A STUDY OF USE OF READING STRATEGIES BY ADULT LEARNERS OF ENGLISH IN PAKISTAN

Salma Khatoon [1], Sultan Muhammad [2], and Syed Azaz Ali Shah [1,*]

[1] *Department of English Kohat University of Science and Technology, Kohat, Pakistan*
[2] *Department of English, Hazara University, Mansehra, Pakistan*

ABSTRACT

Strategic reading has been recognized as an important and critical skill that ensures better reading comprehension abilities. It is evident from Second Language (L2) reading research that less skilled readers are unaware of the use and importance of reading strategies. English is the official language of Pakistan and is used in almost every field of life. Despite this wide use of English, English language teaching and learning in Pakistan is unsatisfactory. This study explored the use of reading strategies by undergraduate and graduate-level learners of English in Pakistan. A Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) was used to collect data. Fifty undergraduate-level and fifty graduate-level learners participated in the study. Results of the current study showed that almost all the learners frequently used almost all the reading strategies. No statistically significant difference in the use of reading strategies was found between undergraduate and graduate-level learners. Support reading strategies were preferred more by undergraduate-level learners, and graduate-level learners preferred global reading strategies. No statistically significant difference was found between the male and female learners of English in terms of the use of reading strategies.

INTRODUCTION

English has bsecome the global and predominant language in today's global world. Therefore, the number of people who learn and study English has increased. There are different reasons why students learn English. One of the main reasons for learning English as a second/foreign language is to excel academically and professionally. Students need better abilities in English both in academic contexts and professional fields. Academically they need better abilities in English to get good grades, and professionally they need better English abilities to communicate easily with their colleagues. All four linguistic skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) are crucial in developing second language abilities. However, reading is considered one of the important linguistic skills that must be focused on to develop better English abilities. Research shows that higher proficiency in reading and skilled reading abilities ensures academic and professional success (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Grabe, 2009; Muhammad, 2011). Reading is a very important and essential skill as it allows the learners to reach knowledge and relevant information and is therefore considered the necessary skill for the learners to master (Ghahari & Basanjideh, 2017; Meniado, 2016). Furthermore, reading is one of the important and major language learning skills. It has multifarious functions. However, it is a difficult and time-consuming process to become an expert in reading comprehension (Ali et al., 2022). Different languages are spoken in Pakistan as it is a multilingual country. Urdu is the national Language of Pakistan and English enjoys the status of being an official language along

with Urdu. English is used as the medium of instruction in higher education institutions (Gul et al., 2022). It is also widely used in different domains of life in Pakistan, like business, administration, bureaucracy, military and judiciary affairs, government offices, and media (Shemeem, 1993). Despite this wide and extensive use of English in various domains of life, the situation of English language teaching and learning and the learners' overall proficiency is not satisfactory. It is evident that even after studying and learning English for so many years in schools, colleges, and universities, most Pakistani learners cannot communicate in English with relative ease and success. The more alarming situation is that these learners lack basic linguistic skills. It has been widely observed that Pakistan's students face difficulty reading in English. Even after studying English for so many years, these difficulties and the low-level reading proficiency of the students served as a motivation to conduct the present study.

In Pakistan, English is taught and treated as a subject, not a language (Muhammad, 2011, 2013; Sultana, 2007). Muhammad (2011) pointed out that along with the unsatisfactory condition of English language teaching and learning, another serious problem is that reading is given very little importance in academic contexts. Reading skill is not considered important in developing learners` proficiency in the English language, and very little attention is paid to the development of reading skill. A close analysis of the studies like Muhammad, 2011, 2013, Sultana, 2007. Memon & Badger (2007) highlight the need and importance of better reading skills and abilities and effective reading instruction for developing learners' proficiency in English and helping them succeed both academically and professionally. Students are provided rare opportunities to read on their own in classrooms. In Pakistan, students are not encouraged for silent reading. Teachers often tend to translate texts in English into Urdu or other local languages (Younus & Khan, 2017). Very little or no attention is paid to developing the metacognitive awareness of strategic reading in Pakistan. This unsatisfactory situation of reading does not lead to the development of positive attitudes toward reading in English. As a result, students do not develop a personal interest in reading (Dilshad, 2006).Reading is a complex and interactive process. Reading is the process of extracting meanings from the text. People read different texts in their daily lives, such as magazines, newspapers, advertisements, billboards, posters, bills, emails, text messages, etc. But some reading becomes very demanding, specifically reading at higher levels in academic settings. Reading in a second language is much more complex and demanding, which results in lower reading abilities of learners in L2. Researchers and experts recommend strategic reading instruction to help learners become skilled readers. Expert and strategic readers employ various strategies for comprehending and extracting meaning from the text.

Research shows that strategic reading is important for better reading skills and abilities. Strategic readers read and comprehend texts with relative ease and success compared to those who are not strategic readers. Therefore, it is important for teachers and learners of English to pay much attention to developing strategic reading behaviours. This study aims to determine whether undergraduate and graduate-level learners of English in Pakistan are strategic readers. Furthermore, this study aims at finding out the variation in the use of reading strategies with gender and education level.

Research Questions

1. Which reading strategies are used by the majority of the university level students of English in Pakistan?

2. Do undergraduate and graduate-level learners differ significantly in the use of reading strategies?

3. Is there any statistically significant difference between male and female learners of English in Pakistan in the use of reading strategies?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Second language reading takes on increasing importance because the majority of the countries are either bilingual or multilingual, and citizens of the present-day global world are required to have better proficiency in English for better functioning both personally and professionally (Grabe, 2009; Grabe & Stoller, 2002 and Muhammad, 2011). Research on the nature of automatic versus strategic reading, metacognition, strategic competence, and human information processing helps in understanding the theoretical and pedagogical issues underlying reading comprehension and instruction (Phakiti, 2006). According to Raftari et al. (2012), research regarding reading strategies has provided important insights about: (1) Types of reading strategies used by both native and non-native English learners as well as learners of other languages; (2) Difference in the use of reading strategies across different proficiency levels, gender, and languages; (3) Advantages of strategic reading instruction and; (4) Relationship between strategic reading and instruction with reading comprehension and skilled reading abilities

According to Grabe (2009), knowledge about what happens in the mind during reading and metacognitive awareness about the processes involved in reading plays an important role in reading comprehension. Research in the area of reading and reading comprehension has revealed that getting learners think about what they do when they read is important. Comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading. One of the most important goals of all reading instruction is to help students become expert and strategic readers so that they can better understand the text, achieve independence, and use literacy for lifelong learning and enjoyment (Janzen & Stoller, 1998). Learning to use strategies effectively is essential for constructing meaning. Various researchers (Grabe, 2009; Paris et al., 1991) have identified that non-strategic readers often face difficulties while reading.

A strategy is a plan that is selected deliberately by readers to accomplish a specific goal/s or to complete an assigned task to accomplish a goal and improve their language learning (Anderson, 2003; Grabe, 2009; Paris, Lipson & Wixson, 1983 and Paris, Wasik & Turner, 1991). As for as research in the field of reading during the past few years is concerned, its main focus is on the importance of strategic reading and reading instruction impacts on reading comprehension. The literature strongly suggests that the metacognitive awareness of ESL learners about the reading processes facilitates students to become constructively responsive, thoughtful, and strategic readers. There is strong evidence in L2 reading research that ESL students' metacognitive awareness about reading processes helps them become 'thoughtful, constructively responsive, and strategic readers' for academic success. Reading strategies can be taught, and students become better readers when their metacognitive knowledge about reading strategies and strategy use is developed (Carrell et al., 1989; Zhang, 2008). Research reveals that skilled L2 readers are strategic, i.e., they employ different kinds of reading strategies while reading. Not skilled readers are unaware of the efficient and proper use of reading strategies and rely on only a few strategies (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2002). Simpson & Nist (2000) highlighted that skilled and strategic reading is more important and critical at a higher level of education (colleges and universities) because, in secondary schools, readers need to be more independent and critical.

Researchers around the world have investigated the relationship between reading strategy use and reading comprehension of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. They also have tried to explore the impact of reading strategy instruction on the behaviour of ESL students as readers (Anderson, 2009). While teaching in the classroom, the teacher has different types of readers, i.e., good, proficient, less proficient, and struggling readers. This diversity in students' abilities should not be considered a challenge; rather, the teacher needs to have a planned curriculum and understanding of the varied preferences of his/her students. Research reveals that better reading comprehension requires strategic approaches. Therefore, teachers and instructors need to explore the strategies different readers use during the reading process.

L2 proficient and skilled readers are skilled in the use of reading strategies, while less proficient readers use only a few reading strategies, and they are not aware of the adequate and efficient use of reading strategies (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2002). Different researchers across the world have explored the effects of strategic reading instruction and conscious use of reading strategies or text comprehension in ESL or English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts. One such instruction is Explicit Reading Strategy Training (ERST). It is renowned and very effective teaching of explicit reading strategies in ESL and EFL contexts to improve reading comprehension.

Muhammad (2011) pointed out the limited body of publically available research literature based explicitly on empirical evidence on the learning and teaching of English in Pakistan. Very little research is being done on reading instruction in Pakistan. Only a few researchers have been found working in this area. Muhammad (2011) explored the beliefs of English teachers about reading in English and their instructional practices across six public sector universities in Pakistan. The researcher highlighted that the situation of English language teaching and learning in these universities is not satisfactory, and there is a lack of awareness about the importance of reading in academic contexts. Similarly, a huge discrepancy was found by Muhammad (2013) between the instructional practices and beliefs about English language teaching of these university teachers. It was found that most teachers prefer to use traditional methods such as reading allowed and asking oral questions, which do not help develop students' reading abilities and skills.

Sultana (2007) explored Pakistan's sociocultural and psychological frames of reference for second language reading skills development. The researcher found that Pakistani L2 learners of English lack functional competency at the advanced level of L2 reading, and reading is not planned in Pakistani institutions. She found that teachers and learners in Pakistan are unaware of the importance of reading skill development. Similarly, Memon & Badger (2007) highlighted problems and deficiencies in the teaching of reading skills in Pakistan. Hassan (2009) and Warsi (2004), in their article, mainly highlighted the ways English is taught in Pakistan and some general factors responsible for the overall unsatisfactory situation of English language teaching and learning in Pakistan. Different researchers (Khan et al., 2017; Khan & Khan; 2016; Bashiruddin & Qayyum, 2014; Muhammad, 2013; Warsi, 2004) have highlighted numerous factors responsible for the unsatisfactory situation of teaching and learning English in Pakistan. These factors include overcrowded classrooms, outdated teaching methods and syllabi, designing courses and syllabi without proper needs analysis, lack of qualified and trained English teachers, and lack of sufficient resources and teaching aids. According to Teevno et al. (2020), reading is a skilled teacher in Pakistan emphasizes and engages students in tasks like reading aloud silent reading, and finding out specific meanings in the text, but teachers do not involve students in creative tests based on their reading. The teaching of reading is not properly planned.

The above-reviewed studies reveal a few important points regarding teaching and the importance of reading skills, specifically in academic contexts. First, there exists a close connection between reading strategy use and L2 reading proficiency. Second, gender affects the frequency of strategy use. Third, reading strategies use is widely researched in ESL/EFL contexts except in Pakistan. Fourth, only a few researchers found working reading strategies use and reading instruction in Pakistan. This research gap needs to be filled.

METHODOLOGY

The research design of the study was quantitative in nature. The researcher used a descriptive survey research design within the quantitative research paradigm.

Population and Sample

The target population for the current study was the L2 learners of English in public sector universities of Pakistan enrolled in both undergraduate and graduate programs. A Non-random, purposive, and

convenience sampling procedure was adopted to select the sample. The sample was broadly divided into graduate and undergraduate learners. Fifty participants were graduates, and fifty were undergraduates. In both graduate and undergraduate groups, twenty-five were male, and twenty-five were female participants. The universities from which the data was collected are Hazara University Mansehra, Pakistan. University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Muzaffarabad, and Bahauddin Zakriya University, Multan.

Instrumentation

Sheorey & Mokhtari (2002) developed a survey to explore using reading strategies named SORS (Survey of Reading Strategies). SORS was used as a data collection instrument in this study. It is a survey composed of thirty items. It is a five-point Likert- scale questionnaire. The scale ranges from 1- never to 5- Always. It asks the respondents about their perceived use of different reading strategies. The items of this survey are further divided into three subscales: GLOB subscale, PROB subscale, and SUP subscale. GLOB stands for global reading strategies, PROB stands for problem-solving strategies, and SUP stands for support reading strategies. GLOB sub-scale is composed of thirteen items, and these are the strategies used by learners for monitoring their reading plan and progress and deciding their reading aims and objectives. PROB subscale comprises eight strategies that learners use to monitor their comprehension of a text. SUP subscale consists of nine strategies that learners use when text comprehension eludes them even after applying global and problem-solving strategies.

Data Analysis

After receiving the completed questionnaires, the data was coded. Variables were labelled and assigned different values for the analysis. Two separate variables, i.e., Education level and Gender, were created to represent the academic levels and gender of the respondents. Descriptive statistics were run to check the data before any subsequent analysis. The questionnaire was checked for internal consistency reliability, and Cronbach`s alpha value was found to be 0.84, which is greater than the standard 0.75. Frequencies were counted to determine the use of reading strategies. To find out the difference in the use of reading strategies between and across the groups, an independent sample t-test was run by using the registered version of SPSS 21. The following section presents the results of the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first research question of this study aimed at finding out the reading strategies that are frequently used by the majority of the learners in the selected universities in Pakistan. In order to answer this question, frequencies were counted for the participants` responses on all the thirty items of SORS. The results of the frequency counts are presented in Table 1.

Results in Table 1 show that almost all the students were found to be using different reading strategies in their academic contexts with the exception of the following four reading strategies, i.e., S5- reading aloud difficult texts, S-15- using visuals for enhancing understanding, S-16-comprehension monitoring, and S-20--observing typographical features. Among these less frequently used four strategies, S-5 and S-20 are global reading strategies, S-5 is a support reading strategy, and S-16 is a problem-solving strategy.

Furthermore, the frequency count of the reading strategies shows that five strategies out of these frequently used strategies were used more as compared to the others. These include: S-7-slow reading for better comprehension; S-9- getting back on track when distracted, S-10- highlighting information, S-14- carefully reading challenging texts, and S-25- reading again and again for better understanding

The overall use of reading strategies by adult L2 learners in the selected universities in Pakistan is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency counts for the use of reading strategies.

Item	Description	Never (1)	Occasionally (2)	Sometimes (3)	Usually (4)	Always (5)
S1	Reading for a purpose	3	9	9	42	37
S2	Taking notes	7	16	17	28	32
S3	Utilizing prior knowledge	4	6	27	27	34
S4	Text previewing before reading	9	20	23	21	27
S5	Reading aloud difficult text	32	17	10	14	27
S6	Aligning content and purpose	10	14	22	30	24
S7	slow and careful reading	0	7	11	30	52
S8	observing text structure	17	20	21	26	16
S9	getting back on track when distracted	1	5	10	42	42
S10	Highlighting information	2	7	8	28	55
S11	reading speed adjustment	13	8	14	28	37
S12	selective reading	7	6	27	26	34
S13	using reference materials	3	19	18	25	35
S14	closely reading difficult Texts	1	1	7	34	57
S15	using visuals	27	17	20	17	19
S16	comprehension monitoring	14	25	29	17	15
S17	using contextual clues	2	5	34	35	24
S18	paraphrasing text	5	14	19	36	36
S19	information visualizations for memorizing	9	11	18	35	27
S20	using typographical clues	19	23	17	25	16
S21	critically evaluating information	5	17	27	34	17
S22	relating ideas	5	17	26	28	24
S23	noticing new information	3	10	28	30	29
S24	guessing theme and content	1	3	16	44	36
S25	rereading for increasing understanding	2	2	11	32	53
S26	asking questions to be answered	13	13	27	28	29
S27	checking prediction about text	6	17	24	27	26
S28	predicting meanings of non-familiar words	3	10	13	41	33
S29	translating into L1	16	23	24	22	15
S30	thinking about information in both L1 and L2	13	14	20	23	30

The focus of the second research question of the study was to see the difference between undergraduate and graduate-level learners in their perceived use of reading strategies. To see the difference between graduate and undergraduate students in using reading strategies, mean scores of all thirty strategies and on the three subscales were computed, and an independent sample t-test was run using the registered version of SPSS 20. Assumptions of the independent sample t-test were checked and met. Levene`s test for equality of variance was insignificant (p=0.38), showing the equal variance of the dependent variable in both groups. Results in Table 2 showed no statistically significant difference in the use of reading strategies across the education level (t=-0.11, df=98, p=0.91>0.05).

Table 2. Difference between undergraduate and graduate level students in the use of reading strategies

Variable	M	SD	t	df	p
Undergraduate	3.60	0.53	-0.11	98	0.91
Graduate	3.61	0.48			

No statistically significant difference in the use of reading was found between the undergraduate and graduate-level learners of English in Pakistan. Means scores of both the groups on the overall strategy use show that both the groups do not differ from each other significantly. Results show that learners in both groups are high strategy users (mean score 3.5 or higher=high). However, means scores on the subscales indicate that graduate students scored slightly higher than an undergraduate students on global reading strategies (graduate =3.55 and undergraduate=3.44). This shows that graduate students reported high and undergraduate medium use of global reading strategies. Similarly, both groups reported high use of problem-solving strategies (graduate= 3.92 and undergraduate =3.88). Furthermore, graduate students reported medium use of support strategies, and undergraduate students reported high use of support strategies (3.39 and 3.58), respectively.

This study also aimed at finding out the difference between male and female students' use of reading strategies while reading in English. To see the difference in the use of reading strategies between male and female respondents, the mean scores were computed for both overall strategy use and subscales. An Independent sample t-test was run through a registered version of SPSS 20. Results of the independent sample t-test are given in Table 3 given below.

Table 3. Gender wise differences in the use of reading strategies by undergraduate and graduate level students

Variable	M	SD	t	df	p
Undergraduate	3.67	0.57	1.20	98	0.23
Graduate	3.55	0.42			

Mean scores in Table 3 indicate that female students scored higher than male students on the overall use of reading strategies (Female=3.67 and male= 3.55). However, t-test results show no statistically significant difference between male and female learners in the use of reading strategies. As far as the subscales are concerned, results showed that high use of both global and problem-solving strategies was reported by female students (mean score= 3.55 and 3.61), respectively, while male students reported medium use of these global and problem-solving strategies (mean score= 3.45 and 3.36) respectively. Additionally, high use of problem strategies was reported by both groups (mean score= of 3.93 and 3.87

The current study explored the use of reading strategies by Pakistani learners of English studying both at the undergraduate and graduate levels in public sector universities of Pakistan. Results showed that all the participants frequently used twenty-six out of thirty SORS reading strategies. Results of analysis of participants' responses in terms of frequency of use indicated that almost all the students (both undergraduate and graduate) were using 26 individual reading strategies out of 30 on SORS, always and usually.

The list of these strategies, is given as: reading for a purpose, taking notes for comprehension, using prior knowledge, previewing text before reading, matching content with purpose, reading slowly and carefully for making sure comprehension, reviewing text structure information, getting back on track when distracted, highlighting information to remember, adjusting reading speed while reading, reading selectively, using reference materials, paying closer attention to difficult texts, using context clues to better comprehend, paraphrasing to comprehension, visualizing information to remember the content, analysing and evaluating information, going back and forth for related ideas, attending to new information, predicting content and theme, re-reading to increase understanding, asking questions to be answered, checking guesses about text, guessing the meaning of unknown words, translating from English to L1 , and thinking about information in L1 and L2.

Only the four reading strategies were not used frequently by these learners are as: reading aloud difficult texts, using visuals for better understanding, comprehension monitoring, and observing typological features.

Furthermore, the results showed that out of the twenty-six frequently used strategies, five strategies were used more frequently as compared to the others. These are as follows:

- Slow and careful reading for better comprehension

- Highlighting information for memorizing

- Closely observing difficult texts and

- Increasing understanding through re-reading

Although students learning and studying English in Pakistan are not being taught reading skills and reading strategies. Reading is a skill that students in Pakistan develop on their own with the passage of time, as pointed out earlier. In view of this, it does not seem unusual that the advanced level students of English in Pakistan have been found using almost all reading strategies without any formal reading strategy instruction. This also indicates that L2 students may develop and learn to use reading strategies without any formal reading strategy instruction. However, it is important to note that the undergraduate and graduate level students reported using reading strategies, but they may not be actually using in real all these reading strategies while reading school-related academic texts in English. Therefore, another study aiming at finding out the difference between real (using Think-aloud Protocol) and perceived use reading strategies (using SORS) will be a great contribution, and the findings of that study might confirm the findings of the present research study.

These findings show that as there is no proper reading instruction/training provided to these students, therefore they use these strategies in order to lessen the problems they face while reading difficult academic texts. Similarly, no statistically significant difference was found in the use of reading strategies between male and female students and also between undergraduate and graduate-level students. One of the main reasons for no statistically significant difference in the overall use of reading strategies between the two groups of participants seems to be the kind of reading tasks assigned to these students; and expectations from the students pursuing master's and M.Phil degrees. Moreover, analysis of the mean scores of both groups of participants (undergraduate= 3.60 and graduate students= 3.61) showed high/frequent use of overall reading strategies by both the undergraduate and graduate level students of English in Pakistan. These results indicate that the advanced level students of English, who pursue either undergraduate or graduate-level degree programs in English, use reading strategies frequently while reading school-related materials and that they are strategic readers. Moreover, the findings of this study that the advanced-level students/learners of English in Pakistan use reading strategies frequently also confirm the findings of the previous research studies related to the high/frequent use of reading strategies by advanced-level learners of English.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current explored the use of reading strategies by adult L2 learners of English in selected universities in Pakistan. Almost all the students reported using all the reading strategies except for a few. This study suggests that it is very important for students to have a good awareness of metacognitive reading strategies, as skilled readers are strategic readers. It also implies that L2 learners should consciously use a variety of reading strategies as reading in L2 becomes much more demanding and complicated. Another matter of concern is that no statistically significant difference in the use of reading strategies between undergraduate and graduate-level students was found despite the fact that it is evident that reading at the

advanced level is more challenging. Teachers and practitioners should highlight the importance of strategic reading and encourage students to become more strategic readers at advanced levels.

Although the findings of this study suggest that the selected students use almost all the reading strategies mentioned in SORS, it is still that most of the students in Pakistan lack the necessary reading abilities. Therefore a follow-up study is needed to explore the perceived and actual use of reading strategies by students in Pakistan. Strategic reading instruction programs should be developed to see the impact of strategic reading on the student's reading comprehension.

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