Exploring Reading Comprehension Strategies and Their Influence on EFL Students' Reading Competence

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استكشاف استراتيجيات الفهم القرائي وتأثيرها على كفاءة القراءة لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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Abstract:

This study aims to reveal the EFL fourth-grade female students' attitudes toward the influence of reading comprehension strategies on students' reading competence. The participants were 41 female students from the Department of English (Evening Studies) at the College of Education for Women, University of Anbar. Out of the total number of participants, only 11 female students participated in the pilot sample, the rest (30) students participated in the survey. The design of the study is a survey study. A questionnaire was built to collect the data for the study. The validity and the reliability of the questionnaire were verified. The results revealed that the students have positive attitudes toward the influence of reading comprehension strategies on students' reading competence, the strategies help the students in skimming and scanning texts helped them to quickly grasp the main ideas, also the note-taking strategy helps the students to retain the important information, and finally, the majority of the participants agree that the "Repeated Reading strategy" contributes to a better understanding over time.

Keywords: Reading comprehension strategies, EFL students, and Reading competence.

الملخص:

تهدف الدراسة إلى الكشف عن اتجاهات طالبات الصف الرابع في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية نحو تأثير استراتيجيات الفهم القرائي على كفاءة القراءة لدى الطالبات. بلغ عدد المشاركات ٤١ طالبة من قسم اللغة الانجليزية (الدراسات المسائية) في كلية التربية للبنات – جامعة الانبار. ومن إجمالي عدد المشاركات، شاركت ١١ طالبة فقط في العينة الاستطلاعية، بينما شاركت ٣٠ طالبة في الدراسة المسحية. تم تبني التصميم المسحي لتحقيق هدف الدراسة. وتم بناء استبانة لجمع البيانات الخاصة بالدراسة. وتم التحقق من صدق وثبات الاستبيان. أظهرت النتائج أن الطالبات لديهن اتجاهات إيجابية نحو تأثير استراتيجيات الفهم القرائي على كفاءة القراءة لديهن ، كما ساعدت الاستراتيجيات الطالبات في قراءة النصوص ومسحها على سرعة استيعاب الأفكار الرئيسية، كما ساعدت استراتيجية تدوين الملاحظات الطلاب في فهم النص و الاحتفاظ بالمعلومات المهمة، وأخيراً، اتفقت غالبية المشاركات على أن "استراتيجية القراءة المتكررة" تساهم في فهم أفضل مع مرور الوقت.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجيات الفهم القرائي، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية ، وكفاءة القراءة.

Statement of the Problem

The students aim at the school and university level is to gain knowledge and increase their information. The major key to achieve this aim is to understand and comprehend new information. The researchers in this study notice that the students do their best in studying the materials of their specialization, but the outcomes do not meet their interest. To stand on the most significant way to increase and develop the information and knowledge is to comprehend it. In order to reach to the most significant way to do so, the researcher reviewed the literature and found that most recent and novice studies that focus on developing knowledge such as Bogaert, et al. (2023); Bouknify (2023); Fatmawan, et al. (2023); Yapp, et al. (2023); Dolba (2022); and Nguyen (2022) found that reading comprehension strategy (RCS) is the most significant method that enhance students' knowledge and increase their information. To read a text in English language at the level of university is not a difficult task for all the students at the departments of English, but to read a text and inferred its information is not an easy task. There are several purpose of reading, at the university most students read for the purpose of comprehension, to comprehend information to increase their knowledge. To achieve this aim, it is important that students aware of the reading comprehension strategies. It is worth to focus on this area for its significant in facilitating the reading process and

save the learners time. To this end, this study is an attempt to investigate university students" attitudes toward using reading comprehension strategies in learning.

The Aim

This study aims to reveal the EFL fourth-grade female students' attitudes toward the influence of reading comprehension strategies on students' reading competence.

The Question

To achieve the aim of the study, the researchers set the following question "To what extent do fourth-grade female students' express attitudes toward the influence of reading comprehension strategies on students' reading competence?"

The Significance

To investigate the fourth-grade female students' attitudes toward the influence of reading comprehension strategies has several significance on the educational outcomes such as, when the instructor understand the students' preferences s/he will tailor the teaching methods to meet the students' interests. Furthermore, understanding the reading comprehension strategies can be a good motivator for the students to participate in reading activities. Insights into female students' attitudes can reveal the students' needs for further support. The outcomes of this study may shed the light on the needs of integrating the reading comprehension strategies in the instructional curriculum.

The Variables

The independent variable is the reading comprehension strategies**, and the dependent** variable is the academic achievement.

The Limits

The outcome of this study is limited to:

1- Participants: The participants are from the 4th grade (Evening Studies).

2- Spatial: The study was conducted at the Department of English, College of Education for Women, University of Anbar.

3- Instrument: A questionnaire was prepared to collect the data.

4- Duration: This study was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2023-2024.

Literature Review

Reading comprehension is not a new pedagogical technique, it is one most important feature of Grammar Translation Method which emphasizes on reading a literature text and translate it to a first language in order to comprehend it (Shawaqfeh, et al., 2024).

In the last few years, what makes a good reader has changed, reading isn't just about reading and translating. Understanding a text means knowing the meaning of the words, the situation it's

about, and what the author is trying to say. This includes how the words are used and how they are connected, as well as the overall meaning and the situation it's written in. Students often make mistakes when they have to answer questions that ask for more than just facts (Anderson, 2002). They also have to understand what the author is trying to say and make inferences. In simple words, reading means understanding everything in the text, both on the outside and inside. Moreover, teaching students how to read well not only helps them do better on tests, but also helps them succeed in real life when reading is important (Bouknify, 2023).

Understanding what you read is important for lots of jobs. It's also important to mention that students who get better at reading. Students who have practiced their abilities will do better in their language classes. EFL students have to learn how to read in class so they can learn new things. They also need to take a specific test to continue studying at higher levels like graduate school by getting better at reading, they will do better in all their school subjects (Tovani, 2023).

Reading comprehension strategies have been explained in a lot of ways. However, usually, these things are:(1)They all agreed that good readers play an important role. (2) the importance of doing intentional and planned activities while reading, and (3) the goal to get better at understanding the text. Reading strategies are ways to help understand what you're reading. They are planned

and intentional ways to make sense of the text, and readers are actively involved in using them (Afflerbach, et al., 2008).

Many different ways of understanding what you read have been described. However, most experts agree on these key points: (1) good readers play an active role, (2) it's important to have a plan while reading, and (3) the goal is to understand the text better. Basically, reading strategies are ways to understand what you read. Readers use deliberate and planned methods to make sense of the text. Readers are active and involved in this process (Bogaert, et al., 2023).

Understanding what you read is very important for students to do well in school and in their future jobs. Furthermore, if you are not good at understanding what you read, it can have a bad effect on how well you learn, how good you are at solving problems, and your future in school and work. Reading comprehension is when you understand and make sense of what you read (Nanda and Azmy, 2020).

Students who are learning a new language, especially if it's not their native language, don't always fully understand it. They don't learn from the text directly, but they learn from using reading strategies. The act of reading strategies were planned ways to help the reader understand and interpret the text better. So, they are very important for learning and getting better at reading by teaching and practicing (Bouknify, 2023).

Being able to read well is important for learning because it helps you understand and learn about different things (Muhibbah, 2023). Acting out stories can help people understand real-life situations better, especially challenges encountered in school or daily life information about the environment is usually given in written form (Erkek, 2022). Students need to be good at understanding what they read. Understanding what you read helps you figure out the different meanings of the writing (Subagio, 2023). To understand the text better, readers can think about what they already know and use that to help them. Understanding what you read needs a lot of focus. You have to carefully study, break down, organize, and find the hidden message in the words. Practicing reading and understanding will help students think and solve problems better and learn new things (Mardiyanti et al., 2022).

Reading competency means a student can read at the same level as the state expects for their grade. Reading competency means being able to understand and use information from books and other written sources for different reasons. This is how the new rules for education defines being good at reading and improving college students' reading skills (Galiza, 2022)

Serious reading helps to turn people who just read into people who are really involved in what they're reading. This can lead to better academic, work, and personal lives. It is important

to improve college students' reading skills in all programs because it affects their grades and the economy's development. It also affects whether a school succeeds or fails (Meniado, 2016).

Previous Related Studies

Ahmad and binti (2021) investigated the EFL students' attitudes toward reading comprehension. The participants were 80 male and female school students. An interview and questionnaire was used to collect the data (if the students' attitudes influenced their reading comprehension). The results revealed that the students' attitudes have low influence toward reading comprehension.

Septianingsi and Atmanegara (2021) investigated students' reading attitude and the factors that influence students' reading comprehension. The participants were 118 school students. A questionnaire and reading comprehension test were used to collect the data. The results revealed that there was a low correlation between reading attitude and reading comprehension.

Koc, et al. (2022) investigated the relation between school students reading and reading comprehension levels. The participants were 300 school students. an attitudinal questionnaire and reading test were used to collect the data of the study. The results revealed that there was a positive attitudes towards reading and reading comprehension.

Methodology

The Participants

The participants were 41 female students from the Department of English (Evening Studies) at the College of Education for Women, University of Anbar. The researchers selected randomly 30 female students to represent the sample of the study, and 11 students were selected to represent the pilot sample.

The Design

The instrument of the study is a questionnaire, and the study that collect its data via a questionnaire is a survey research design.

The Instrument

To collect the data, the researcher prepared a questionnaire. the items of the questionnaire were elicit from the literature review. The questionnaire's validity and reliability were verified.

Content and Face Validity

The questionnaire was given to a group of experts major in the field of methodology, applied linguistics, and curriculum designers to verify the content and face validity of the questionnaire. The experts' recommendations and suggestions were taken in consideration, about 7 items were omitted from the questionnaire, and the questionnaire final version consisted of 15 items only. Also, some modification have been done for the 15 items. All the experts agree that the questionnaire items are well

formed to measure what is supposed to be measured, this achieve the face validity of the instrument.

The Reliability

The reliability of the questionnaire was verified by using Test-Retest Reliability. The questionnaire was administered to 11 female students. After 11 days, the researchers re-administer the questionnaire to the same students. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to verify the correlation between the first and the second students' responses. The result revealed that there is a high correlation of 0.91 which indicates good test-retest reliability.

The Result

To answer the question of the study that states "To what extent do fourth-grade female students' express attitudes toward the influence of reading comprehension strategies on students' reading competence?" frequencies and percentages were used. Table 1 shows the results.

Table 1: Frequencies and percentages of students' responses on the Items of the questionnaire

No	Item	Agree		Disagree		Not Sure	
		F*	P*	F*	P*	F*	P*
1.	Skimming and Scanning texts has helped me quickly grasp the main ideas.	26	86.67	3	10.00	1	3.33
2.	Utilizing "Prediction Techniques" before reading enhances my understanding of the text.	12	40.00	11	36.67	7	23.33
3.	Actively "Summarizing" the main points of a passage improves my comprehension.	19	63.34	8	26.33	3	10.00
4.	"Questioning the Text" and generating questions as I read helps me engage with the material.	20	66.67	7	23.33	3	10.00
5.	Making Connections to my own experiences or prior knowledge aids in understanding the content.	21	70.00	6	20.00	3	10.00
6.	Focusing on "Vocabulary in Context" helps me decipher the meaning of unfamiliar words.	22	73.34	5	16.66	3	10.00
7.	"Visualizing" the events or concepts described in the text enhances my comprehension.	18	60.00	8	26.66	4	13.34
8.	Using "Graphic Organizers" or charts helps me organize information and understand the structure of the text.	15	50.00	9	30.00	6	20.00
9.	"Active Note-Taking" during reading assists me in retaining important information.	24	80.00	4	13.33	2	6.67

10.	Applying "Inferential Reasoning" to draw conclusions beyond the explicit text improves my comprehension.	14	46.67	9	30.00	7	23.33
11.	"Repeated Reading" of challenging passages contributes to better understanding over time.	28	93.34	1	3.33	1	3.33
12.	"Peer Discussion" of reading material enhances my comprehension and critical thinking.	18	60.00	7	23.34	5	16.66
13.	"Monitoring Comprehension" by checking my understanding as I read helps maintain focus.	19	63.34	8	26.66	3	10.00
14.	Employing "Text Annotation" or highlighting key information aids in comprehension.	15	50.00	6	20.00	9	30.00
15.	"Reflecting on the Author's Purpose" and perspective contributes to a deeper understanding of the text.	10	33.34	15	50.00	5	16.66

Table 1 shows that the students' have high positive attitudes toward the influence of reading comprehension strategies on students' reading competence. About 93.34 of the students agree that "Repeated Reading" strategy can contribute to understand the information over time. And about 86.67 of the students agree that "Skimming and Scanning" strategy can help students to get the main ideas quickly. In addition, about 80.00 students agree that "Active Note-Taking" strategy can help students in retaining important information. In other hand, about 50.00 of the students do not agree that "Reflecting on the Author's Purpose" strategy can

contributes comprehensive understanding. Also, about 23.33% students are not sure if the "Prediction Techniques" strategy can support understanding the information.

Discussion of the Results

The results revealed that the students have high positive attitudes toward the influence of reading comprehension strategies on students' reading competence, the direction of the influence is that when the students awareness of reading comprehension strategies increase the reading competence increase too. Most of the students nominated "Repeated Reading" as the best reading strategy that supports reading competence, as it is the closest strategy that the students apply spontaneously while studying, so it was the most likely to be nominated as the best among the reading strategies.

Also, Also, a large percentage of students agreed that the "Skimming and Scanning" strategy is one of the strategies that support students' reading competence because most students during their studies look for a specific piece of information or an important paragraph, which they use spontaneously, "Skimming and Scanning," which reduces time and effort while studying. Answering questions or searching for information. This strategy also helps in collecting the largest number of keywords for information that helps in understanding a large part of the topic. This strategy has been emphasized by many researchers and its

importance in students' understanding of information, including the studies conducted by Azmi, et al. (2020); Rahmawati and Fitriawati (2022); Fatmawan, et al. (2023); Siahaan and Pangaribuan (2022); and Toshtanova (2023) which improve the significance of "Skimming and Scanning" strategy in reading comprehension.

The "Active Note-Taking" strategy is one of the closest reading strategies used by most students interested in in-depth study, which has an impact on preserving and retrieving information over a long period. This strategy has received a high level of positivity towards its use in reading competence. This strategy includes combining writing, application, reading, and using visual images to understand the information. This method may take a long time to understand the information, but understanding the information lasts for a long time and is useful in building information. New development of student understanding.

On the other hand, approximately half of the students did not agree that Reflecting on the Author's Purpose strategy can support reading efficiency. This is due to the fact that using this strategy is difficult for students because it requires time, effort, and deep thinking that requires a broad scientific background for the purpose of using this strategy. It may also be attributed to the fact that the students did not use this strategy in the study, and their nomination of it (their point of view towards it) was merely their

appreciation that it might be useful in the students' reading competence. This strategy was investigated for its importance by a small number of researchers during the past five years, including Muhammad. Karima (2021), and Wales (2021).

In addition, the strategies of "Summarizing", "Vocabulary in Context", "Visualizing", and "Peer Discussion" have been proved to be helpful strategies to support students' reading competence. This fact related to the significance of these strategies have been emphasized by Ramirez-Avila and Barreiro (2021) and Budianto, et al. (2022) who found that summarizing strategy can improve reading comprehension; also Manihuruk (2020) and Zhang and Zhang (2022) found that vocabulary in context strategy enhanced reading comprehension; Damiri, et al. (2022) and Damayanti, et al. (2022) found that Visualizing strategy develop students' reading competence; and Den Besten (2021) and Tsuei, et al. (2020) found that Peer Discussion reading strategy have improved students' reading comprehension and competence.

Conclusion

In light of the results of this study, it can be inferred that the most used reading comprehension strategies (mentioned in the 15 items of the questionnaire) can help the students' reading competence. The most recommended reading comprehension strategies those strategies that are close to the students' favorite and easy to be used in daily reading process.

Also, the students' attitudes toward the reading strategies that are rare used during the reading, have gained low level due to the either difficulty of use or unawareness of the steps of implementing them.

The results inferred that the students have high level of awareness of the reading comprehension strategies and their significant in improving students' reading skills, proficiency, and competence. The students" high level of attitudes toward the reading comprehension strategies is good indicator of students" ability of self-regulation.

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