

English Studies S1 Students' Awareness of Reading Comprehension Strategies and Performance: A Case Study at the Faculty of Languages, Literature and Art, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco

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Abstract

Reading comprehension is the most challenging language skill that the Moroccan University English studies' students face in their learning process. This is due to their low or non-awareness of reading comprehension strategies that shall help them to understand English texts efficiently. Respectively, this survey first attempts to evaluate the students' awareness of reading-comprehension strategies. It also intends to investigate on the relationship between the S1 students' awareness of reading comprehension strategies and their performance in reading comprehension tasks. A sample of 189 University students in EFL context are chosen, but only 158 of them have filled in the questionnaire and completed their pre-test and post-test. All of these 158 students have attended the usual reading curriculum without any special treatment. This research main finding indicates that the S1 students' awareness concerning reading comprehension strategies have not been developed throughout their presence in the usual reading comprehension courses. The other important result of this study reveals that there is no correlation between the S1 students' performance and their awareness about reading comprehension strategies. In brief, the S1 students' scores in reading comprehension tasks are not determined by their degree of awareness about reading comprehension strategies, and the usual reading comprehension classes do not satisfy their academic needs. Therefore, the coming studies should focus on the appropriate teaching of reading comprehension strategies so as to have an effective impact on the students' awareness about reading comprehension strategies and eventually on their performance in reading comprehension tasks.

Keywords

Reading Comprehension Strategies, Awareness, Performance, Improvement, S1 Students, EFL Context

1. Introduction

This article is about the result of a study held to evaluate the EFL students' awareness of reading-comprehension strategies, and its effect on their performance in reading comprehension tasks.

The sample of population of this survey is the S1 English studies' students at the Faculty of Languages, Literature and Art, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco. The choice of the S1 students is due to the fact that reading comprehension course is a part of the syllabus of the first semester of the university English studies. Moreover, the teaching and the learning of reading comprehension strategies should be at the beginning of the English studies process which is the S1. All of them have accepted to participate in my research so as to improve their performance in reading comprehension tasks.

About 189 students who first accept to take part in this research, but only 158 have filled-in the needed Survey of Reading Strategies and completed the answers in both the pre-test and post-test. All the participants have agreed to take part in this survey deliberately, as they become aware of its objectives, through my explanation to them and their teachers' encouragement to do so. As a result, this study would provide teachers with a clear view about the students' needs in terms of reading comprehension courses. The 158 participants in this survey belong to four university groups who have different teachers of reading comprehension course. They all follow their S1 (Semester one) English studies at the faculty of languages, letters and Arts, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Kingdom of Morocco. Additionally, it is worth noting that other universities have been programmed to be involved in this study. Unfortunately, for health reasons and the widespread of COVID-19, it was assumed to constitute the ideal target population for the present research of only the S1 students of the Ibn Tofail university students, as there were fears that all universities would be closed again due to the continuous spread of the pandemic during the time of collecting the data (from September 2021 to February 2022).

1.1. Research Questions

- 1) Does the Moroccan EFL students' awareness about reading comprehension strategies increase at the end of S1 studies?
- 2) Do the students' scores in reading comprehension tasks improve after the S1 studies?
- 3) Does the students' awareness of reading comprehension strategies have an effect on their scores in the pre-test and post-test?

1.2. Data Collection

In this study, three instruments of collecting data have been adopted. First, four questions to evaluate the S1 students' familiarity with reading comprehension strategies, the Survey of Reading Strategies adopted from [Mokhtari and Sheorey \(2002\)](#), and the pre- and post-tests that are selected from a Toefl Test Book.

The collection of this data has allowed for measuring the development of the students' awareness of reading-comprehension strategies, and its effect on their performance in reading comprehension activities.

1.3. Data Analysis

The analysis of the collected data is done by the SPSS version 25, specifically the Paired Samples test and Correlation processes.

First, the Paired Samples test is used to compare the two means of the students' awareness of reading comprehension strategies before and after the end of the S1 classes. In other words, the Paired Samples Test is a parametric test that is adopted in this study to check the effect of regular reading comprehension courses on the students' scores from the one hand and on their awareness of reading comprehension strategies from the other hand, mostly after taking both the pre- and post-tests. Additionally, the correlation statistical method is applied to investigate on the relationship between the students' scores of reading comprehension pre-test and post-test, and the development of their awareness about reading comprehension strategies.

2. The Review of the Literature

Reading is one of the basic skills of a language learning process and its main objective is comprehension. Still, Reading Comprehension in EFL context is a challenging and difficult task that most of EFL readers faces in their process of learning, and this causes their failing or getting low scores in the exams of reading comprehension course. To change this fact, a lot of studies and a considerable amount of literature have been published to prove that reading strategies awareness is an effective tool to achieve and enhance comprehension among EFL learners ([Anderson, 1991](#); [Carrell, 1989](#); [Paris, Lipson, & Wixon, 1983](#)). For this purpose, this survey is held to explore the field of awareness and use of reading strategies that shall help S1 English studies' students to overcome their difficulties in reading comprehension tasks, and reach the ashore of comprehension of English texts.

2.1. Reading Comprehension Strategies

According to [Garner \(1987\)](#), reading strategies are the actions that readers choose deliberately to get meaning. That is, as [Barnett \(1989\)](#) suggests, they are the mental operations or actions used by readers to deal with a text and make sense of what they are reading. Thus, reading strategies are the specific actions or operations used consciously by the readers to understand a text.

Moreover, Paris, Wasik and Turner (1991), refers also to reading strategies as the actions chosen deliberately by readers to fulfill certain goals. Thereby, reading strategies are the actions that readers choose to achieve the determined objective of reading a text which is mainly understanding it, through the use of certain strategies, which are skimming, scanning, contextual guessing, skipping unknown words, tolerating ambiguity, predicting, inferencing, re-reading, using cognates, activating prior knowledge, using cognates and recognizing text structure.

In brief, Singhal (2001), states that reading strategies are how readers conceive a task so as to understand a text, and they are referred to by Carrell P. (1984), as the expert readers' use of rapid decoding, a lot of vocabularies, phonemic awareness, and different strategies to understand a text.

Keeping in mind all the above definitions of reading strategies, it is worth saying that reading strategies are the basic learning tools or instruments that guide readers to facilitate their comprehension of comprehension texts in EFL context.

2.2. Reading Strategies Awareness

In reading comprehension, readers use a wide range of strategies, while involving "conscious and unconscious use of various strategies", to understand a text (Johnston, 1983). This conscious and unconscious use of these strategies is referred to in this article as reading strategies awareness.

In this respect, Rebecca Oxford (1994), Anderson (2002), and Mokhtari & Sheorey (2002), reveal that reading strategies awareness helps readers to understand mostly the text. Once a learner becomes a strategic, his or her reading comprehension ability improves, as his or her effective use of these strategies helps him or her to understand texts easily and efficiently. In brief, the students' low level of awareness of reading strategies means low ability to understand a text, while the wide use of reading strategies, still, indicates the reader's high abilities to understand English texts. Accordingly, Mokhtari and Reichard (2002), state that the high frequency of use of reading strategies refers to the students' high awareness of these strategies, and thereby, the higher their awareness arise about reading comprehension strategies, the higher their scores improve in reading comprehension tasks. Thus, instructors shall expose their students to a wide range of reading strategies and encourage the use of them more frequently than before so as to enhance their awareness about these strategies that shall have a positive effect on their performance in reading comprehension tasks.

Furthermore, in this study, the students' awareness about reading strategies is measured by two tools. The first tool refers to five questions that try assess the students' familiarity with the concept of reading comprehension strategies. Then, the second tool to measure the students' awareness is the SORS, which is adopted from (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002). This latter is composed of 30 items that measure the frequency use of reading strategies among participants, mainly skimming, scanning, inferring, guessing, predicting, activating prior knowledge, questioning,

vocabulary learning, visualizing, graphic organizing, paraphrasing and summarizing.

3. The Results and Discussion

3.1. The Results

The results of this study are taken from the scores of the pre-test and post-test and the questionnaire have been that administered to a sample of population of 189 students, but only 158 of them have filled in the questionnaire, including the Mokhtari and Sheorey's Survey of Reading Strategies (2002), completed both the pre-test and post-test tasks, and answered three questions about their familiarity with reading comprehension strategies. This sample of population of 189 participants has attended regular classes without any treatment. In this respect, two main variables are analysed and discussed, mostly reading comprehension awareness and students' scores in reading comprehension tasks.

3.1.1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

By reference to **Table 1**, the comparison of the means scores between the pre-test and post-test shows that the mean result of the pre-test is 4.31, while the mean result of the post-test is 4.04. Thus, this result is a statistical evidence that the readers who take the pre-test and post-test could not improve their proficiency level in reading comprehension, as their pre- and post-tests scores do not progress.

These results shall be supported by the data presented in **Table 2** which indicates that T-test is (.313), and thereby there is a statistically non-significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores.

According to the results stated in **Table 1** and **Table 2**, the students' reading proficiency level at the beginning of S1 classes is higher than at the end of these classes. This slight difference of $-.27$ can be explained by the students' non-benefit from reading comprehension classes in S1 to develop their reading comprehension skill in the Moroccan EFL Context.

Table 1. Paired Samples Statistics for pre-test and post-test.

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test score	4.3196	158	2.92487	.23269
Post test score	4.0411	158	2.68753	.21381

Table 2. Paired Samples Test for pre-test and post-test.

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
-Pre-test score/ -Post test score	.27848	3.46111	.27535	-.26539	.82235	1.011	157	.313

3.1.2. Reading Strategies Awareness

In determining reading strategies awareness, two variables are evaluated, mainly frequency use and familiarity. These variables are determined through the questionnaire administered to the participants which include SORS adopted from Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) and four questions about the students' familiarity with reading comprehension strategies. These two evaluated elements are referred to by Johnston, 1983 as "conscious and unconscious" use of strategies. Besides, in this study, the students' awareness about reading comprehension strategies is composed of both students' frequency use of reading comprehension strategies and their familiarity with them.

Firstly, the comparison of frequency uses of reading comprehension strategies and familiarity with them while taking the pre-test and the post-test are represented in both Table 3 and Table 4.

The mean result of the Frequency use of Reading Comprehension Strategies, shown in Table 3, while taking the pre-test is 2.32, and when taking the post-test slightly increases to 2.46. This result is an evident that the use of reading comprehension strategies is about the same while taking the pre-test and post-test.

Similarly, Table 4 shows that the mean result of being familiar with reading comprehension strategies while taking the pre-test is 1.05, while it increases after taking the post-test to only 1.08, which is statistically seems to be non-significant.

Furthermore, both the results that Table 5 and Table 6 indicate below reveal that there is a statistically non-significant difference between Reading comprehension Strategies Awareness (frequency use and familiarity) while taking both tests, as the T-tests results in both Table 5 and Table 6 are successively (.022) and (.096). These statistics are an evidence that students' awareness about reading comprehension strategies does not improve at the end of S1 reading comprehension classes.

Briefly, it has become obvious that S1 students have kept the same level of awareness about reading comprehension strategies throughout all the S1 academic career, and thereby showing no improvement in their familiarity with reading comprehension strategies and their frequency use at the end of the S1 classes.

Table 3. Paired samples statistics for the frequency use of the reading comprehension strategies.

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
While Pre-test R C S Freq Use	2.329	158	.6429	.0511
While Post-test R C S Freq Use	2.462	158	.5602	.0446

Table 4. Paired samples statistics for being familiar with reading comprehension strategies while taking both the pre-test and post-test.

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest familiar with RCS term	1.057	158	.2325	.0185
Post-test familiar with RCS term	1.089	158	.2851	.0227

Table 5. Paired samples statistics for the frequency use of the reading comprehension strategies while taking both the pre-test and post-test.

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
-While Pre-test R C S Freq Use	-.1329	.7236	.0576	-.2466	-.0192	-2.309	157	.022
- While Post-test R C S Freq Use								

Table 6. Paired Samples Test for being familiar with reading comprehension strategies while taking both the pre-test and post-test.

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pre-test familiar with RCS term	-.0316	.2373	.0189	-.0689	.0056	-1.676	157	.096
Post-test familiar with RCS term								

3.1.3. Correlation between Awareness of Reading Comprehension Strategies and Tests Scores

After the evaluation and exploration of the S1 students' reading comprehension scores and the development of their awareness about reading comprehension strategies, it is worth evaluating the relationship between reading strategies awareness and performance in reading comprehension tasks. For this purpose, both the **Table 7** and **Table 8** below reveal that the correlation between Reading comprehension strategies awareness and pre-test scores is not significant as the $p = .071 > .05$ and the $p = .597 > .05$.

Respectively, both below **Table 9** and **Table 10** indicate that the correlation between S1 students' post-test scores and awareness of reading comprehension strategies (frequency use and familiarity with reading comprehension strategies) is also non-significant as **Table 9** shows $p = .673 > .05$ and **Table 10** indicates $p = .965 > .05$.

To sum up, the results represented in **Tables 7-10** indicate that there is no significant correlation between the scores of the pre-test and post-test and the S1 students' awareness of reading comprehension strategies, mainly frequency use and familiarity. Thus, the students' awareness level of reading comprehension strategies is not an indicator of their mastery of understanding reading comprehension texts or failure in reaching comprehension in reading tasks. In fact, the non-correlation between students' reading comprehension awareness and pre-test and post-test scores declares that English studies' S1 students are not exposed to a comprehensive reading comprehension curriculum that include the teaching of reading comprehension strategies. Therefore, S1 students shall benefit from the instruction of reading comprehension that focus on the explicit teaching and learning of reading comprehension strategies that raise their awareness about these strategies and acquisition of the appropriate use of them.

Table 7. Correlaion between pre-test scores and frequency use of reading comprehension strategies.

		Pre-test score	While Pre-test R C S Freq Use
Pre-test score	Pearson Correlation	1	.132
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.071
	N	189	189
While Pre-test R C S Freq Use	Pearson Correlation	.132	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.071	
	N	189	189

Table 8. Correlation between pre-test scores and familiarity with reading comprehension strategies.

		Pre-test score	pretest familiar with RCS term
Pre-test score	Pearson Correlation	1	-.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.597
	N	189	189
pretest familiar with RCS term	Pearson Correlation	-.039	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.597	
	N	189	189

Table 9. Correlaion between post-test scores and frequency use of reading comprehension strategies.

		Post test score	While Post-test R C S Freq Use
Post test score	Pearson Correlation	1	.034
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.673
	N	158	158
While Post-test R C S Freq Use	Pearson Correlation	.034	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.673	
	N	158	158

Table 10. Correlaion between post-test scores and familiarity with reading comprehension strategies.

		Post test score	Post-test familiar with RCS term
Post test score	Pearson Correlation	1	.004
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.965
	N	158	158
Post-test familiar with RCS term	Pearson Correlation	.004	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.965	
	N	158	158

3.2. The Discussion of the Results

The first finding of this study indicates that the reading classes that are addressed to English studies' S1 students do not contribute in raising their awareness about reading comprehension strategies, mainly the frequency use of reading strategies and familiarity with them. According to the statistical results shown above in **Tables 3-6**, the students' awareness about reading comprehension strategies does not develop throughout the S1 reading comprehension regular classes.

The second result of this survey shows that both **Table 1** and **Table 2** reveal that the students' reading scores in the pre-test is higher than in the post-test. Thereby, this fact can be explained by their low awareness about reading comprehension strategies or the inappropriate instruction and learning of these strategies in the S1 usual Reading Classes.

Moreover, the most important result of this survey is the fact that the S1 students' awareness is not an absolute determinant of their success or failure in understanding comprehension texts, which is contrary to what **Mokhtari and Reichard (2002)** previously stated that readers who are aware of different types of reading strategies and use them in HIGH frequency are automatically successful readers.

Furthermore, this study also reveals that even if the awareness of reading comprehension strategies is an important element in the process of reading comprehension, it should be supported by both explicit instruction and learning of reading strategies, in addition to their appropriate practice in the S1 regular reading classes. In fact, the teaching of reading comprehension strategies should be integrated in the S1 reading comprehension syllabus, so as to enhance the appropriate use of these strategies in reading comprehension tasks.

Briefly, this survey has answered all the above three research questions and resulted in the mainly findings:

- 1) The usual S1 reading classes DO NOT enhance the students' awareness about reading comprehension strategies;
- 2) The S1 students' scores in reading comprehension tests DO NOT improve throughout their usual reading comprehension classes;
- 3) The S1 students' awareness about reading comprehension strategies DOES NOT have a positive effect on the students' scores, neither in the pre-test nor in the post-test.

Briefly, the students' awareness about reading comprehension strategies is not a guarantee for creating successful reading comprehension readers. Therefore, the English studies university curriculum should integrate the explicit and appropriate teaching and learning of reading comprehension strategies to create successful and independent readers. This fact has become a Must that shall be adopted by the department of education that is responsible for the teaching of reading skill. This shall help students to improve their mastery of reading comprehension through the acquisition of the appropriate ways of practicing them

and thereby being S1 successful readers who can follow their language learning career without serious deficiency in reading comprehension. Respectively, all the partners who are involved in the educational process should work together for the integration of reading strategies in the educational curriculum of the S1 university students.

4. Conclusion and Limitations

To conclude, the findings of this survey indicate that S1 students' awareness about reading comprehension strategies is not enhanced throughout the S1 reading comprehension classes that these students are exposed to. This is due the inappropriate teaching and learning of reading comprehension strategies or the non-integration of these strategies in the syllabus of reading comprehension courses at the university.

In addition, the analysis of the students' awareness of reading strategies (including frequency use and familiarity) and the scores of the pre-test and post-test reveals that reading comprehension strategies awareness is not an indicator of students' performance in reading comprehension tasks. Thus, teachers and curriculum designers should give much importance to the appropriate learning and instruction of these strategies. Nevertheless, these results above are not completely reliable unless an experimental group is created and appropriate instruction of reading strategies are provided with. Eventually, the coming article shall also take into consideration the creation of an experimental group, their motivation, the analysis of the English language proficiency of the participants, and the provided English textbooks or reading file in order to evaluate the integration of the appropriate learning and teaching of reading strategies at the university reading classes.

These above limitations should be taken into consideration so as to check the readers' developing awareness about reading strategies after being exposed to appropriate instruction and learning of these strategies. The readers shall score higher grades in reading-comprehension tasks, and show better understanding of reading comprehension texts after benefiting from explicit and appropriate instruction of reading comprehension strategies.

5. Implications and Recommendations

According to [Mokhtari and Reichard \(2002\)](#), the high awareness of reading strategies is an indicator of successful readers. Moreover, the use of various reading strategies shall also help readers to master their reading comprehension as this variety knowledge of strategies allow them to shift from one strategy to another to overcome their difficulties in understanding ([Brookbank, Grover, Kullberg, & Strawser, 1999](#)).

However, the results of this research show that the level of reading strategies awareness is not an indicator of understanding in reading comprehension texts. Thus, teachers shall expose their students to explicit and appropriate reading

strategies instruction. Respectively, many surveys held by Paris, Lipson and Wixon (1983), Carrell (1989) and Anderson (1991) have revealed that the teaching of reading strategies are indispensable for the students' advancement in reading comprehension. Students who are exposed to appropriate reading strategies training shall be better readers than the ones who use wide range of strategies, but inappropriately.

Hence, curriculum planners and textbooks writers shall be called to "include activities which utilize reading strategies in the materials used with students" (P:1), AD-Heisat, Mohammed, Krishnasamy and Issa (2009). To achieve this, teachers should benefit from workshops on the appropriate instruction of reading comprehension strategies and expose them to different activities that may enhance the learning of these strategies.

Furthermore, Grabe (1991) states that these trainings on reading strategies should be clear and regular, yet not randomly practiced and annually organized. Hence the teaching and learning of reading strategies shall be a part of the teachers' continuous training and education.

Besides, teachers, curriculum designers, textbooks writers, academic researchers and decision-makers should encourage the integration of the teaching and learning of reading strategies throughout all the students' university career and develop activities that shall enhance their appropriate learning of these strategies.

To conclude, all the above educational measures may help in developing the S 1 students reading comprehension tools to be independent and good readers. All the concerned parties should work together to create tasks that aim at helping EFL readers to be effectively aware of reading strategies and master their appropriate use to reach the ashore of being good and independent readers.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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