

Main Idea Identification Strategies: EFL Readers' Awareness and Success

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Abstract:

The present study was designed to determine whether there is a facilitatory relationship between awareness of reading comprehension strategies and their effective use in foreign language reading. To that end, it investigated the effects of reading comprehension strategy awareness and use on main idea comprehension and recall of foreign language texts. Subjects were four Libyan Arabic-speaking readers of English as a foreign language (EFL). Subjects provided written recalls of foreign languages texts, which were assessed according to weightings (Kintsch, 1988) derived from a propositional analysis of the texts (Zerhouni, 1996; Schellings, Van Hout-Wolter, Vermunt, 1996; Roloff, 1999). Subjects also completed a Reading Strategy Survey (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002) and a semi-structured Reading Strategy Interview. Additional data were derived from the experimenter's observation of the subjects' approach to the recall task. The results indicate a positive relationship between reading strategy awareness, use of these strategies and main idea comprehension of the text. The implications of these results for teaching FL reading are discussed.

Key words: foreign language reading, reading comprehension strategies, strategy awareness, main idea comprehension

Introduction

The identification of main points is considered to be one of the basic skills in reading a text and is critical to understanding it (Tomitch, 2000). A related skill is the ability to distinguish between main points and subsidiary points. A number of studies have indicated that many students lack proficiency in identifying these main points in their first language (L1) (Hudson, 2007; Schellings & Van Hout-Wolters, 1995; Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). As little is known about the mastery of this ability in learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), the present study investigated four native Libyan Arabic speaking readers' awareness and use of EFL reading strategies. The study examined how these readers interacted with written English texts and the types of reading strategies they used to identify the main idea(s). While acknowledging that the identification of the main and subsidiary points of a text is a complex process, it can be broken down into essentially three main types of reading strategies. These are: Global reading strategies, Problem-solving strategies and Support strategies. According to Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), Global strategies include using background knowledge, identifying the purpose for reading, and self questioning. Problem-solving strategies include deciding what to focus on, getting back on track when concentration weakens, and monitoring comprehension. Support reading strategies include note taking, underlining key ideas or words, and listing major ideas.

The present study examined four Libyan Arabic speaking EFL readers' awareness of the above mentioned strategies, their ability to use them during reading, and the usefulness of these strategies for main idea comprehension and identification. The research questions were: Do EFL readers use Global, Problem-solving, and Support reading strategies in EFL academic reading? Which of the above mentioned strategies help EFL readers to identify the main idea when reading? These questions are addressed through detailed analyses of subjects' text recalls, a written Reading Strategy Survey, a semi-structured Reading Strategy Interview, and observation of the subjects' approach to the recall task.

The next section of the paper provides a Conceptual Framework for the study. This is followed by a section devoted to Experimental Design, including Instruments, Methodology and Subjects. The Results section presents both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data. The Discussion section looks at the findings in terms of the research questions the study was designed to address, while the Conclusion raises some broader implications of the findings for EFL reading and raises issues for future exploration.

Conceptual Framework

One of the main research questions of the present study is whether EFL readers use comprehension strategies of Global, Problem-solving, and Support Strategies to identify the main points of an academic text. This section examines research on the role these strategies play in reading comprehension.

Second Language (L2) Global Reading Strategies

Global Reading Strategies are rather complex, as they rely on the reader's ability to integrate background knowledge with identification of the purpose for reading and self questioning

(Mokhtari and Sheorey, 2002). A number of studies have looked specifically at the role of background knowledge as part of this complex. For example, Chen and Graves's (1995) demonstrate that utilizing prior knowledge is especially useful for comprehending L2 texts containing culture-specific elements that cannot otherwise be accessed. Thus their study affirms that background knowledge activation plays a major role in comprehending and remembering L2 text information and can be considered one of the most important global strategies used for main idea comprehension.

In addition, Anderson (1999) demonstrates that activating background knowledge or schema has a major influence on reading comprehension. Anderson argues that meaning does not emerge entirely from the printed words, but that readers bring certain knowledge to reading which affects their comprehension. Anderson concludes that activation of background knowledge facilitates comprehension of the main ideas of a text because readers' understanding of the meaning of words and the organization of texts facilitates their comprehension and enhances reading skills in both their L1 and L2.

In a similar vein, Lin (2002) and Hudson (2007) studied the role of prior knowledge in L2 reading. The results of Lin's research demonstrate that EFL readers' prior linguistic knowledge is the most important factor for EFL reading comprehension at the beginning stages of FL learning, while readers' prior socio-cultural knowledge is considered the most important factor for FL comprehension at higher levels of proficiency. Lin argues that replacement of linguistic knowledge by socio-cultural knowledge takes place as FL readers improve their target language and attain advanced levels. Hudson (2007) also argues that cultural background knowledge plays an important role in interpreting reading texts, as this type of knowledge interacts reader's comprehension process.

Vann and Abraham (1990) compared successful and unsuccessful Arabic EFL learners in terms of the quantity and quality of global strategies they used in various tasks, including L2 reading. This study provides counter-evidence for the notions that unsuccessful learners are inactive strategy users or that strategy use per se can differentiate between successful and unsuccessful learners. In fact, two unsuccessful learners in this study were found to be remarkably similar to successful EFL learners in their use of strategies. However, the less successful learners usually failed to apply the appropriate strategy for a particular task. In his study examining individual differences in strategy use for L2 reading by adult learners, Anderson (1991) likewise reports that effective reading is not simply a matter of being aware of strategies. This awareness must be coupled with knowing how and when to use the appropriate strategy. Block (1992) agrees that differences that exist in comprehension monitoring strategies between L1 and L2 readers seem to be more related to overall reading proficiency than to the language background of the readers. Both Anderson (1991) and Block (1992) note that skilled L2 readers are as proficient as skilled L1 readers in recognizing problems during reading and in applying problem-solving strategies to resolving them, which often means figuring out which other reading strategies they need to resort to. Problem-solving strategies are the focus of the next section of this paper.

L2 Problem-solving reading strategies

Poor reading performance by L2 learners can be attributed to inadequate use of problem solving strategies when a text becomes difficult to read. As such difficulty can be due to a lack of comprehension monitoring, a lack of awareness of rhetorical structure of L2, vocabulary

difficulty, lack of prior knowledge, and cognitive style, readers must be able to implement a strategy or strategies appropriate to the problem. These may include deciding what to focus on, getting back on track when concentration weakens, and monitoring comprehension. Using a recall protocol, Kim (1995) shows that persistently applying appropriate problem-solving strategies to the reading of L2 materials diminishes both language and reading problems while enhancing overall language learning. These problem-solving strategies include guessing the meaning of unknown vocabulary, rereading to increase understanding, and adjusting reading speed to comprehend text information.

In a similar vein, Najar (1998) conducted a classroom study on the use of cognitive learning strategies during L2 reading tasks. Her results suggest that not all learning strategies are of equal benefit in helping L2 readers to identify main ideas and comprehend a text. On the basis of these findings, Najar suggests that problem-solving reading strategies, such as vocabulary identification and guessing meaning, lead to more successful task performance, because they encourage L2 learners to work with the text in order to comprehend it. Such work involves the use of support reading strategies, discussed below.

L2 Support reading strategies

Support reading strategies are implemented as needed and can include full translation, use of outside reference materials, note-taking, underlining key ideas and words and listing major ideas (Mokhtari and Reichard, 2002). Najar (1998) argues that these strategies enhance comprehension because they involve main idea recognition and organizing information into levels of importance. Note-taking also directs readers' attention toward certain information, such as important points, which consequently increases their recall of information related to the main ideas.

Reading strategy awareness

The research reviewed above establishes the importance of global, problem solving and support strategies for comprehending written texts. Skilled readers rely on global strategies to manage their reading, on problem solving strategies as they process the material and on support strategies to help them comprehend the text. By effectively applying these strategies, L2 readers are able to compensate for a lack of English proficiency. However, in order to successfully use such strategies, readers must also be aware of them and familiar with their appropriate use (Mokhtari and Sheorey, 2002; Bernhardt, 2010).

Research questions

Unfortunately, little is known about the relationship between awareness of reading strategies and their successful use in reading comprehension by EFL readers. To shed further light on this issue, the present investigates EFL readers' awareness and use of the three types of reading strategies categorized by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) and compares these to their ability to identify and comprehend the main ideas of a text. The main research questions are:

Are EFL readers aware of global, problem-solving, and support reading strategies?

Do EFL readers use these strategies appropriately in EFL academic reading?

Which of these strategies contribute to EFL readers' ability to identify and comprehend the main ideas of a written text?

Hypotheses

It was hypothesized that participants' awareness of reading strategies would be related to their use of them, but that only correct application of the strategies would lead to better reading comprehension and main idea identification outcomes.

Methodology

Participants

Participants were four native Libyan Arabic-speaking females between the ages of 27 and 34. The selected participants were recent university graduates in science, law or engineering. These four participants had all studied English as a foreign language in Libya for about six years, four hours per week. They had not received instruction on reading strategies in EFL reading during their education, because the Libyan curriculum and the EFL education system emphasize the teaching of grammar above all else. Moreover, Libyan EFL teachers, who also experienced the Libyan curriculum during their own education, received no training in reading strategies and are thus not equipped to teach them.

At the time of this study, all 4 participants were living in Canada as temporary residents, but had not yet taken any ESL courses in Canada. In this paper, each participant will be referred by her initials. Materials that were used in this study will be introduced in the following section.

Instruments

The instruments are discussed in their order of administration. No time limit was imposed on any of the tasks.

1. Participants' Self-reported EFL Reading Strategy Awareness and Use were measured by Mokhtary and Sheorey's (2002) Reading Strategy Survey, which was translated into Arabic, the participants' first language (L1). This written test consisted of 30 statements, each describing a reading strategy from one of three categories: global reading strategies (13 items), problem-solving strategies (8 items), and support reading strategies (9 items). After each statement, participants indicated how often they use the strategy depicted using a 5-point Likert scale provided after each statement (ranging from 1 'I never do this' to 5 'I always do this'). Participants were reminded that their responses should refer only to the strategies that they think they use during their reading of school-related materials. Appendix X contains an English version of the test.
2. The second instrument was a Text Recall Task based on a reading passage. Bilingual Arabic/English instructions for the task preceded the passage. The target English-language reading text of 719 words was on the topic of "functional foods" or foods that have medicinal functions. The text was interesting and non-technical, as it was written by a native speaker and addresses native English readers of a life style magazine. As it was written by and for native readers of English, without being modified or simplified for learning or teaching purposes, the text can also be considered authentic. This is crucial

for ensuring the reliability and validity of the results of the present study with respect to the participants' ability to comprehend authentic L2 texts. All participants indicated to the researcher that "functional foods" was a familiar topic about which they had sufficient knowledge and interest to inspire them to read carefully. All of them are mothers who are concerned about the health and nutrition of their children.

After reading the passage, participants were given two blank pages upon which they were directed to write as much as they could recall from the text without looking back at it. Participants were permitted to write in either language to avoid the problem of limited L2 production abilities. This allowed for maximum insight into the strategies these EFL readers used for identifying the main idea of the text.

3. The third instrument consisted of informal researcher observation protocol of the participants' performance in order to gauge their active use of various strategies to the extent that such use is observable. While participants read the text and performed the recall task, the researcher took notes on their way of reading, their use of support reading strategies and their use of a translation strategy, such as writing the Arabic translation on the text sheet above the English words as an aid to understanding the text.
4. The fourth instrument was a retrospective semi-structured oral interview (Appendix 1) with each participant during which the researcher discussed their task performance with them in order to confirm what she had observed and to obtain information about the strategies that participants thought they had used.

Results and Discussion

Self Reported Strategy Use

In accordance with Mokhtari and Reichard (2002), participants' scale responses on the Reading Strategy Survey were divided into three levels of utilization of for each of the three reading strategies: high level (mean of 3.5 or higher), medium level (mean of 2.5 to 3.4), and low level (mean of 2.4 or less).

Tables 1 through 3 provide participants' self-reported use of reading strategies by item. The results indicate inter-participant variation in their self-reported use of global and support strategies, with means ranging from high to medium levels (Tables 1 and 3). The highest average in the Global category was obtained by Asia (4.4). Amal scored 3.6, which is still considered a high level usage (Table 1). However, both Wala (2.6) and Nadia (3.2) fall into the medium usage level. In the case of Support Strategies, both Asia and Amal reported a high level of usage (4.2 and 3.7), while Wala and Nadia again were in the medium category (3.2 and 3.3). Conversely, there was no apparent difference in the self-reported use of problem-solving strategies across the four participants, as all of them were at a high level with means ranging from 5.0 to 4.1 (Table 2). Participants' overall means combining the three types of strategies were: Asia-4.5, for Wala-3.2, for Amal-3.8 and Nadia-3.5

Table 1: Participants' Self-Reported Use of Global Strategies

Participant	Global Reading Strategies by Item															Total	Global mean
		1	3	4	6	8	12	15	17	20	21	23	24	27	13		
Asia	S	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	3	4	5	5	5	58	4.4	
Amal	C	4	4	4	2	4	4	3	4	3	3	4	4	3	47	3.6	
Wala	O	5	4	1	2	1	3	4	4	1	1	4	3	1	34	2.6	
Nadia	R	4	3	3	3	4	4	3	1	4	1	4	5	3	42	3.2	
	E																

Table 2: Participants' Self-Reported Use of Problem-Solving Strategies

Participant	Problem-solving Strategies by Item										Total	Problem mean
		7	9	11	14	16	19	25	28	8		
Asia	Scores	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	40	5.0
Amal		4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	34	4.2
Wala		5	4	3	5	4	4	4	4	5	34	4.2
Nadia		5	5	4	4	3	2	5	5	5	33	4.1

Table 3: Participants' Self-Reported Use of Support Strategies

Participant	Support Strategies by Item										Total	Support mean
		2	5	10	13	18	22	26	29	30		
Asia	Score	4	4	5	3	5	4	4	4	5	38	4.2
Amal		4	3	5	3	4	3	4	4	4	34	3.7
Wala		5	5	5	1	2	4	2	2	3	29	3.2
Nadia		5	5	2	4	2	2	3	1	4	30	3.3

Scoring of the Recalls

Scoring of the recalls was based on the number of propositions a participant recalled. The propositions were identified following the guidelines developed by Zerhouni (1996), Schellings, Van Hout-Wolter, and Vermunt (1996) and Roloff (1999), who in turn based their analyses on Kintsch's (1988) propositional analysis model. This propositional structure is a set of propositions organized into a hierarchy that reflects their relative importance in the text. Five hierarchical levels were assigned to the reading text: a Macro propositional level (MP), which is the highest in the hierarchy, presents the topic of the text; a primary propositional level (PI) represents the main ideas; a secondary propositional level (PII) corresponds with the ideas of comparable importance, which clarify and/or expand the main ideas; a tertiary propositional level (PIII) represents ideas of lesser importance, which provide further details regarding secondary propositions; a quaternary propositional level (PIV) presents the details within the text that are related to names of substances and organizations, as well as those that provide clarification for tertiary propositions. In other words, propositions that are not important for main idea comprehension are positioned at this lowest level (PIV).

An idea unit analysis based on this model and verified by a native speaker analyst yielded 79 semantic propositions for the target text in the Text Recall Task. Following the weighting of the propositions suggested in Zerhouni (1996) and Roloff (1999), the scoring of propositions was calculated based on the weighted values shown in Table 4. Thus each participant's score was arrived at on the basis of both the type and the category of propositions that they recalled from the text.

Table 4: *Maximum Possible Score for Text-based Propositions by Level*

Prop. Level	N of Props	Points for each proposition	Total points for each level
MP	1	X 16	16
PI	11	X 8	88
PII	15	X 4	60
PIII	40	X 2	80
PIV	12	X 1	12
Total	79		256

Table 5: *Participants' Propositional Recalls and Total Weighted Scores*

Participant	Number of recalled props. From each level					Total recalled Props. (79)	Total weighted score (256)	Total weighted recall percentage
	M P (1)	PI (11)	PII (15)	PIII (40)	PIV (12)			
Asia	1	6	12	20	5	44	157	61%
Wala	1	4	5	13	2	25	96	37.5%
Amal	1	3	3	13	2	22	80	31%
Nadia	1	6	7	12	1	27	117	45.7%

As indicated in Table 5, participants' total weighted recall scores ranged from 80 to 157 out of a possible 256. The range in scores is not due to participants' ability to recall the major point (MP), which they all did correctly, as expressed through their recall of the title of the text. Instead, they varied considerably in their recall of lower level propositions (Table 6).

Table 6: *Percentages of Recalled Propositions*

Participant	Percentage of recalled props. from each level					Total recalled Percentage
	MP	PI	PII	PIII	PIV	
Asia	100%	54%	80%	50%	41%	55%
Wala	100%	36%	33%	32%	16%	31%
Amal	100%	27%	20%	32%	16%	27%
Nadia	100%	54%	46%	30%	8%	34%

Table 6 shows that Asia had the highest recall overall except for PI, where she tied with Nadia. But Asia was more successful on the second level propositions than on the first level propositions. She identified more from PII (80%) than from PI (54%), which could mean either that she had difficulty recognizing higher-level propositions or that she focused more on the second level ones to the detriment of those from the first level. Nadia evidenced the same recall percentage as Asia from level 1 (54%), but in level 2 she recalled only 46% versus Asia's 80%. Moreover, Nadia recalled 30% of the propositions in level 3 and only 8% in level 4, which is the lowest recalled percentage of all four participants. Wala recalled 36% of propositions from level 1, 33% from level 2, 32% from level 3 and 16% from level 4, suggesting that she paid almost the same amount of attention to these three different propositional levels. Nonetheless, both Nadia's and Wala's recall percentages ranged from high to low in the same order as the proposition levels. This indicates that they focused more on high level ideas than on low level ideas, which suggests that they used some effective reading strategies for identifying the main ideas of the text, although their overall averages are lower than Asia's. Lastly, Amal's recall percentages indicate that she may have focused on level 3 propositions more than on those from levels 1 and 2. Aside from the MP, her highest recall percentage was for level 3 propositions at 32%. This indicates that, like Asia, she had a problem distinguishing the most important from the more secondary ideas or supporting details of the text. In contrast, Nadia's and Wala's recalls indicate that they focused more on level 1 propositions, as they recalled 54% and 36% respectively and their percentages of recalls for the lowest level decreased to 8% and 16% respectively.

In summary, aside from their 100% recall of the MP, the participants varied with respect to their recall of the main ideas of the text. Asia considered the second level ideas as the most important ones, while Amal focused more on the third level propositions. On the other hand, Wala's close recall percentages from levels 1, 2, and 3 indicate an inability to differentiate between main ideas and supporting details. Overall, the generally low overall averages of the recalled propositions, ranging from 55% to 27%, reveal the participants' deficiency in recognizing the main ideas of

the text. An examination of these recall results in the light of data from the researchers' observation protocol and the semi-structured interviews, as well as from the participants' strategy awareness questionnaires, sheds additional light on the participants' approach to FL reading.

Text Recall as a Function of Self-reported Strategy Use, Observed Usage and Interviews

A comparison of participants' total averages on the L2 Reading Strategy Inventory with their propositional recall results indicates a predictive relationship between self-reported use of more main idea comprehension strategies and greater recall of idea units from the text (Table 7). For example, Asia scored 4.5 overall in the strategy survey and recalled 55% of the propositions of the text, which represent the highest scores in both cases. The other three participants performed similarly to one another, achieving scores at lower levels on both awareness and recall.

These findings are consistent with Najar (1998), who reports that readers more proficient in finding and comprehending main ideas used global and problem-solving strategies more often than less skilled readers.

Table 7: Scores of Recall and Self-Reported Comprehension Strategies

Participants	Recall %	Mean Overall Strategy Use	Mean Global Strategy Use	Mean Problem Solving Strategy Use	Mean Support Strategy Use
Asia	55%	4.5	4.4	5	4.2
Amal	27%	3.8	3.6	4.2	3.7
Wala	31%	3.2	2.6	4.2	3.2
Nadia	34%	3.5	3.2	4.1	3.3

Another notable finding was that conscious application of global reading strategies correlated positively with reading performance and comprehension, which is consistent with the conclusions of Feng & Mokhtari (1998). For example, Asia scored 4.4 in self-reported global strategy usage and recalled 61% of the text. This finding agrees also with the results of Swaffar, Arens, & Byrnes (1991), whose research on EFL and ESL reading for meaning indicated that users of global reading strategies focus primarily on textual propositions. Likewise, both the researcher's observations and the data on strategy awareness in the present study indicate that support reading strategies such as note taking, translation, underlining of key words, and strategies which utilize some form of main idea recognition led to more effective comprehension of the reading text than cases where there was no evidence of support strategy use. Furthermore, strategies that include main idea recognition and the organization of information into levels of importance lead to more interpretation and analysis of the text owing to the fact that they involve the reader in working and interacting with the text to understand it and committing time to the task. According to Najar (1998) and Hudson (2007), this interaction leads to a better understanding of the text content. Hence, using this reading strategy improves FL reading comprehension.

Lack of FL Reading Strategies

Conversely, lack of FL reading strategies causes most of the problems of misinterpreting the paragraphs of the reading text. In explaining why participants could not recall the main idea of the reading text, it is crucial to emphasize that the most important aspect of getting the author's main idea is to understand what s/he is saying in each paragraph by using the required strategies. This is in agreement with Jacobowitz (1990). However, according to the researcher's teaching experience, most of EFL readers' problems in paragraph interpretation are: getting a vague general notion of the text without comprehending the main point of the author; failure to realize the relationship between the main idea and the supporting details of the text and to differentiate between them; or introducing irrelevant concepts that the author never intended.

Another explanation of this study's EFL readers' failure to locate and identify the main idea of the text was their lack of the following reading strategies: reading the introduction and the conclusion; focusing on the topic sentences of the paragraphs; and using appropriate macrostructure formation (Mannes and Kintsch, 1987). The analysis of the participants' recalls, researcher's observations and their statements during the discussion with the researcher supported this notion, since they revealed that they read the text word by word, from the first word to the last word, paying the same amount of attention to every word. According to the researcher's observation, Amal and Nadia did not realize where one sentence began and another ended since they read the paragraph as if it were one sentence. They dealt with the text in terms of words, not sentences or paragraphs. They did not pay attention to the introduction or to the conclusion, since they were not aware of the text structure or organization. This was noted by the researcher during the experimental session and also stated by the participants. "*I read every word and try to understand its meaning*". They read all the words and tried to understand the meaning of each word; they were intent on not missing a word. This explanation agrees with Swaffer, Arens and Byrnes's (1991), Bernhardt (2010) and Hudson (2007) discussions that readers with low proficiency are more likely to use bottom-up strategies, such as paying the most attention to the meaning of individual words.

Participants' inability to decide on the importance of some of the main ideas of the text was another crucial contributing factor to their failure to identify them. For instance, Amal stated that she focused on every word and paid the same amount of attention to every word. On the other hand, Nadia used the opposite strategy to Amal's. Nadia neglected some important ideas or keywords completely and did not make an effort to understand their meaning. Block (1992) called this strategy "omitting" (when readers did not recall a component that was in the text). Some words that Nadia failed to understand and later could not recall were examples of omission. This omission of important ideas or words shows that Nadia could not decide on their relative importance.

Nadia also had a problem with connecting words to each other in a sentence, and with connecting different sentences with each other in a paragraph to understand the idea. By not paying attention to the beginning and the end of the sentences to comprehend their ideas, she merged a part of one sentence with another part of another sentence in the text in her written recall. For example, she wrote "*green tea reduces cholesterol and prostate cancer.*" However, the text says "green tea reduced cancer risk, lycopene in tomatoes and tomato products reduced risk of some types of cancer, especially prostate cancer." From this example, it was obvious that

Nadia merged the first two sentences from one paragraph with the last sentence of the previous paragraph.

Moreover, according to the researcher's observation of two of the participants during the experimental session, vocabulary difficulty with even simple non-technical words was one of their most serious problems. This is in agreement with Coady (1993) and Lems, Miller & Soro (2011), who assume that the lack of word recognition skills is often a cause of difficulties in developing L2 reading comprehension.

In contrast, all the participants brought their background knowledge to bear on understanding the main idea of the text by remembering and recalling what they had heard elsewhere about functional foods and their health benefits. For example, they recalled types of foods not mentioned in the text such as, "*parsley reduces risk of urinary tract infection*" and "*nutmeg is good for kidney pain*". Also Amal used the base form of some words as a strategy to understand the new words. For instance, Amal returned the word "convincingly" to "convinced" as she was thinking aloud while reading the text.

Conclusion

The results of this study illustrated the correlation between reading strategy awareness (as measured by the Reading Strategy Survey of Mokhtari & Reichard, (2002)) and use (as observed by the experimenter) and main idea comprehension. Participants who used more main idea comprehension strategies recalled more idea units from the text. This notion is supported by the fact that those participants who believe that they implement L2 reading strategies and actually use them were more successful performers in the propositional recall task. The results suggested that not all support reading strategies were equally effective in helping the readers to identify the main idea and to understand the content of the text. It appears from the data that strategies such as vocabulary identification and translation were useful only when applied in conjunction with strategies which encourage the utilization of some form of main idea recognition. On the other hand, the data showed that support strategies such as note-taking and underlining key-words or ideas that involve organizing the information of the text into levels of importance and main idea identification led to more successful task performance. Therefore, EFL readers who used FL reading strategies of main idea identification were more capable of comprehending and identifying the main idea of the text.

However, none of the participants performed at an even near native level on the comprehensions task despite their apparent awareness and use of at least some reading strategies. This suggests that reading comprehension strategies alone are not effective unless EFL readers are capable of appropriately applying them. In other words, it is not enough to simply know the appropriate reading strategies; EFL readers must also be able to regulate and monitor the use of these strategies in order to comprehend reading texts. Helping EFL readers to think about their reading processes and encouraging them to build up their confidence to use their reported strategic knowledge may enhance their reading comprehension. This metacognitive knowledge might also help EFL readers to understand that linguistic proficiency in a FL is not the only factor in assisting their reading comprehension. Such knowledge could help them to realize that reading strategies play an obvious role in comprehending the main idea of any reading text.

In the light of the present study, as well as previous research findings, it might be possible to

enhance readers' reading comprehension by having teachers focus students' attention on both identifying main ideas and important supporting details in texts. This can be done by teaching some of the basic reading strategies, such as skimming and anticipating. It is crucially important, before asking teachers to incorporate strategy instruction in their classrooms, to convince them that students may have reading problems that must be resolved and that resolution of these problems is more important than teaching the meaning of specific words and concepts (Block, 1992). This could be done by providing teachers with programs and seminars on FL reading strategies. The goal of these programs would be to introduce teachers to cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies and to convince them of their importance to students' ultimate success in reading.

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APPENDIX I:

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

At the end of the recall protocol session, the researcher asked participants to retrospect about their reading session. This was guided by the following questions:

- 1- At what rate (quickly, moderate, or slowly) did you read the text? And why?
- 2- In which order did you read the text? (e.g. 1st paragraph, 2nd paragraph. etc. or 1st, last paragraph.)
- 3- What did you specifically do to understand the text?
- 4- Describe the strategies that you used to make sure you understood the text.
- 5- What did you do to remember the important points of the text?
- 6- Did you do anything else to help you understand and remember the text?
- 7- Is there anything that you would like to add?