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## **EXAMINATION OF READING STRATEGIES OF ESL LEARNERS**

Reading complex academic texts is a crucial priority for ESL students who enroll in various higher education programs . However, their general knowledge of English does not at all guarantee that the students will be successful in coping with complex, authentic academic reading genres required of them by the syllabi. As instructors of English who teach classes the curriculum of which are closely associated with working with various genres of readings in academic contexts, we can not help but notice that our students in majority are experiencing difficulties in completing reading assignments. This might be due to the lack of familiarity either with the genre of academic reading, low reading ability in a second language in general, or lack of awareness of reading strategies that are necessary in order to cope with the academic reading tasks. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate to what degree our male and female ESL students are familiar with the cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies, what strategies they generally use, and to what degrees. The present study was conducted in order to ramify this stance with academic reading and help ESL students to raise their awareness of the reading strategies in academic contexts.

The theoretical research in cognitively complex process of reading has a long history and covers a variety of topics that can be applied to second language acquisition as well. Thus, Goodman's (1970) seminar article, "Reading: A psycholinguistic Guessing Game", discusses bottom-up and top-down processing theory. Bottom-up processing, relates to "linguistic data – processing mechanisms", where the readers have to identify various linguistic signals and arrange them in a certain sequence [12]. Bottom-up processing focuses on decoding letters in a word, words in a phrase, sentences in a discourse. Top-down processing, on the other hand, engages the learners' "intelligence and experience in the process of understanding the text" [12]. The reader infers the meaning of the unknown words and phrases from whole context of the text in a manner of a guessing game.. Thus, reading, according to Goodman (1967), is a "puzzle-solving process", where readers have to "decide what to retain and not to retain, and move on" [3]. Therefore, ESL learners need

to master reading skills using both processes simultaneously and in the appropriate situation to succeed in academia.

Various studies have been done in attempt to classify reading strategies that can be used by L2 readers that reflect Goodman's top-down, bottom-up processing theory (e.g. Anderson, 1991; Block, 1986; Pritchard, 1990). [1; 16; 2]. Block's coding system relates reading strategies to two levels: general comprehension and local linguistic strategies. General comprehension strategies include methods used for "comprehension-gathering" and "comprehension-monitoring" [16]. These strategies are classified as top-down, reader-centered strategies. Local linguistic strategies are concerned with the reader's attempt to understand specific linguistic units. These would be regarded as bottom-up, text-centered strategies.

Another aspect of reading comprehension is related to the theory of schemas (Clarke & Silberstein, 1977; Carell, 1987; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Widdowson, 1983; Carrell, Pharis & Liberto, 1989) [9; 6; 4; 18; 5]. Schemata, or schema, have been described by Widdowson, 1983 as "cognitive constructs which allow for the organization of information in long-term memory" [18]. Researchers Carrell & Eisterhold (1983), identified three types of schemata: content, formal and linguistic. Content schema, according to provides the reader with background knowledge; formal schema is associated with the knowledge of different genres, language structures, and it deals with text organization, vocabulary and grammar [4]. Finally, linguistic schema allows the reader to identify even the unknown words from the specific way of their collocation. All three schemas are of outmost importance for successful reading comprehension.

The current research in learning strategies in ESL and EFL settings has focused on cross-cultural aspects of using and teaching second language learning strategies (Levine, Reves & Leaver, 1996; Dreyer & Oxford, 1996) [14; 11], considered the influence of gender and motivation on strategy use (Kaylani, 1996) [13] and discussed methods of teaching strategies in EFL settings (Dadour & Robbins, 1996; Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary & Robbins, 1996) [7; 10]. Among these topics, the issue of teaching specific academic-related language strategies in university and college settings (Chamot & O' Malley, 1996) plays a very important role in order for the students to succeed [8]. Thus, teaching reading strategies seems an indispensable part of success in various academic programs.

Reading is a complex process that involves aspects of cognition (the ability to comprehend the text) and metacognition (the strategic ability to manipulate the text in order to achieve a particular goal). Both aspects are crucial in understanding the academic text. Various factors may influence the readers' metacognitive knowledge including "previous experiences, beliefs, culture- specific instructional practices , proficiency in L2" [17]. Sheorey &

Mokhtari (2001) further point out that “the combination of conscious awareness of the strategic reading process and actual utilization of reading strategies distinguishes the skilled from unskilled readers” [17] .

Research on examination of metacognitive and cognitive awareness of reading strategies among native and non-native readers in ESL or EFL settings (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001; Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002) focused on reading academic texts, such as textbooks among high school and college students [17; 15]. However, very few studies had been done that examine cognitive and metacognitive strategies of college and university ESL students, focusing specifically on a particular reading genre of academic scholarly journal articles.

The present study takes up this question investigating the perceptions of cognitive and metacognitive awareness of ESL university students. More specifically, we hypothesized that gender would be a significant factor in selection of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies.

The participants in this study were 36 international students (18 females, 18 males) enrolled in classes that focus on developing academic reading and writing skills . In these classes, the students were involved in a variety of reading and writing tasks that included reading of a wide range of academic journal articles as a part of their preparation for writing secondary and empirical research studies.

The data for this study were collected by means of a reading strategies survey modified from the original *Metacognitive-Awareness-of-Reading-Strategies Inventory (MARS)* developed by Sheorey & Mokhtari [17] . The modified version was used because reading journal articles requires use of specific reading strategies. The specific strategies (cognitive and metacognitive) were selected based on the whole class discussions of students’ use of reading strategies. The students were given an academic journal article to read and then were interviewed on the use of their reading strategies. The survey was developed to determine cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies of non-native speakers of English.

The collected data on 29 reading strategies were analyzed, using quantitative method of analysis (SPSS) . The analysis focused on the following variables: gender, preference for cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and tendency and degree of each reading strategy use. In the course of analysis, using frequency distribution, t-test method, and correlation analysis of cognitive and metacognitive strategies the following statistics were reported: mean, standard deviation, and the percentage of use for each strategy. The reliability coefficient for overall items, metacognitive items, and cognitive items were determined.

The objective of this study was to examine the use of metacognitive and cognitive reading strategies of male and female university ESL students. More

specifically, this study focused on reading strategies of university ESL students enrolled in classes with the emphasis on research, in which the students were reading academic journal articles.

The results revealed that, in general, females used slightly more often cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies than males. More specifically, for example, the mean difference between the use of metacognitive reading strategies among males and females was slightly greater than the mean difference between the uses of cognitive reading strategies across genders. The findings further indicate that females used slightly more metacognitive reading strategies than cognitive strategies, and males use more often cognitive strategies than metacognitive ones. That males used fewer metacognitive reading strategies might indicate that they might be better in top-down processing mechanisms, that is in identifying various linguistic signals and arranging them in a sequence of a successful reading problem solving. In addition, males affectively compensate for strategic manipulation of the text by using various cognitive strategies such as activating their background knowledge or schemata.

In contrast, as one could infer from the results females are more detail oriented than males and prefer bottom-up processing of information. That is, they tend to use diverse factors, such as life experiences, cultural knowledge and situational sensitivity during the reading process. They have a better strategic ability and employ metacognitive strategies in order to comprehend the text in a slightly larger degree than males. This gendered approach to selection and use of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies could have useful implications for successful reading group activities in which both genders would complement each other in the application of text processing skills.

The results also showed that all the participants used metacognitive and cognitive strategies linearly. That is, when the participants read academic journal articles, they used a similar number of metacognitive and cognitive strategies. Such discovery indicates that reading academic journal articles requires both types of strategies in order to comprehend the texts.

The fact that the correlation of cognitive and metacognitive strategies across genders was not statistically significant might be explained by the relatively small number of participants ( $n=36$ ). More correlational studies need to be done among gender, cultural, and educational variables. Finally, participants mainly were ESL students coming from Asian cultures; therefore, the findings might vary with the different population or settings.

The results of this study, however, can not be conclusive. Even though the outcome of this study does indicate that females in general used more reading strategies, it does not suggest that males are not aware of these strategies. Instead, males may not use them when needed. In addition, the use of

reading strategies may not guarantee that students would still understand the text. More research has to be conducted with a larger number of participants, addressing the use of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies in academic settings.

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## **РОЗВИТОК АНАЛІТИЧНИХ ЗДІБНОСТЕЙ У СТУДЕНТІВ СПЕЦІАЛЬНОСТІ "МІЖНАРОДНА ІНФОРМАЦІЯ" ЯК ЧИННИК ЇХ ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНЦІЇ**

На початку третього тисячоліття поглиблюються та прискорюються загальносвітлові соціально-економічні, політичні, соціокультурні процеси, які визначають розвиток людства на сучасному етапі його життєдіяльності. Глобальні суспільні зрушення мають систематичний, швидкий, незворотний характер. Вони зумовлені науково-технічним прогресом, швидкою інформатизацією та комп'ютеризацією, демократизацією суспільного життя у більшості країн світу.