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Reading Strategies Used by Ajloun National University Students

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Abstract : *This study aimed to identify the main strategies used by Ajloun National University (ANU) students in English reading comprehension skills and to describe the strategies that the students employed to cope with reading tasks. The participants were 20 English major students from ANU. The researchers used a questionnaire to investigate the reading strategies used by ANU students. Data analysis was performed with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).*

The results showed that reading strategies (summarizing, reading for pleasure, using a dictionary, distinguishing fact from opinion and understanding points of view) were the most frequent reading strategies used by the students. Besides, the mean scores of females were higher than males and the mean scores of first year students were higher than fourth year students. Finally, the researchers recommended that teachers should take into consideration their students learning strategies and try to recognize and identify these strategies in order to support less successful students to achieve success and to use these reading strategies to help them to improve their reading comprehension. Moreover, teachers should encourage students to read more English magazines and newspapers and to listen more to recorded text to develop their English language reading and pronunciation

Keywords: *Reading Strategies, Skimming, Scanning , ANU Students*

I . Introduction

Reading comprehension is a process that involves a reader decoding a writer's written words or symbols and then using background knowledge to construct an approximate understanding of the writer's message. Reading is a receptive skill; through it a reader catches or receives information.

The goal of all reading instruction is ultimately targeted at helping a reader comprehend text. Comprehension is affected by the reader's knowledge of the topic, knowledge of language structures, knowledge of text structures and genres, knowledge of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, their reasoning abilities, their motivation, and their level of engagement.

However, the complex process of reading also requires the skill of speaking, so we can pronounce the words that we read. In this sense, reading is also a productive skill in that we are both receiving information and transmitting it. Reading is the third skill of the four language skills which are; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As a process, it can either be silent (in our head) or aloud (that other can hear).

Many students accept that an author's intended meaning is solely in the printed words on the page or screen, and that reading is only a process of obtaining meaning from the source. They approach reading passively, relying heavily on the use of a bilingual dictionary, and as such spend most of their time laboring over direct sentence-by-sentence translations. Despite this effort, their reading comprehension remains poor (Barnett, 1988). To enhance the reading comprehension ability in English, Alfassi (2004) stated that students should "understand the meaning of text, critically evaluate the message, remember the content, and apply the new-found knowledge flexibly". As reading is a complex cognitive process, students need to take active control of their own comprehension processes.

From among various types of learning strategies, reading comprehension strategies have long been recognized by researchers of second/foreign language reading (Brantmeier, 2002; Slataci&Akyel, 2002). As a matter of fact, reading comprehension strategies separate the passive, unskilled reader from the active reader. Skilled readers don't just read, they interact with the text.

Reading comprehension is an extremely important skill, particularly at the basic level. Students can learn from reading variety of things: it helps students to understand things that are written, it can also improve students' knowledge and vocabulary, it may help students to enhance their imagination, and helps students to understand things easily and quickly. Afflerbach, Pearson and Scott(2011) studied the terms reading skill and reading strategies are central to how we conceptualize and teach reading. Despite their importance and widespread use, the terms are not consistently used or understood. Students, who have learning difficulty to decode and recognize words, often have difficulty with reading comprehension. Students who struggle with decoding rarely have a chance to interact with more difficult text and often learn to dislike reading. As a result, these students do not have sufficient opportunities to develop the language skills and strategies necessary for becoming proficient readers. Readers with poorly developed language skills and strategies will not have the tools to take advantage of the obvious structures and

comprehension cues that are part of considerate text nor will they have the extra tools needed to overcome the barriers of inconsiderate text.

II . Purpose of the Study.

The purpose of this study is to identify the main strategies used by Ajloun National University(ANU) students in reading comprehension skills in English language and to describe the strategies that students are employing to cope with reading tasks. However, there are many reasons for students to read such as: the need to reproduce the content of the text in some way or another, the discussion of the ideas it contains, the summary of the text for a report and preparing for an examination. Thus, the lack of studies being conducted in the field of reading comprehension strategies in Jordan is another purpose for conducting this research. Moreover, this research helped students to choose the appropriate reading strategies that fit their learning styles and personalities. In addition, it aimed at providing the teachers of English language with some effective strategies for teaching reading comprehension skill appropriately.

III. Significance of the Study.

The present study is significant because it exposes students to different reading comprehension strategies, highlights the importance of using effective reading comprehension strategies in improving the reading skill, supplies information for further research in reading comprehension strategies and teaches students how to cooperate with others and seek help from peers and teachers to comprehend reading texts.

IV. Questions of the Study.

Q1- What are the common strategies used in reading comprehension by Ajloun National University students?

Q2- Are there any statistically significant differences in using reading comprehension strategies used by Ajloun National University students due to gender?

Q3- Are there any statistically significant differences in using reading comprehension strategies used by Ajloun National University students due to the academic level (first year and fourth year)?

V . Review of Related Literature.

Hayashi (1999) pointed out that reading a lot in both L1 and L2/FL becomes mainly the most important factor for improving reading skills rather than just teaching reading strategies for EFL

students. Extensive reading provides learners with : rich background knowledge, vocabulary recognition, a high motivation for more reading, the basic skills of rapid reading, discovery of reading strategies by learners themselves, and increases guessing capability in context. Mokhtarib and Sheoreya (2001) studied the differences in the reported use of reading strategies of native and non-native English speakers when reading academic materials. Participants were 302 college students (150 native-English-speaking US and 152 ESL students). The instrument the researchers used was questionnaire. The results of the study showed that “both US and ESL students display awareness of almost all of the strategies included in the survey and both groups attribute the same order of importance to categories of reading strategies in the survey, regardless of their reading ability or gender: cognitive strategies (the deliberate actions readers take when comprehension problems develop), followed by metacognitive strategies (advanced planning and comprehension monitoring techniques), and support strategies (the tools readers seek out to aid comprehension).”

Dreyer and Nel (2003) found that many students have low levels of reading ability. This has an unfavorable effect on their chances of academic success. In order to meet the reading needs of students in the 21st century, educators are pressed to develop effective instructional means for teaching reading comprehension and reading strategy use. Daryl and Mike (2005) carried out a study to extend the knowledge garnered with younger populations by determining the reading comprehension strategies most important to adults' success on adult literacy outcome measures. “A panel of six analysts—two practitioners and four researchers—was assembled to conduct the content analysis of the selected outcome measures. Researchers selected four literacy outcome measures for use in this study. The results of the study showed that panelists agreed on the first- and second-choice strategy in a range between 67% and 100%, depending on the text structure and level of difficulty. Scorer agreements were highest for reading selections and tasks related to document text structures.”

Yao (2012) tried to discover if a strategies based teaching approach to teach reading will improve reading comprehension and if the reading strategies used interact with the level of English proficiency of the students. The results of this study showed that more of the participants not only spend time in reading their texts and materials for examinations but also they would spend some time in reading the materials they are interested in. Damrong's (2013) study aimed to explore inference strategies necessary to successfully read journal articles. A total of 88 graduate students at a university in Bangkok participated in this study. The instrument which the researcher used in this study was some comprehension questions. The results showed that the students were successful at interpreting the thesis statement, the gist of the section, the meaning of the tested words and clause.

Chen & Channarong (2014) investigated the use of reading strategies by the University Business English majors in relation to their levels of reading proficiency. The participants were 926

students Business English majors from 6 universities in southwest China. The Strategy Questionnaire for Business English Reading (SQBER) and the Business English Reading Comprehension Test (BERCT) were used to collect the data. The results showed that the students with good reading proficiency reported significantly greater use of reading strategies than the students with either fair or poor reading proficiency at the overall and category levels. Rakchanok (2014) investigated the way of EFL undergraduate students do to improve their reading comprehension, solve the problems encountered while reading, and overcome comprehension failures. Thirty-nine students from four different government universities in Thailand participated in the study. A semi-structured interview served as the main source of data. The data showed that the participants actively invoked a variety of strategies in order to achieve the academic reading texts. The analysis of the data revealed a total of 39 statements which the students reported employing while reading an English academic material. Then the 39 statements were classified into two main categories: strategies for comprehending reading texts and strategies for enhancing textual comprehension category.

Yi-Jiun (2015) carried out a study intended to examine college students' use of metacognitive reading strategies in their first language (Chinese) and second language (English) while reading academic materials. The participants were technological university students in southern Taiwan. The Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire (MRSQ) was applied to investigate learners' use of metacognitive reading strategies in terms of analytic reading strategies and pragmatic reading Strategies in L1 and L2 reading. The results revealed that students used both analytic strategies and pragmatic strategies more frequently when they read L1 rather than L2 in academic articles.

VI . Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 20 students from the Department of English Language and Literature at Ajloun National University [ANU], Jordan. The sample were chosen randomly from the 1st year (5= males and 5= females), and ten students from the 4th year (5=males and 5=females).

VII . Instrument

In order to examine the detected English reading strategies used by English major students, a questionnaire was used in this study. The first version of the questionnaire consisted of (27) items. In order to determine the validity of the questionnaire which is modified by three experts from the Department of English Language and Literature at ANU. However, the final version of the questionnaire consisted of (20) items. Thus, Cronbach's Alpha formula was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. The reliability score of the questionnaire was (0.85) after applied the questionnaire on 6 students from the population of the study. The sample

of the study responded to the items on a five-point Likart scale (always, usually, often, sometimes, never). To analyze the results, Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) interpreted mean scores of the SILL as such that the range of 1.0 to 2.4 was considered as low use of strategy use, the range of 2.5 to 3.4 as medium use, and the range of 3.5 to 5.0 as high use.

VIII. Results of the Study

A -Results related to the first Question : "What are the common strategies used in reading comprehension by ANU students"? To answer this question , means and standard deviations are calculated (see Table 1).

Table :1

Means and standard deviations of common strategies
used by ANU Students.

<i>No</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std.Deviation</i>	<i>Level</i>
1	I skim the text first to obtain the main idea of the text .	20	4.15	1.136	High
2	I practice scanning to comprehend reading texts.	20	3.97	1.234	High
3	I make use of cohesion and coherence of the texts to understand it easily.	20	3.38	.887	Medium
4	I can extract the main idea out of an academic written texts.	20	3.29	.944	Medium
5	I use a dictionary to obtain a detailed sense of what an individual word means.	20	2.48	1.050	low
6	I make predictions about what I expect will happen next in the text.	20	2.21	1.050	low
	Total Score	20	3.24		Moderate

Table 1 showed that the means of the common strategies used by ANU students to comprehend reading texts range between (4.15-2.21). It is obvious from table (1) that the item "I skim the text first to obtain the main idea of the text. " scored the highest mean (4.15). While the item " I make use of cohesion and coherence of the texts to understand it easily." Scored the medium mean (3.38). Whereas, "the item I make predictions about what I expect will happen next in the text." Scored the lowest mean (2.21). Finally, with reference to the total score ,of common strategies used by ANU students to comprehend reading texts, was moderate and the overall mean was (3.24).

B - Results related to the second question : "Are there any statistically significant differences in using reading comprehension strategies used by ANU students due to gender?" To answer this question, means, standard deviations, and t-test were calculated (see Table 2).

Table: 2

Means, standard deviations, and t-test of differences in using reading comprehension strategies due to gender.

Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Male	3.59	.586	.284	.893
Female	3.83	.528		

Table 2 indicated that the mean of male students was(3.59) while the mean of female students was (3.83).Therefore , the results revealed there are no statistically significant differences ($P = .05$) among ANU students in using reading comprehension strategies due to gender.

C - Results Related to the Third Question : "Are there any statistically significant differences in using reading comprehension strategies used by ANU students due to the academic level (first year and fourth year)? " To answer this question , means, standard deviations, and t-test were calculated (see Table 3).

Table :3

Means, standard deviations, and t-test of differences in using reading comprehension strategies due to the Academic Level.

Academic Level	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
First year	3.73	.500	.284	.893
Fourth year	3.69	.636		

Table 3 confirmed that there were no statistically significant differences ($P = .05$) among ANU students in using reading comprehension strategies due to the academic level. The results explained that the first and fourth year students at ANU used the same reading comprehension strategies comparatively.

IX . Discussion

The first question asked about the common strategies used by ANU students to comprehend reading comprehension texts. The results showed that the overall degree of the common strategies used by ANU students to comprehend reading texts was moderate . This result focused on the importance of using reading strategies when the students practiced reading.

The common strategies used by students were: skimming the text, scanning the text, making use of cohesion and coherence to understand the text, extracting the main ideas ,using the dictionary and making predications . The researchers found that the students focused on the skimming and scanning the text to comprehend main ideas and the specific information in the texts .On the other hand, students found it difficult to use the dictionary to find the meanings of the strange and difficult words that helped them understand the reading texts easily and quickly.

The second and third questions asked about the statistically significant differences in using reading comprehension strategies used by ANU students due to gender or to the academic level .Rahimi (2008) studied the use of language learning strategies among 196 EFL learners in Iran (79 males and 117 females). The study found no significant difference between males and females in the use of language learning strategies. The researcher noted that this finding could be related to the fact that the participants of the study were all English majors and it may be possible that “the participants’ awareness of language learning processes minimized the gender effect in this study.” . In contrast, another study conducted by Green & Oxford (1995) examined language learning strategies among 374 ESL students from different levels in Puerto Rico. The study’s results showed that females used more strategies and employed them more frequently than males in all categories, except the categories of cognitive and compensation strategies.

The researchers found that females exert more efforts in learning and studying than males because they want to compete with others and they are keen to success more than males. In addition, the majority of males spend their time outside their houses and they interested in establishing social relationships with others, so they don’t find any time to spend in reading or studying.

The researchers found that the first year students use the modern technology to help them to use the appropriate reading strategies to comprehend reading texts easily . In addition, they are fresh students so they have a strong desire to study and a spirit of competition with others. On the other hand, the fourth year students may be exposed to frustration because of low academic achievement or because they get bored of studying all the previous years. Finally , the findings of this study revealed that the students' adoption of the appropriate reading strategies to learn a foreign language generally, and in learning the reading, in particular, gives better results than reading texts according to the in-classroom ordinary method whose results were proved to be

discouraging to most teachers and students. In this study, the questionnaire showed the most and least reading strategies used by ANU students .

X . Conclusions

The main purpose of this study was to identify the major strategies that ANU students used in reading comprehension skills, and to describe the strategies that this group of students employed to cope with reading tasks. The major purposes of students' reading English texts may include: the need to reproduce the content of the text in some way or another, the discussion of the ideas it contains, the summary of the text for a report and preparing for an examination.

Moreover, this research provided guidance for students in choosing the appropriate reading strategies to fit their own individual learning styles and personalities. In addition, this study aimed at providing teachers of the English language with some effective strategies for teaching reading comprehension skills .The present study is significant for a number of reasons. First, it exposed students to different reading comprehension strategies. Second, this study highlighted the importance of using effective reading comprehension strategies in improving reading skills. Third, it provided information for further research on reading comprehension strategies. Finally, it taught students how to cooperate with others and to seek help from their peers and teachers.

Additionally , this study is a step towards giving justice to this topic and provides teachers and students with appropriate techniques or strategies to help them to comprehend academic texts written in English easily. In conclusion, the students participating in this study showed positive results in using reading strategies

XI . Recommendations

According to the results of this study, the following recommendations are suggested so that they may benefit future research and the educational system as well about the importance of using of read strategies:

- 1- Raising the awareness of students towards reading strategies since reading is considered as an important skill of English language .
- 2- Encouraging students to read more English books, journals, magazines and newspapers and listen more to recorded text to develop their reading and pronunciation in English language.
- 3- Motivating students to use the electronic library and the Internet because they might feel bored of the traditional ones.
- 4- Providing new courses in using technology by the students to improve their way of reading skills

- 5- Making new competitions in reading texts, stories and other literature pieces and books then giving prizes for the highest level of reading.
- 6- Using general reading strategies in particular can help an L2 reader to improve their reading comprehension. As such, teachers should take into consideration their students learning strategies and try to recognize and identify these strategies in order to support less successful student to achieve success and master the target language.
- 7- Incorporating reading strategies into their teaching methods and approaches, teach the students to use the appropriate strategy for a specific purpose or a specific skill area, and encourage them to use the strategies as much as possible.

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