity.

Table 4*KMO and Bartlett's Test; Views on Teaching Reading*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.678
	Approx. Chi-Square	99.765
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	15
	Sig.	.000
Determinant		.261

¹ Rotation was not needed for the Views on teaching reading, because it extracted a single factor.

The SPSS extracted two factors as the underlying constructs of the six items related to the views on teaching reading. This two-factor model accounted for 61.39 percent of the variance (Table 5).

Table 5*Total Variance Explained; Views on Teaching Reading*

Component	Initial Eigen-values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.597	43.281	43.281	2.597	43.281	43.281	1.936	32.274	32.274
2	1.087	18.115	61.396	1.087	18.115	61.396	1.747	29.122	61.396
3	.796	13.268	74.664						
4	.655	10.910	85.575						
5	.534	8.895	94.469						
6	.332	5.531	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

And finally; Table 5 displays factor loadings of the six items under the two extracted factors. The results showed that items 6, 7 and 8 loaded under the first factor. Items 5, 9 and 10 loaded under the second factor. It should be noted that two items; items 6 and 5, had their loadings under both factors. All factor loadings were higher than .30. That is to say; the six items related to the views on teaching reading had moderate to large contributions to their constructs.

Table 6*Rotated Component Matrix; Views on Teaching Reading*

	Component	
	1	2
q8	.910	
q7	.766	
q6	.513	.420
q9		.821
q10		.767
q5	.487	.516

3.3. Construct Validity of Views on Importance and Necessity of Reading Strategies

A factor analysis using the principal axis factoring method and varimax rotation was carried out in order to probe the underlying constructs of the next 17 items; i.e. items 11 to 27, related to the importance and necessity of reading strategies. Before discussing the results, it should be mentioned the KMO index of .780 was higher than the minimum acceptable criterion of .60; indicating that the present sample size was adequate to run the factor analysis. The significant Bartlett's test ($\chi^2(136)=744.151, p=.000$) showed that the correlation matrix was not an identity one; that is to say, there were not zero correlations among all items. The opposite of identity is the singularity; i.e., too high correlations among all variables. The determinant value of .0001 (> .00001) indicated that the correlation matrix did not suffer from singularity.

Table 7*KMO and Bartlett's Test; Importance and Necessity of Reading Strategies*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.780
	Approx. Chi-Square	744.151
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	136
	Sig.	.000
Determinant		.0001

The SPSS extracted five factors as the underlying constructs of the 17 items related to the importance and necessity of reading strategies. This five-factor model accounted for 62.28 percent of the variance (Table 8).

Table 8*Total Variance Explained; Importance and Necessity of Reading Strategies*

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7.030	41.354	41.354	6.681	39.300	39.300	2.959	17.403	17.403
2	1.764	10.376	51.729	1.390	8.174	47.474	2.124	12.492	29.895
3	1.355	7.973	59.703	1.036	6.092	53.566	2.012	11.837	41.732
4	1.247	7.333	67.035	.859	5.053	58.619	1.853	10.902	52.634
5	1.052	6.191	73.226	.623	3.665	62.284	1.641	9.650	62.284
6	.734	4.316	77.542						
7	.636	3.742	81.284						
8	.566	3.330	84.614						
9	.484	2.847	87.461						
10	.440	2.589	90.050						
11	.403	2.369	92.419						
12	.355	2.088	94.507						
13	.301	1.773	96.280						
14	.223	1.314	97.594						
15	.185	1.091	98.685						
16	.139	.817	99.502						
17	.085	.498	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

And finally; Table 9 displays factor loadings of the 17 items under the five extracted factors. The results showed that items 11, 12, 16, 22, and 27 loaded under the first factor. Items 13 and 18 loaded under the second factor. Items 19, 25, 26 had their loadings under the third factor. Items 17, 21, 23, and 24 loaded under the fourth factor; and finally, items 14, 15 and 20 loaded under the fifth factor. All factor loadings were higher than .30. That is to say; the 17 items related to the importance and necessity of reading strategies had moderate to large contributions to their constructs. It should be noted that a large number of items had their loadings under multiple factors.

Table 9
Rotated Factor Matrix; Importance and Necessity of Reading Strategies

	Factor				
	1	2	3	4	5
q12	.813				
q11	.738				
q27	.571				
q16	.522		.495		
q22	.455	.331		.378	.367
q13	.482	.784			
q18		.699	.464		
q25	.378		.675		
q26			.581		
q19		.368	.392		.331
q23	.343		.305	.663	
q24			.513	.602	
q17		.523		.598	
q21				.518	
q14					.688
q15	.460				.579
q20		.475		.355	.499

3.4. Construct Validity of Views on Reading Strategies

Since principal axis factoring did not converge, a factor analysis using the principal component method² was carried out in order to probe the underlying constructs of the 12 items related to the reading strategies. Before discussing the results, it should be mentioned the KMO index of .600 was equal to than the minimum acceptable criterion of .60; indicating that the present sample size was adequate to run the factor analysis. The significant Bartlett's test ($\chi^2(66)=227.03$, $p=.000$) showed that the correlation matrix was not an identity one; that is to say, there were not zero correlations among all items. The opposite of identity is the singularity; i.e. too high correlations among all variables. The determinant value of .043 ($>.00001$) indicated that the correlation matrix did not suffer from singularity.

Table 10
KMO and Bartlett's Test; Reading Strategies

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.600
	Approx. Chi-Square	227.038
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	66
	Sig.	.000
Determinant		.043

The SPSS extracted five factors as the underlying constructs of the 12 items related to the reading strategies. This five-factor model accounted for 69.16 percent of the variance (Table 11).

² Rotation was not needed for the Views on teaching reading, because it extracted a single factor.

Table 11*Total Variance Explained; Reading Strategies*

Factor	Initial Eigen-values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.382	28.182	28.182	3.382	28.182	28.182	2.058	17.153	17.153
2	1.499	12.488	40.670	1.499	12.488	40.670	1.803	15.029	32.181
3	1.237	10.309	50.979	1.237	10.309	50.979	1.635	13.627	45.808
4	1.141	9.512	60.491	1.141	9.512	60.491	1.478	12.319	58.127
5	1.041	8.677	69.168	1.041	8.677	69.168	1.325	11.041	69.168
6	.863	7.189	76.357						
7	.752	6.264	82.621						
8	.672	5.597	88.219						
9	.441	3.677	91.895						
10	.399	3.328	95.223						
11	.370	3.081	98.304						
12	.203	1.696	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

And finally; Table 12 displays factor loadings of the 12 items under the five extracted factors. The results showed that items 5, 6, 10, and 11 loaded under the first factor. Items 2, 3 and 8 loaded under the second factor. Items 1, and 9 had their loadings under the third factor. Items 4, and 7 loaded under the fourth factor; and finally, item 12 loaded under the fifth factor. All factor loadings were higher than .30. That is to say; the 12 items related to the reading strategies had moderate to large contributions to their constructs. It should be noted that of the items had their loadings under multiple factors.

Table 12*Rotated Factor Matrix; Reading Strategies*

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
s10	.815				
s5	.658				
s6	.537		.510		
s11	.511				.464
s2		.834			
s3		.789			
s8	.474	.558			
s9			.833		
s1			.696	.417	
s7	.361			.797	
s4				.725	
s12					.896

3.5. Teachers' Gender, Teaching Experience, and Their Perceptions of Teaching Reading Comprehension

The first three null hypotheses addressed the main and interaction effect of teachers' gender and teaching experience on their perception of teaching reading comprehension. In order to

answer these three null hypotheses, descriptive statistics of the data obtained from the first and second parts of the questionnaire, which measured the perception of male and female teachers in the three groups of novice, developing, and experienced in teaching reading comprehension skill, were calculated. Table 13 indicates the results of descriptive statistics.

Table 13

Descriptive Statistics of the Male and Female Participants' Perceptions of Teaching Reading Comprehension Scores

Dependent Variable: Reading Instruction				
Gender	Experience	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Female	Novice	36.73	4.51	15
	Developing	39.05	3.50	17
	Experienced	39.68	3.87	22
	Total	38.66	4.07	54
Male	Novice	38.00	2.30	7
	Developing	36.00	8.00	6
	Experienced	39.27	3.16	11
	Total	38.08	4.63	24
Total	Novice	37.13	3.93	22
	Developing	38.26	5.03	23
	Experienced	39.54	3.60	33
	Total	38.48	4.22	78

According to Table 13, in terms of teaching experience, male novice teachers (38) had a better average than teachers with relative experience (36), but experienced teachers (39.27) obtained the highest average, which indicated their clearer perception of reading comprehension instruction. But among female teachers, experienced teachers (39.68) had a clearer perception than novice (36.73) and developing (39.05) colleagues. Before conducting Two-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA), it was necessary to see whether the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met or not; so, the researcher used Levene's test of equality of error variances. The results of the homogeneity of variances are indicated in Table 14.

Techniques in which units are selected because they have characteristics that you need in your sample. In other words, units are selected "on purpose" in purposive sampling.

Table 14

Test of Homogeneity of Variances for the Participants' Perceptions of Teaching Reading Comprehension Scores

Dependent Variable: Reading Instruction			
F	df1	df2	Sig.
1.71	5	72	.14

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.
 a. Design: Intercept + Gender + Experience + Gender * Experience

According to Table 14, the results of Levene's Test with a significant value of .14 showed that there was no violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances; therefore, the analysis of variance between groups was performed on the data obtained from the first two parts of the questionnaire and its results are indicated in Table 15.

Table 15

Two-Way between Groups Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the Male and Female Participants' Perception of Teaching Reading Comprehension Scores

Dependent Variable: Reading Instruction						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	128.65 ^a	5	25.73	1.48	.20	.09
Intercept	91577.00	1	91577.00	5279.78	.00	.98
Gender	8.48	1	8.48	.48	.48	.00
Experience	67.67	2	33.83	1.95	.15	.05
Gender * Experience	43.68	2	21.84	1.25	.29	.03
Error	1248.82	72	17.34			
Total	116916.00	78				
Corrected Total	1377.48	77				

a. R Squared=.09 (Adjusted R Squared=.03)

In Table 15, the significant value of 0.487, higher than .05, showed that neither the gender of the teachers ($F(1,72)=.48, p=.48 > .05$) nor their teaching experience $F(2(72)=1.95, p=.15 > 0.05$) independently or interactively ($F(2,72)=1.25, p=0.29 > .05$) had a significant effect on teachers' perception of teaching reading skills. Therefore, the answer to research questions one to three is negative.

3.6. Teachers' Gender, Teaching Experience, and Their Perception of Teaching RC Strategies

The four, five, and six research questions addressed the main and interaction effects of teachers' gender and teaching experience on their perception of teaching reading comprehension strategies. To answer these questions, first, the descriptive statistics of the research data from the third section of the questionnaire were calculated, which are presented in Table 16.

Table 16

Descriptive Statistics of the Male and Female Participants' Perceptions of Teaching Reading Comprehension Strategies Scores

Dependent Variable: Strategy Use				
Gender	Experience	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Female	Novice	39.00	3.48	15
	Developing	41.23	3.21	17
	Experienced	42.59	4.54	22
	Total	41.16	4.08	54
Male	Novice	40.71	3.72	7
	Developing	37.83	6.58	6
	Experienced	40.09	4.22	11
Total	Total	39.70	4.70	24
	Novice	39.54	3.56	22
	Developing	40.34	4.43	23
	Experienced	41.75	4.53	33
	Total	40.71	4.30	78

Based on the results obtained from Table 16, the total mean score of female teachers (41.16) was slightly higher than the total mean score of male teachers (39.70). Among male teachers, novice ones with a mean score (40.71) and a standard deviation (3.72) have a clearer perception of the importance of reading comprehension strategies than high experienced teachers (40.09) with a standard deviation (4.22) and developing teachers (37.83) with standard deviation (6.58). But among the female teachers, the highest mean score belonged to the experienced teachers with a mean (42.59) and a standard deviation (4.54) in comparing to the mean score of novice teachers (39) with a standard deviation (3.48) and developing teachers (41.23) with the standard deviation (3.21) indicated difference. Before conducting Two-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA), it was necessary to see whether the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met or not; so, the researcher used Levene's test of equality of error variances. The results of the homogeneity of variances are indicated in Table 17.

Table 17

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances for the Participants' Perception of Teaching Reading Comprehension Strategies Scores

Dependent Variable: StrategyUse			
F	df1	df2	Sig.
1.14	5	72	.34

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + Gender + Experience + Gender * Experience

According to Table 17, the results of Levene's test with a significant value of .347 showed that there was no violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variances, to determine the independent and interaction effect of teachers' gender and teaching experience on their perception of the importance of reading comprehension strategies. The results obtained from the third part of the questionnaire were analyzed by using a Two-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Table 18 shows the results.

Table 18

Two-Way Between Groups Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the Iranian Male and Female Participants' Perception of Teaching Reading Comprehension Strategies

Dependent Variable: Strategy Use						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	180.24 ^a	5	36.04	2.08	.07	.12
Intercept	102043.22	1	102043.22	5889.24	.00	.98
Gender	30.69	1	30.69	1.77	.18	.02
Experience	44.83	2	22.41	1.29	.28	.03
Gender * Experience	72.67	2	36.33	2.09	.13	.05
Error	1247.54	72	17.32			
Total	130748.00	78				
Corrected Total	1427.79	77				

a. R Squared=.12 (Adjusted R Squared=.06)

According to the results in Table 18, neither the gender of the participants ($F(1,72)=1.77$, $p=.18>.05$) nor their teaching experience ($F(2,72)=1.29$, $p=.05>.05$) had any significant main or interaction effect ($F(2,72)=2.09$, $p=.13>.05$) on their perception of the importance of reading comprehension strategies. Therefore, the answer to research questions four to six is also negative.

4. Discussion

The present study examined Iranian EFL teachers' perception of how to teach reading comprehension and the importance of comprehension strategies with regard to their teaching experiences and genders. The results of the first three research questions showed that, regardless of gender and teaching experience, the participants had a relatively positive, though lower than expected, perception of teaching reading. The important point is that even teaching experience had no effect on promoting this concept and there is no significant difference between novice, developing and experienced teachers with more than ten years of experience.

A significant misconception was reflected in the participants' answers to item 4, which asked teachers' opinions about using reading aloud to improve reading comprehension. Out of 78 participating teachers, 31 agreed or completely agreed with the statement that reading education is forcing the learner to read the text aloud to improve their pronunciation and focusing on the importance of this practice in teaching. This is surprising since the participants were expected to have realized the difference between the two purposes of reading aloud, which was to strengthen sound/symbol association and enhance pronunciation at early stages and silent reading for the purpose of comprehension. In fact, this misconception can realign the whole process of teaching reading comprehension from the right path of focus on reading strategies to equip learners with tools for autonomous learning to focusing on pronunciation which is a lower skill. This vague understanding may justify numerous problems that Iranian EFL learners have in deciphering meaning when they need to digest academic content. More shocking is the fact that this was a shared misconception which remained unimpacted by teaching experience and gender.

The results obtained from the examination of teachers' perception of the importance of reading strategies also led to staggering results. A mean lower than 50 indicates a poor perception of teachers regarding the importance of these strategies in teaching this important skill. Meanwhile, the mean score of the six investigated groups was between 37 and 42 out of a total of 85. Moreover, even teaching experience or gender had no significant effect on clarifying teachers' perception of reading comprehension strategies, and this result can be considered a severe weakness in the English language education system.

The outcomes of this research underscore the uncertainty in teachers' perception of reading comprehension skills and the key role of relevant strategies which can be one of the main causes of students' weakness in this skill. It should be borne in mind that teachers' perception and beliefs of various skills and of their learners' characteristics and needs shape their classroom activities and

are effective factors in determining the level of students' achievement in various fields. In this regard, countless studies have been conducted in the field of English teachers' perception in various contexts, which can be compared with the results of the present study. The results of a consolidated research conducted by Coday et al. (2015) to examine the beliefs and practices of two graduate teachers indicated the need for regular and planned training of teachers to develop their ability to identify individual differences in language learners and make informed educational decisions.

The findings from the present study, however, run counter to those reported by Abdullah Saleh (2016). They explored teachers' perception of the nature of reading comprehension and the role of reading strategies and reported acceptable levels of teachers' awareness and perception of strategies such as determining the purpose of reading, reading the text slowly and answering questions, teaching keywords, encouraging students to use dictionaries in understanding the meaning of new words and re-reading difficult sentences in the pre-reading stage. However, in the context of Iran, the investigated in the present study, the participating teachers' misconceptions and immature perceptions could adversely impact their teaching practice making them unable to efficiently assist students who have problems comprehending written language. This seems to suggest the need to realign teacher training courses with a focus on the significance of strategic investment (Cekiso, 2017). Alternatively, in-service training courses might be designed to raise teachers' awareness of the role strategies play in reading comprehension and the ways they might be taught.

The need for enhancing teachers' perceptions can be emphasized based on the findings from another study tapping teachers' perception of reading comprehension strategies in relation to students' motivation and learning (Nugroho et al., 2019). The results emerging from this study indicated that teachers' correct perception of reading comprehension strategies instruction had a significant positive effect on their students' reading comprehension activities such as interpreting the meaning of written words and connecting background knowledge with the text. This clear perception allowed the teachers to use effective reading strategies to deal with students' problems, such as proposing a series of questions related to the topic to create mental context, paying attention to the main idea of each paragraph, determining and identifying the structural features of the text and teaching the use of a dictionary to recognize the meaning of unfamiliar words. Thus, the researcher recommended the need to improve teachers' knowledge of the right teaching process and the significance of reading strategies because their perception is the outcome of their knowledge which can greatly impact their teaching performance.

Of course, any misconceptions among ELT teachers might be altered through meticulously designed training courses along with consistent support in the form of informed and expert supervision. This conforms to the claim made by Fitri and Ginting (2021) who proposed that teachers' clear understanding of teaching reading strategies is closely related to their level of preparation as well as their awareness of students' reading strategies and reading problems.

The findings emerging from the research studies in the context of Iran have accentuated the paramount of reading comprehension from teachers and students' perspectives and lack of necessary equipment, book deficiencies and inappropriate evaluation techniques have been reported as factors contributing to the inadequacy of high school English language programs with regard to this skill (Malmir & Bagheri, 2019; Nikou & Sadeghi, 2012). For example, the study of teaching reading comprehension strategies to Iranian EFL pre-university students (Mehrpour et al., 2012) displayed that although strategic instruction increased students' strategic awareness, it did not create a significant difference in the understanding of the control and research groups.

Teaching reading means involving learners in making meaning, knowing and modeling reading strategies such as semantic mapping, activating prior knowledge, rewriting, guessing and inferring, clarifying meaning through questions, previewing text, drawing and summarizing, using visual support, monitoring and assessing reading comprehension, encouraging the use and generalization of strategies through extended reading, all of which should be taught to students to have successful and comprehensible reading. Recognizing these strategies and focusing on the needs of language learners along with supportive behaviors such as dialogue, interactive question and answer in receiving textual information, monitoring, and providing clues and feedback motivates language learners to have more targeted reading comprehension. Undoubtedly, this kind of strategic reading comprehension improves the autonomy of language learners, however, what should not be forgotten is the acquisition of this autonomy by language teachers. That is to say, what may resolve students' problems is the teachers' clear perception of the process of reading comprehension and the correct method of strategic teaching, which can create a favorable change in educational achievements, because without considering the fundamental role of teachers' beliefs, strategic teaching may not be able to create a remarkable impact on students' reading comprehension. In other words, the initial question to ask is whether English language teachers themselves have reached this stage of independence so that they have a clear understanding of language skills including reading comprehension and have they clearly understood its strategic nature?

Reeve et al. (2004) proposed that language teachers tend to use more controlling educational methods such as encouragement and use less supportive strategies. This is rooted in the cultural aspects that prevail in the foreign language contexts of eastern countries, in which the relationship between the language learner and the teacher is not equal and friendly, but unequal and with respect (Sheeraz et al., 2015). Of course, it should be noted that this cultural relationship should be approved in the sense that teachers receive the necessary training (Tutunis, 2011) so that they can play their main role by using the resources, materials and methods that match the needs of language learners and in line with independent education (Thanasoulas, 2000) and make learners achieve autonomous in learning (Han, 2014).

The first step in providing this training is to assess teachers' needs, which can be done through various descriptive studies to evaluate the perceptions and beliefs of various groups of

practicing and prospective teachers, as well as their professional qualifications. One of these evaluation models was presented by Rajaeenia et al. (2021) for the context of Iran, which includes 6 components, including how to provide teaching and professional duties and responsibilities by creating professional interaction and growth. Such models can be the basis of providing effective professional activities to improve the perception of teachers. The effectiveness of such teacher training programs, of course, have to be measured and assessed through follow-up scrutiny of the viable changes in the teaching performance of those who undergo the training programs as well as the enhancement of educational outcomes achieved by the language learners who are taught by the same trained teachers (Rezabeigi et al., 2021).

5. Conclusion

Reading comprehension is a complex process that requires decoding the text and overcoming many lexical, structural, grammatical, thematic, semantic, unfamiliar words, writing system problems and many other comprehension difficulties. This skill is completely different from reading the text, which is done in the early stages of language learning, and its purpose is to connect verbal symbols with the text. The results of the present research showed that the distinction between these two goals in teaching reading skill has not been established for the teachers participating in this study. In fact, what makes it possible for language learners to overcome the obstacles of reading comprehension is not the reading of the text aloud, as stated by the participants in the present study, but the use of reading strategies which should be taught to increase the students' awareness of the comprehension process and make them gain autonomous (Mokhtari & Richard, 2002; Ahmadianzadeh et al., 2018). Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers need proper training in the field of the nature of reading comprehension skill and this training will be effective only if it is based on the application of the principles of constructivism theory.

Both radical and social constructivism theories in the field of learning emphasize that education is a social and at the same time a personal process in which the teacher reduces the difficulty of learning by asking interactive questions and supporting methods and makes the concepts understandable for the learner, therefore; the information is internalized in the informative cognitive structure (Reagan & Osborn, 2008). In fact, practicing and prospective teachers might be considered educators who need correct educational methods to understand appropriate content by using effective interactive activities to have a clear perception of language teaching concepts (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Johnson (2009) also emphasizes the socio-cultural approach in teacher training in which undergraduate and graduate teachers are as learners who should gain a correct understanding of the nature of language and language skills in the cultural, social and historical superstructures of their contexts in cooperative and interactive activities so that they can shape their activities in the classrooms and influence educational achievements. What should be considered in these teacher training courses is the social, political,

and cultural conditions of the teachers, as well as the relationship between the teachers' professional training and the impact of these courses on their students' achievement of higher educational goals, such as accomplishing autonomy in different language skills. Inevitably, teachers' perception plays a vital role in the learning process, which can be measured by using functional evaluation models of teachers' professional qualifications (Rajaeinia et al., 2021).

The findings of the present study refer to a number of educational suggestions for teachers, syllabus designers and teachers. The importance of reading comprehension for teachers should be recognized and relevant training activities have to be incorporated in teacher training programs not only to familiarize the trainees with the significance of reading strategies but also with how they should be taught and the problems that are usually shared by EFL learners. Syllabus designers should also add a strategic component to the coursebook and instructional materials in order to address learners' needs and facilitate the teaching process for practitioners. Finally, teachers and students themselves can improve their understanding of how to facilitate the reading comprehension process through self-directed professional development and learn what activities might be implemented to raise learners' awareness of strategic reading by using appropriate reading strategies.

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