



Reading Strategies Used by Afghan EFL Students in the Department of English at Khost Shaikh Zayed University

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Abstract

This study investigates the reading strategies employed by Afghan EFL students in the Department of English at Khost Shaikh Zayed University, where reading is a fundamental aspect of the curriculum. The research aims to identify the strategies students report using and assess the extent to which these strategies are actively implemented in their reading practices. A sample of 34 male students participated in the study, completing a structured questionnaire designed to gather data on their reading strategies. The data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel to quantify the frequency of strategy usage. The findings revealed that while students reported using a variety of reading strategies, their actual application was limited. A notable 90.18% of respondents indicated a strong reliance on dictionaries during reading activities, highlighting an emphasis on vocabulary acquisition. However, deeper cognitive strategies, such as making inferences and semantic mapping, were employed less frequently. The results suggest a significant gap in students' awareness and effective application of reading strategies. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the need for enhanced instructional practices that incorporate metacognitive training and a balanced approach to teaching reading strategies. By fostering both surface-level and deeper processing strategies, educators can better equip Afghan EFL students for improved reading comprehension and overall language proficiency. These insights aim to inform future curriculum development and pedagogical strategies in the context of English language education in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghan EFL students, Comprehension ,English Department, Reading Language Learning, Reading strategies, Shaikh Zayed University, Theory

Introduction

Reading is a fundamental aspect of the curriculum in the Department of English at Khost Shaikh Zayed University. From the first to the eighth semester, instructors prioritize the teaching of reading skills and strategies, ensuring that students engage with a diverse range of genres. This approach aims to develop their comprehension and analytical abilities throughout their academic experience. The reading course is designed to introduce various reading strategies, using texts that range from basic to more advanced levels. As noted by Anderson (2003), effective reading requires a harmonious balance between the reader's skills, the characteristics of the text, and the cultivation of reading fluency. To attain fluency and maintain a suitable reading pace, students must utilize specific reading strategies.

Research indicates that the effective application of these strategies is crucial for junior students in the English Department. To gather data, researchers collaborated with the head of the English Department and the relevant course instructor, providing consent forms to ensure that participants were willing to contribute to the study. A notable limitation of this research was the timing of the questionnaire distribution, which took place during midterm exams, leading to potential time constraints for the students. The literature review highlighted a gap in understanding the effectiveness, significance, and global application of reading strategies. This study aims to determine whether junior students at Khost Shaikh Zayed University not only understand but also effectively implement these reading strategies. It will assess their familiarity with these strategies and their competence in using them in everyday reading contexts. If students fail to apply these strategies effectively, they may encounter difficulties in comprehending various texts and developing analytical skills. This could result in passive reading habits, reducing their engagement with both extensive and intensive reading, especially as learners of a foreign language.

The primary goal of this study is to support EFL students in the Department of English at Khost Shaikh Zayed University by enhancing their use of effective reading strategies. The research is guided by two main objectives: (1) to determine whether Afghan EFL students benefit from employing reading strategies when engaging with various types of texts, and (2) to identify and examine the strategies most commonly used by these students while reading English passages. Correspondingly, the study seeks to answer two research questions: (1) What reading strategies do Afghan EFL students report using? and (2) Which strategies do they apply most frequently when reading English texts? Previous research highlights the significance of reading comprehension in second language acquisition. The investigation into reading strategies in English as a First Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes is crucial for enhancing comprehension skills among learners. As highlighted by Marashi and Rahmati (2017), reading comprehension is an essential skill across all English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts. They emphasize that the integration of various language aspects—such as textbook utilization, composition, vocabulary development, grammar acquisition, and the use of computer-assisted language programs—plays a significant role in reading comprehension. A well-established approach for teaching reading involves the utilization of reading strategies. Brantmeier (2002) describes these strategies as the processes through which

readers make sense of texts; they encompass methods and actions aimed at improving comprehension. Reading strategies are vital components of cognitive psychology and are essential for effective understanding (May, 2001; Walker, 2000; Zare, 2013). Cohen (1990) defines these strategies as mental processes that readers consciously select to complete reading tasks successfully.

Reading strategies can be categorized into top-down and bottom-up approaches. Top-down strategies involve using prior knowledge to make connections with the text, while bottom-up strategies focus on analyzing textual elements such as words and sentences (Janzen, 2003). Additional strategies include evaluating, questioning, checking for answers, predicting, summarizing, paraphrasing, and translating (Zare & Othman, 2013).

Research indicates that successful comprehension does not occur automatically (Cubukcu, 2008); rather, it relies on directed cognitive effort, which involves knowledge and regulation of cognitive processing (Batumlu & Erden, 2007). Cognitive effort manifests through strategies that are procedural, purposeful, and essential for enhancing comprehension (Alexander & Jetton, 2000). They assert that for readers to effectively use strategies, they must approach reading with intention.

Al Melhi (2000) found notable differences between successful and less successful readers regarding their reading strategies, awareness, and perceptions of effective reading. Strategic awareness and monitoring of the comprehension process are critical elements of proficient reading, often referred to as metacognition (Auerbach & Paxton, 1997). This includes understanding strategies for processing texts, monitoring comprehension, and adjusting strategies as needed.

According to Oktay Cem Adıgüzel and Meral Özkan Gürses, mastering the four language skills—reading, listening, writing, and speaking—is essential in both first (L1) and second language (L2) learning. Among these, reading is the primary tool for learning. A proficient reading ability in L2 positively impacts academic success. Reading is characterized as a dynamic process where readers construct meaning by integrating knowledge, experiences, and emotions (Anderson, 1999; Bouvet & Close, 2006). This complex process requires conscious actions known as reading strategies (Carrell, Gajdusek, & Wise, 1998).

Research consistently shows a relationship between reading strategies and effective reading in L2, indicating that instruction in these strategies enhances comprehension skills (Anderson, 1999; Carrell, 1998; Koda, 2007; Taylor, Steven & Asher, 2006). Various strategy instruction models exist within L2 teaching, including the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA), developed in the United States to address the challenges faced by secondary students learning English as L2 (Allen, 2003; Chamot & O'Malley, 1994).

CALLA comprises three main components: content topics, academic language development, and explicit instruction in learning strategies. The content is selected based on students' levels and fields of study, with an emphasis on topics that enhance interest and motivation (Allen, 2003). Academic language development encompasses all four language skills and is integral to content areas (Allen, 2003).

Chamot and O'Malley (1994) differentiate between academic and social language skills, with academic language being crucial for teaching and learning, covering functions such as analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating. Explicit instruction in language learning

strategies is interwoven with language topics, providing students with a list of strategies to choose from based on their learning activities (Chabot & O'Malley, 1994).

Koondher (2015) notes that reading is a continuous, interactive process where learners construct new knowledge from existing knowledge. However, in Pakistan, many students struggle to engage with reading strategies effectively due to a lack of understanding, leading to suboptimal performance in reading English at higher secondary levels (Haq, 2016). Teachers often emphasize memorization over modern teaching strategies, which hampers students' ability to process information from longer texts (Khan, 2007).

The primary strategies employed by Pakistani students include summarizing, reading for information, and answering comprehension questions (Gulzar & Qadir, 2010). Despite utilizing various reading strategies, many students do not achieve satisfactory performance in English reading (Shahzada, 2012). The challenges in teaching English as a second language, particularly in reading, necessitate a systematic approach to understanding and improving reading strategies among students. Kocuko (2012) asserts that reading is a lifelong skill essential for success in school and beyond. The ability to read well is foundational for personal fulfillment and job success (Anderson et al., 1985). Despite its significance, reading remains one of the most challenging areas within the education system, particularly given the increasing demand for literacy in our technological society (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

In addition, research studies depend mostly on directed cognitive effort which includes knowledge about and regulation of cognitive processing (Batumlu & Erden, 2007). Al Melhi (2000) stated that successful and less successful readers use reading strategies accordingly; strategic awareness and monitoring of the comprehension process are significantly important features of competent reading (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). Such awareness and monitoring in the literature is often referred to as metacognition, including knowledge of strategies for processing texts, the ability to monitor one's own comprehension, and the ability to modify strategies when needed (Auerbach & Paxton, 1997). Koondher (2015) believed that reading is a continuous, interactive, and dynamic process, where learners acquire new knowledge. Teachers generally do not use modern teaching strategies in reading of English (Khan, 2007).

To maximize comprehension, students must learn to read critically and analytically, understanding both the overt and underlying meanings of texts. Effective readers are actively engaged with the material and aware of the processes they use to comprehend (Teele, 2004). Research indicates that teachers can enhance student comprehension by teaching reading strategies such as predicting, questioning, and summarizing (Block & Israel, 2005). It is vital to teach these strategies explicitly, using modeling, group practice, and independent application (Duke & Pearson, 2005).

While numerous studies have emphasized the importance of reading strategies in enhancing comprehension among EFL learners (e.g., Anderson, 2003; Cohen, 1990; Baker & Boonkit, 2004), there remains a lack of focused research on how Afghan EFL students – particularly those at Khost Shaikh Zayed University – actually apply these strategies in real academic contexts.

Moreover, despite reading being a core subject taught throughout all semesters, there is limited insight into how instructional practices align with students' strategic reading development. This study addresses that gap by investigating the actual usage, frequency,

and perceived benefits of reading strategies among Afghan EFL students, aiming to inform more effective pedagogy and curriculum design. The research gap identified in the article is as follows: Despite the recognition of the importance of reading strategies in enhancing comprehension among EFL learners, there is a lack of focused research on how Afghan EFL students, particularly those at Khost Shaikh Zayed University, actually apply these strategies in real academic contexts. Existing literature broadly discusses the theoretical benefits of reading strategies and metacognitive awareness, but has not empirically examined:

Specific Strategy Usage: Which reading strategies Afghan EFL students use most frequently.

Effectiveness Across Genres: How effectively these strategies are applied across diverse reading materials.

Self-Regulation of Reading Processes: Whether students are aware of and able to regulate their reading processes.

Integration of Modern Teaching Methods: The extent to which modern teaching methods are incorporated into reading instruction in Afghan universities.

Additionally, while reading is a core subject taught throughout all semesters, there is limited insight into how instructional practices align with students' strategic reading development. This study addresses these gaps by investigating the actual usage, frequency, and perceived benefits of reading strategies among Afghan EFL students, aiming to inform more effective pedagogy and curriculum design.

Material and Method

This study adopts a descriptive research approach to investigate the reading strategies utilized by students in EFL classes within the Department of English at Khost Shaikh Zayed University. Employing a survey-based methodology, the research primarily relied on quantitative data. The study was conducted among students from the English department, all of whom participated voluntarily. The questionnaire, administered in English, served as the main instrument for data collection. Designed to gather insights into participants' perspectives on specific reading strategies, the study seeks to explore students' opinions and reported practices in this area.

Participants

The study involved 34 male students enrolled in various classes within the Department of English at the Faculty of Languages and Literature, Khost Shaikh Zayed University. The participants' ages typically ranged from 20 to 24 years.

Data collection instruments

The primary instrument used for data collection in this study was the Reading Strategy Questionnaire. This questionnaire consisted of 27 items grouped under six categories, focusing on strategies employed during and after reading. Specifically, items 1-20 addressed strategies used during reading, while items 21-27 related to strategies applied after reading. The questionnaire utilized a 6-point Likert scale, allowing participants to express their frequency of strategy use with responses ranging from "always" to "never." This scale included options such as skimming, scanning, previewing, predicting, word mapping, and inferring meanings. The questionnaire was designed to capture students'

reported use of various reading strategies, ensuring comprehensibility through consultations with the research course instructor to validate its reliability.

Data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Microsoft Excel. The analysis focused on the frequency and percentage of responses to the Likert scale items. The results were categorized to determine the most and least frequently used reading strategies.

The data analysis included:

Percentage and frequency calculations for each item on the questionnaire.

Classification of strategies into groups based on their application during and after reading.

Presentation of results in tables and graphs to illustrate the findings and provide a clear understanding of the students' reading strategies.

Since the questionnaire used a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 'always' to 'never', Use of dictionary in the first part of the questionnaire was the most frequently used strategy for the participants as it rates in the graph as 27 out of 34 which is 90.18% of all of the participants. Main idea, scanning, and identifying topic sentence were the other strategies mostly used by the participants. 50% percent of the participants indicated that they always summarize a reading text, relate word meaning in to sentence meaning, and relate sentence meaning in to general understand of a text. In the third category (often), the participants indicated that they use strategies such as understanding different types of letters, distinguishing between facts and opinions, and making prediction about reading text. The most frequently used strategies and the least frequently used strategies were presented in the table below.

Table 1 demonstrates 10 reading strategies that students most frequently use in their ELT classes. Table 2 shows the least frequently applied reading strategies used by students. All of these strategies belong to the 'while reading' section. The lowest ranking strategy that students use (63%) has been "I know different strategies of reading". This research that I conducted and reported its results here which revealing the students of Khost Shaikh Zayed University in undergraduate level like to follow the strategies of reading when they are reading different types of texts. As well as, it indicates that these students know and enjoy the reading strategies to apply in their reading process. Ethical considerations were integral to the research process. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Key ethical aspects included:

Confidentiality: All responses were kept anonymous, and personal data were secured to prevent unauthorized access. Participants were assured that their individual answers would not be linked to their identities.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, with participants given the option to refuse or withdraw their consent at any point during the study.

Data Handling: Data were coded to maintain confidentiality, and only the researchers involved in the study had access to the personal data collected.

By adhering to these ethical guidelines, the study aimed to protect the rights and welfare of all participants involved.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the Reading Strategy Questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the help of Microsoft Excel. The analysis aimed to quantify the frequency and extent of reading strategy use among Afghan EFL students in the Department of English at Khost Shaikh Zayed University.

Descriptive Statistics:

Frequency Counts: Each response on the Likert scale was counted to determine how many participants selected each option (from "always" to "never") for every item on the questionnaire.

Percentage Calculations: The frequency of each response was converted into percentages to provide a clear representation of the proportion of participants who employed each strategy.

Categorization of Strategies:

The strategies were classified into three main categories based on their application:

During Reading: Strategies that students reported using while reading texts.

While Reading: Strategies that facilitate comprehension as students engage with the text.

After reading: Strategies aimed at consolidating understanding post-reading.

Statistical Findings:

The most frequently used strategy was identified as the use of a dictionary, with 90.18% of participants reporting that they "always" relied on it while reading.

Other commonly used strategies included:

Identifying the main idea of the text (rated by 70.59% of participants as "always").

Scanning for specific information (reported by 64.71%).

Summarizing reading text, with 50% indicating they "always" summarized.

The responses were further categorized into three levels of frequency:

Frequent Use: Strategies used by more than 50% of participants.

Moderate Use: Strategies used by 20-50% of participants.

Infrequent Use: Strategies used by less than 20% of participants.

Statistical Representation:

- a. The results were visually represented through tables and charts, with Table 1 displaying the most frequently employed strategies and Table 2 highlighting the least frequently used strategies.
- b. The analysis revealed that students were less likely to engage in strategies such as making inferences and developing awareness of semantic fields (word mapping), which were both marked as "never" by a significant portion of respondents.

By employing these statistical methods, the study provided a balanced and comprehensive overview of the reading strategies utilized by Afghan EFL students, offering insights into their reading habits and areas for improvement.

Findings

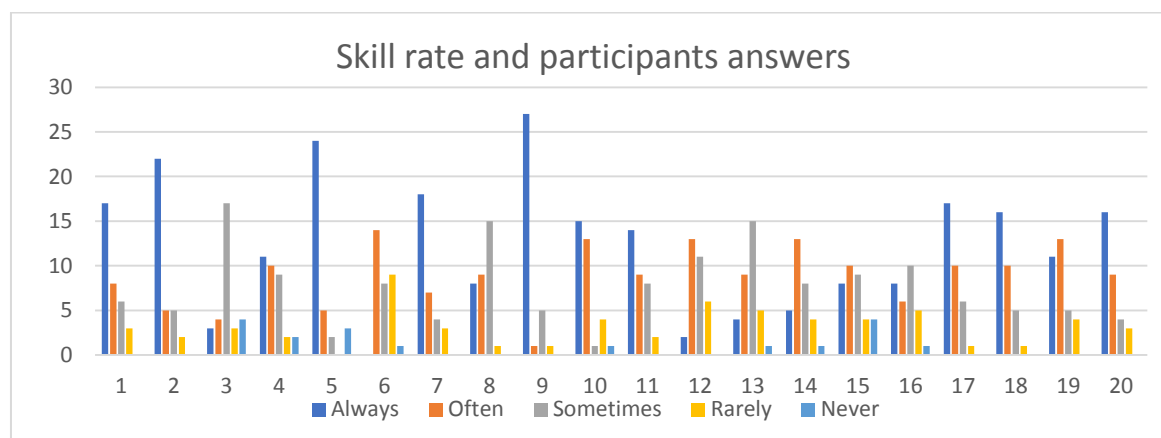
The research question 1: What Reading Strategies Do English Department Students Report Using? To address this question, the study employed a structured questionnaire as its primary data collection tool. The responses were subjected to quantitative analysis, with

percentage ratios calculated using Microsoft Excel to ensure accuracy and clarity in data interpretation. The Likert-scale items within the questionnaire were evaluated through statistical measures, specifically frequencies and percentages, to determine the extent of strategy usage. The findings derived from this analysis offered valuable insights into the types of reading strategies students actively engage with and implement during their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) coursework.

Following the categorization of the questionnaire items, it was identified that the instrument included three strategies applied during reading, twenty-five strategies utilized while reading, and two strategies implemented after reading. Notably, the distribution of strategies related to the during and after reading phases was uneven across the questionnaire.

To illustrate how often each strategy was used, the scale was categorized into three distinct levels: high, moderate, and low frequency. Since a 6-point Likert scale questionnaire was used, ranging from 'always' to 'never', use of dictionary in the first part of the questionnaire was the most frequently used strategy for the participants as it rates in the graph as 27 out of 34 which is 90.18% of all of the participants. Main idea, scanning, and identifying the topic sentence were the other strategies mostly used by the participants. 50% percent of the participants indicated that they always summarize a reading text, relate word meaning into sentence meaning, and relate sentence meaning into general understand of a text. In the third category (often), the participants indicated that they use strategies such as understanding different types of letters, distinguishing between facts and opinions, and making predictions about reading text. tables bellow present both the most frequently and least frequently employed reading strategies by students in their ELT classes.

Table 1 outlines the ten reading strategies most commonly used by students in their English Language Teaching classes, while Table 2 presents those that are least frequently applied. The strategy with the lowest usage rate was reported by 63% of students." The findings from this research, conducted with undergraduate students at Khost Shaikh Zayed University, demonstrate that learners actively engage with various reading strategies when working with different types of texts. Moreover, the results suggest that these students are not only familiar with reading strategies but also enjoy applying them during the reading process.



The chart above shows that 27 students out of 34 use dictionary while reading texts which is the top option for the participants. The second from the top is identifying the main idea of the text as a beneficial reading strategy. The third strategy that the students used frequently is scanning which they use always to read texts. The other commonly used reading strategies among participants include identifying the topic sentence (rated 18), skimming (rated 17), distinguishing the main idea from supporting details (rated 17), summarizing the reading text (rated 16), relating word meaning to sentence meaning (rated 16), and predicting or guessing the meaning of words through context (rated 14). The rest of the questions in the first category (always) are marked from highest 11 to lowest 2. It is important to mention that inference and understanding types of letter rate are 2 and 3. Looking to the other four categories, which are often, sometimes, rarely, and never, the highest in the often category is 14, and the lowest is 1, which are developing awareness of semantic fields (word mapping) and use of the dictionary. For the category, sometimes the highest is 17, which is understanding different types of letters, and the lowest is 1, which is summarization of a reading text. For the rarely category, the highest is 9, which is developing the field of semantic awareness (word mapping), and the lowest is 0, which is identifying the reading text's main idea. For the last category (never), the highest is 4 which are understanding different types of letters and analyzing components of text such as setting, theme and characters and the lowest as 0 for the 11 questions. Here we can say that students heavily rely on the use of a dictionary as a primary source of help for overcoming reading challenges because 27 out of 34 students said that they always use a dictionary. The second highest rated questions are identifying main idea of reading text that 24 out of 34 students always try to identify main idea of the text while reading. On the other hand, none of the students said that they always develop awareness of semantic fields which is an important element of reading skills that contributes to other skills such vocabulary, grammar, writing and speaking, because if they learn how words are formed and what are the role of prefix and suffix, they can easily improve their language skills and become active learners. Also, making inferences, which is another crucial skill in reading, is marked as 2 by the students, meaning that only 2 students out of 34 are always making inferences while reading text. In the second part of the questionnaire, each questions were designed to examine students' reading strategies, usage of them, and their application while reading English texts. In the second part of the questionnaire, question one tried to get a good judgement of students knowing reading strategies. Out of 34 students, 21 marked skimming, 11 marked scanning, and two marked word mapping while one did not respond to anyone. For question number 2, which was consideration of strategies while reading different texts. Out of 34 participants, 14 marked skimming, 14 marked scanning, two marked previewing, two marked word mapping, and the remaining two marked prediction and inference. The answers for question three which tried to understand which strategies should be used for every types of texts, again 14 marked skimming, 11 marked scanning, five marked previewing, three marked predictions, and only one marked inference. When it came to question four, that tried to understand which strategies are needed for various texts, nearly half of the students (14) marked all strategies and none marked word mapping and inference. However, again skimming and scanning were marked by eight and seven and previewing and prediction were marked by three and two of the students. For question five which was about strategies if participants think

are time consuming and not helpful, skimming scored zero as no one marked it and the rest of the questions were marked from eight as highest and three as lowest. For question number six, again, half of the participants marked all strategies applicable for fast reading and better understanding, and being helpful; however, no one marked inference. Skimming and scanning scored higher as five and eight in comparison to previewing, prediction, and word mapping. For the last question in part two, which tried to show disagreement with specific strategies, nearly half (16) of the participants marked inference, and nine marked word mapping. Four marked all strategies; however, none marked previewing, and for skimming and scanning were marked as one and two. To show the above short discussion in graph, the chart is provided to show the application rate of each strategy and its importance from the participants' point of view.

The data reveals that using a dictionary is the most frequently employed reading strategy among Afghan EFL students at Khost Shaikh Zayed University, with 27 out of 34 participants reporting they "always" use it. This heavy reliance suggests that students prioritize vocabulary acquisition as a key to comprehension. Anderson (2003) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge is foundational to reading fluency, and dictionary use can support immediate word recognition. However, overdependence may hinder the development of contextual guessing skills and reading flow.

The second most common strategy is identifying the main idea, marked by 24 students, followed by scanning, which is consistently used to locate specific information. These strategies align with what Cohen (1990) describes as deliberate mental processes that readers employ to navigate texts efficiently. The frequent use of skimming and scanning also reflects a top-down approach to reading, as noted by Janzen (2003), where readers focus on overall meaning rather than decoding every word.

Interestingly, strategies such as semantic field awareness (word mapping) and making inferences are among the least used. Only 2 students reported always making inferences, and none consistently practiced word mapping. This gap is concerning, as semantic awareness contributes significantly to vocabulary depth, grammar understanding, and writing fluency (Zare & Othman, 2013). Moreover, inferencing is a critical skill for deeper comprehension and engagement with implicit meanings (Baker & Boonkit, 2004).

The second part of the questionnaire further confirms these trends. While skimming and scanning dominate across multiple questions, strategies like previewing, prediction, inference, and word mapping receive minimal attention. For example, in question six, which asked about strategies helpful for fast reading and comprehension, no student selected inference, and only a few chose word mapping. In question seven, which explored disagreement with specific strategies, 16 students rejected inference, and 9 rejected word mapping, indicating a lack of perceived value or understanding of these techniques.

These findings highlight several key areas for instructional improvement:

Balanced Strategy Instruction: Teachers should emphasize not only surface-level strategies like skimming and scanning but also deep-processing strategies such as inferencing, semantic mapping, and prediction. These promote critical thinking and long-term language development.

Metacognitive Awareness: As Sheorey & Mokhtari (2001) argue, strategic awareness and monitoring are hallmarks of competent readers. Educators should foster metacognitive

skills by encouraging students to reflect on their strategy use and adapt based on text type and purpose.

Integrating Word Mapping into Curriculum: Given its role in vocabulary expansion and grammar acquisition, **semantic field instruction** should be embedded into reading lessons. Activities involving prefixes, suffixes, and word families can enhance lexical competence.

Reducing Overreliance on Dictionaries: While dictionaries are useful, students should be trained to guess word meanings from context, use synonyms, and rely on structural cues to enhance reading fluency.

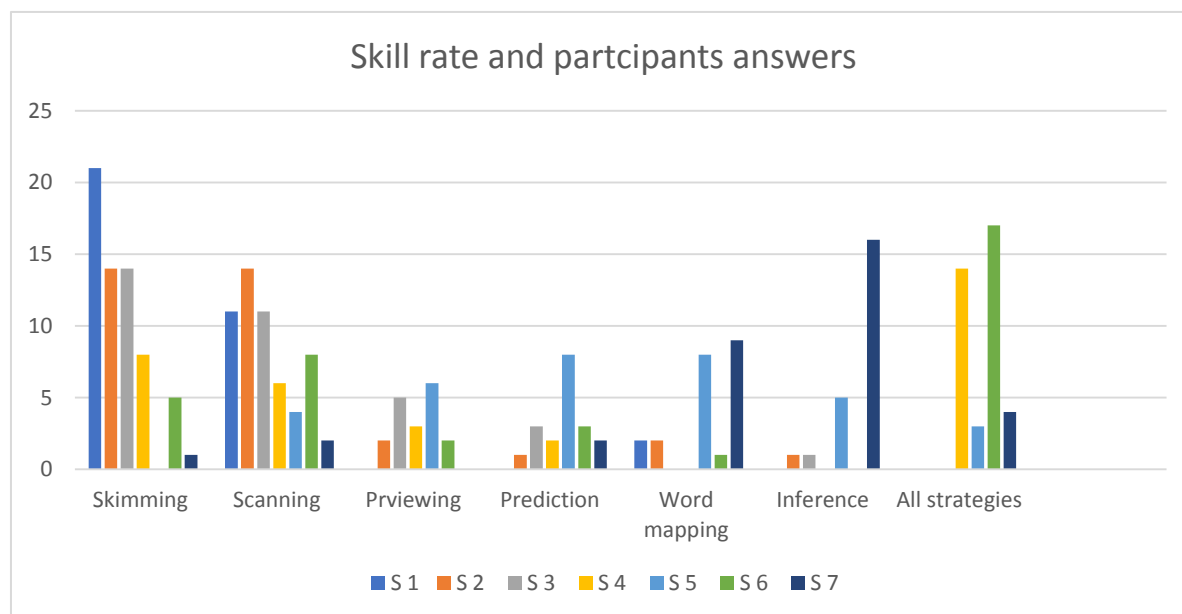


Chart 2, Part 2, displays participants' answers to questions.

As the chart displays, participants mostly rely on skimming and are familiar with application of it for most of the reading passages. The second after the skimming is the option all strategies as question six tries to find out if participants think all of the mentioned strategies are helpful for faster reading and better understanding. Again, the third top strategy among the six for most applications is scanning, which shows that students mostly benefit from while reading passages. On the other hand, nearly half of the students (16) of them disagree with the application inference for reading passages. After inference, the least applicable strategies for the students are prediction, word mapping, inference again, and previewing that they think these strategies are time consuming and not helpful. The graph above shows that the students prefer to apply skimming and scanning mainly for readings, while inference is nearly rejected as helpful. Looking at the hypothesis one which talk of the students' interest and usefulness of reading strategies, not all strategies seem to be useful to them. This raises the question that weather the students are not familiar with other strategies application or those strategies were not taught to them in their reading courses.

The findings of this study align with existing literature on reading strategies in EFL contexts, emphasizing the importance of strategic reading for language learners. Key findings include:

Frequent Use of Dictionaries:

With **90.18%** of participants reporting reliance on dictionaries, this finding supports the work of Cohen (1990), who noted that effective readers often utilize reference tools to enhance comprehension. This reliance indicates a vital strategy for Afghan EFL students, reflecting a need for vocabulary support in their language learning process.

Identification of Main Ideas:

The high frequency of students identifying the main idea (70.59%) echoes Anderson's (2003) assertion that recognizing main ideas is critical for successful reading comprehension. This suggests that Afghan EFL students are developing foundational skills in reading but may require further support to enhance their analytical abilities.

Moderate Use of Summarization:

The finding that **50%** of students "always" summarize texts is consistent with research indicating that summarization is a key strategy for comprehension (Block & Israel, 2005). This suggests that students are beginning to engage in reflective practices post-reading, but there remains room for improvement in this area.

Limited Application of Inference and Semantic Awareness:

The lower rates of strategy use related to making inferences and developing semantic awareness (e.g., word mapping) align with findings from Zare & Othman (2013), which highlight that many learners struggle with higher-order thinking skills. This gap indicates a need for targeted instruction in these areas.

The implications of these findings for EFL teaching in Afghanistan are significant:

Enhanced Reading Instruction:

Educators should focus on integrating explicit instruction in reading strategies, especially those that promote inference and semantic awareness. Training students to make inferences and understand the relationships between words can foster deeper comprehension and analytical skills.

Utilization of Dictionaries:

Given the heavy reliance on dictionaries, teachers should incorporate dictionary skills into their curriculum. Workshops or sessions on effective dictionary use could empower students to become more independent learners and enhance their vocabulary acquisition.

Focus on Comprehension Strategies:

Since students are already familiar with identifying main ideas and summarization, instructors can build on these strengths by introducing more complex strategies. For instance, teaching students how to evaluate texts, compare different readings, and synthesize information from multiple sources could greatly enhance their critical thinking skills.

Culturally Relevant Materials:

Incorporating culturally relevant texts that resonate with students' backgrounds may increase engagement and motivation. This approach can make reading more meaningful and relatable, thereby encouraging students to apply a wider range of strategies.

Professional Development for Teachers:

Continuous professional development for teachers is essential. Training programs that focus on the latest research in reading strategies and effective teaching practices can equip educators with the tools needed to better support their students' reading development.

Monitoring and Assessment:

Regular assessment of students' reading strategies and comprehension abilities can help educators identify areas for improvement. Implementing formative assessments and providing feedback will enable students to reflect on their reading practices and make necessary adjustments.

By addressing these areas, EFL programs in Afghanistan can enhance the reading skills of learners and prepare them for academic success in both their studies and future professional endeavors.

Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the reading strategies employed by English department students in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes at the Faculty of Languages and Literature, Khost Shaikh Zayed University, and to assess how frequently these strategies are applied. The study involved 34 male students from the English department. In the first phase, the focus was on identifying which reading strategies students commonly use during EFL instruction. Results showed that students frequently reported using a wide range of strategies, with ten being the most commonly used. Notably, twenty of these strategies were categorized under the "while reading" phase, while ten were among the least used. The second phase examined how often students applied six specific strategies while reading. The findings indicated a statistically significant variation in the use and application of these strategies, which appeared to be influenced by the students' individual interpretations of the strategies outlined in the questionnaire. The students heavily rely on the use of a dictionary, as 90.18 % of them use it while reading. Key findings include: Strategy Usage Students frequently reported using various reading strategies, with dictionary use being the most common (90.18%). Other frequently used strategies included identifying the main idea and scanning. Limited Application Despite reporting high usage of certain strategies, actual application was limited, particularly for deeper strategies like inference and semantic mapping. Awareness and Understanding Many students exhibited a lack of awareness regarding the benefits of certain strategies, indicating a need for enhanced instruction in this area.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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