The Reading Strategies Awareness among English as a Second Language (ESL) Learners in Malaysia's University

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Abstract—This research paper aims to measure the awareness level of reading strategies of the English as Second Language (ESL) Learners in Universiti Teknologi MARA, Penang. This study has included the measurement of their perceived use of reading strategies while reading academic materials since reading of specialized academic material in the second language is beginning to receive attention. This type of academic reading is also important to test the learners' reading comprehension skills and their knowledge of the text. An instrument of the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) was used for this study where it consists of three broad categories of reading strategies namely, Global Reading strategies, Problem Solving Strategies and Support Strategies. Analysis of the collected data revealed that the learners perceived the three strategies with a different frequency level depending on the purpose of reading academic materials. The data also provided evidence that they were able to practice them. The findings of the reading strategies awareness of ESL learners are discussed.

Index Terms—reading strategies, global reading strategies, problem solving strategies, support strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading strategies are important as they can actually assist the ESL learners' reading process and gives them a clear sense of direction on what they are actually digesting while reading. English as Second Language (ESL) learners in general have employed different reading strategies that suit them well especially when they have different reading materials. However, most of them have no knowledge of what these reading strategies are as they might not have been exposed to the various reading strategies. As such, it is not known to them that should these reading strategies be employed, it can enhance their understanding and memorizing of the materials being read. This results in having both effective skills that may help the ESL learners to succeed in examination. There are different kinds of reading strategies

that are employed by ESL learners namely, Global Reading Strategies (GLOB), Problem Solving Strategies (PROB) and Support Strategies (SUP). Basically, these reading strategies can be employed simultaneously on one reading material such as, the academic materials but some ESL learners are not aware of which reading strategies they have employed.

Strategies as defined by Winograd & Hare, 1998 (as cited in Anderson, 1999) are "deliberate actions that learners select and control to achieve desired goal or objectives." Finding out which reading strategy is employed and effective in improving or helping a learner in understanding or memorizing any reading materials such as the academic materials, can be a great help in determining which strategies should be included in the syllabus when teaching the reading comprehension skill.

In the context of second language learning, learners use the strategies to make learning more effective and improve comprehension. According to Singhal (2001), reading strategies "indicate how readers conceive a task", help them to understand and guide them to comprehend. It is important for second language readers to be aware of their comprehension processes during reading. In order to do that, strategies are selected to assist in getting at the meaning of what they read. Indirectly, metacognitive awareness, which is the "readers' awareness of strategies during the reading process" is the skill that second language readers used while reading to make them better readers. (Singhal, 2001). Therefore, students who are deficient in metacognitive awareness, tend to use extra time to understand words than to construct meaning from the text. As a result, they "often have difficulties coping with academic materials and "tend not to possess the necessary reading strategies and skills for efficient comprehension." (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002).

Consequently, to increase students' awareness of such strategies, it is not easy and not the learners' responsibilities solely. Teachers play a vital role in helping to use the "given strategy" and also "taught how to determine if they are successful in their use of that strategy" (Anderson, 1999). Grabe (1991) cautions, "effective strategy training is not a simple or easy matter" since it needs "duration of training, clarity of training procedures, students responsibility and strategy transfer." As highlighted by Mokhtari & Sheory (2002), for students "to be strategic and constructively responsive readers" it is strongly recommended to introduce skilful academic reading to accomplish in academic. As for teachers to implement reading strategies is not an easy task. It takes time to be taught and requires guided practice on the teachers' part on "how to teach; why, when and in what problems or circumstances to use a strategy" and it also "involves frequent modelling and re-teaching specific strategies when necessary" (Ciborowski, 1991).

Although excessive research and reliable instrument in assessing reading awareness of native English speakers have been done, it is Mokhtari & Reichard's, 2002 stand that there is yet a specific design to measure metacognitive awareness of adolescent and ESL learners that has prompted us to use and adopt the instrument such as SORS in this study. The significance of using SORS is to measure awareness of ESL learners' reading strategy as well as to provide suggestions to improve their reading skills. This instrument can help to identify the learners' strategies in comprehending and acquiring the academic text. SORS are categorized in three different strategies such as Global Learning Strategies, Problem Solving Strategies and Support Strategies, which help the readers to control, evaluate and manipulate the reading materials during the process of reading.

It is vital for ESL learners to be aware of their reading strategies in order to aid their comprehension in the tasks assigned. By having the metacognitive strategies and being aware of the strategies used, it may help students to be responsive as well as to be able to construct meaning from the text. The information provided in the research could perhaps increase the awareness of reading strategies of the readers while reading and to improve their understanding of the process and help them to be "thoughtful, constructively responsive and strategic readers" (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002). Second language readers should know how to comprehend the reading strategies to help them in absorbing the academic materials better.

Therefore, in short, the objectives of this study are three-folds, namely to identify differences in the reading strategies employed by learners, to identify learners awareness in employing reading strategies, and lastly is to highlight the effectiveness of some reading strategies that help the learners to understand the text better.

Apart from that, a median and mode analysis were also conducted on the overall means of each sub-scale category so as to shed some light on the answers to our research questions of:

1) What is the most prominent type of reading strategy as perceived to be employed by these students when reading academic materials?

2) What are the frequencies for the three categories of reading strategies as perceived to be employed by these students when reading academic materials?

II. METHOD

The Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) questionnaire that were constructed and validated by Mokhtari & Sheorey (2002) was used.

A. Sampling Design

Using a simple random sample, the subjects of this study were sixty (60) third semester students who came from the Engineering Faculty of UiTM Penang. This sample population refers to about 20% of the total number of third semester students who were pursuing Mainstream English II (BEL 250) Preparation for MUET (BEL260) of this institution

whereby about sixty percent of the subjects were male and forty percent were female aged between nineteen to twenty-one years old.

B. Questionnaire

A selected-response format of thirty items was measured using the Likert –Scale that provided us with an ordinal scale measurement. The instrument was adopted, constructed and validated by Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002. The responses were then rated based on a five-point Likert-scale which ranged from numbers one to five;

1 means "never" or "almost never"
2 means "only occasionally"
3 means "sometimes"
4 means "usually"
5 means "always" or "almost always"

These 30 items were categorised into three categories of reading strategies comprising of Global Reading Strategies (13 items), Support Strategies (9 items) and Problem Solving Strategies (8 items) by Mokhtari & Shoerey (2002), adapting this formula from the work of Oxford & Stock (1995). All the items in this questionnaire were mainly used to indicate the extent of awareness to which the respondents perceived themselves to be using the described strategy when reading academic materials.

Frequency and percentage were carried out on all the responses made by the sixty samples in this study. The descriptive statistics of frequency and the percentage were used to determine the level of awareness of the reading strategies preferences among the students in UiTM Penang.

In addition to that, mean and mode scores were used to determine the sub-scales and frequency of reading strategy awareness as perceived by the respondents.

C. Data Analysis

The data collected from the 60 respondents were computed and analyzed using the SPSS 11. Individual scores from the questionnaire that were grouped together according to their sub-scale category namely the Global Reading Strategies (GLOB), Problem Solving Strategies (PROB) and Support Strategies (SUPP) were recorded and added up to obtain the total score for the entire instruments. The statistical procedures used in this study were the descriptive statistics − mean and mode scores and also frequency and percentage. The overall means for each sub-scale are categorized as below:

High –   (mean of 3.5 or higher)
Moderate – (mean of 2.5 to 3.4)
Low –   (mean of 2.4 or lower)

III. RESULTS

A. The Awareness of Reading Strategies Employed

TABLE 1:
MEAN FOR GLOBAL READING STRATEGIES (GLOB)

Mean	n	%
H	14	23.3
M	42	70.0
L	4	6.7

The data above shows the moderate usage of designation of reading strategies being the most prominent with 70% of the respondents showing their awareness in various techniques such as highlighted in Table 1. About forty-two students fall under the moderate usage designation of reading strategies as compared to only a mere 6.7 percent of the total respondents showing the lack of awareness of such techniques. This shows that a majority of the respondents are able to monitor and manage their reading such as being aware that they do actually preview the text, have a purpose in mind about the text and use typographical aids, tables and figures. The high mean score, as suggested by the SORS; made up of 3.5 and higher sees only a total of fourteen respondents being in this category.

TABLE 2:
ANALYSIS OF PERCENTAGE OF GLOBAL READING STRATEGIES (GLOB)

Item No.	Description of Items		1	2	3	4	5
1	I have a purpose in mind when I read	n	0	4	34	16	6
		%	0.0	6.7	56.7	26.7	10.0
3	I think about what I know to help me understand what I read	n	0	7	20	27	6
		%	0.0	11.7	33.3	45.0	10.0
4	I take an overall view of the text to see what it is about before I read it	n	4	9	23	19	5
		%	6.7	15	38.3	31.7	8.3
6	I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose	n	2	15	21	18	4
		%	3.3	25.0	35.0	30.0	6.7
8	I review the text first by noting its characteristics like length and organisation	n	4	13	25	15	3
		%	6.7	21.7	41.7	25.0	5.0
12	When reading, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore	n	3	12	28	11	6
		%	5.0	20.0	46.7	18.3	10.0
15	I use tables, figures and pictures in text to increase my understanding	n	8	18	18	10	6
		%	13.3	30.0	30.0	16.7	10.0
17	I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading	n	2	9	20	26	3
		%	3.3	15.0	33.3	43.3	5.0
20	I use typographical features like bold face and italics to identify key information	n	10	16	14	13	7
		%	16.7	26.7	23.3	21.7	11.7
21	I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text	n	4	15	30	9	2
		%	6.7	25.0	50.0	15.0	3.3
23	I check my understanding when I come across new information	n	0	8	28	18	6
		%	0.0	13.3	46.7	30.0	10.0
24	I try to guess what the content of the text is about when I read	n	1	4	18	25	12
		%	1.7	6.7	30.0	41.7	20.0
27	I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong	n	6	8	20	21	5
		%	10.0	13.3	33.3	35.0	8.3

As for Item 21 in Table 2, fifty percent of respondents indicated that they sometimes critically analyse and evaluate their reading texts in answering comprehension questions. In gauging their frequency of awareness on item 17 - *I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading*, the majority of respondents which amounted to forty-eight percent of respondents stated a higher degree of awareness in using contextual clues while reading. This shows that the technique of using contextual clues is a skill the respondents need especially in making intelligent guesses about a certain lexis or vocabulary based on the context of the reading passage.

TABLE 3:
MEAN FOR PROBLEM-SOLVING READING STRATEGIES (PROB)

Mean	N	%
H	39	65
M	20	33
L	1	1.7

As can be seen from Table 3, the Problem Solving Strategies (PROB) which skill readers are to have localised, the focus technique especially when understanding of textual information is hindered, the respondents of this sub-skill strategies account to 65% (39 respondents). This suggests that these respondents do indicate a higher level of awareness in applying some of the Problem Solving Strategies; for instance adjusting one's speed of reading when the text become difficult or easy, guessing the meaning of unknown word and rereading the text to improve comprehension. Contrastively, the Problem Solving mean score for the lower usage designation only recorded the one and only respondent as showing the least awareness of such strategies to be applied in his academic reading. Since the focus is on the reading of academic materials, usually the readers are given specific time to comprehend the texts.

TABLE 4:
ANALYSIS OF PERCENTAGE OF PROBLEM-SOLVING READING STRATEGIES (PROB)

Item No.	Description of Items		1	2	3	4	5
7	I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading	n	0	4	10	24	22
		%	0.0	6.7	16.7	40.0	36.7
9	I try to get back on track when I lose concentration	n	0	8	10	29	13
		%	0.0	13.3	16.7	48.3	21.7
11	I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading	n	1	13	22	18	6
		%	1.7	21.7	36.7	30	10
14	When text becomes difficult, I pay close attention to what I am reading	n	1	8	11	27	13
		%	1.7	13.3	18.3	45.0	21.7
16	I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading	n	7	15	23	13	2
		%	11.7	25.0	38.3	21.7	3.3
19	I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read	n	4	9	17	21	9
		%	6.7	15.0	28.3	35.0	15.0
25	When text becomes difficult, I reread it to increase my understanding	n	2	3	8	25	22
		%	3.3	5.0	13.3	41.7	36.7
28	When I read, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases	n	1	5	16	28	10
		%	1.7	8.3	26.7	46.7	16.7

In Table 4, for item 7, a majority of forty two respondents acknowledged the awareness of staying focussed and not being easily side-tracked. In fact, more than 40 respondents acknowledged that they have usually, always or almost always used the strategies as given in items 9, 14 and 25.

TABLE 5:
MEAN FOR SUPPORT READING STRATEGIES (SUPP)

Mean	N	%
H	19	31.7
M	31	51.6
L	10	16.7

Table 5 as shown above preview another moderate usage of designation of reading strategies being the most prominent but this time, with 51.6 percent of the respondents showing their awareness in techniques used such as highlighted in Table 6 below. About thirty-one students fall under this moderate usage designation of reading strategies as compared to other group of means, of the same strategy. The percentage of 31.7 shows the high mean score whereas, 16.7 percent indicates the low mean score, which can be observed as showing the lack of awareness of techniques in the items such as shown in Table 5. This shows that a majority of the respondents are aware of the strategy that could assist them to understand the text so that they would be able to interpret it as what has been requested by the questions.

TABLE 6:
ANALYSIS OF PERCENTAGE OF SUPPORT READING STRATEGIES(SUPP)

Item No.	Description of Items		1	2	3	4	5
2	I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read	n	3	26	18	11	2
		%	5.0	43.3	30.0	18.3	3.3
5	When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read	n	12	10	15	17	6
		%	20.0	16.7	25.0	28.3	10.0
10	I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it	n	6	10	16	15	13
		%	10	16.7	26.7	25	21.7
13	I use reference materials (e.g., a dictionary) to help me understand when I read	n	3	9	13	17	18
		%	5.0	15.0	21.7	28.3	30.0
18	I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) of better understand what I read	n	5	10	27	11	7
		%	8.3	16.7	45.0	18.3	11.7
22	I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it	n	6	12	25	16	1
		%	10.0	20.0	41.7	26.7	1.7
26	I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text	n	4	14	21	18	3
		%	6.7	23.3	35.0	30.0	5.0
29	When reading I translate from English into my native language	n	5	9	13	12	21
		%	8.3	15.0	21.7	20.0	35.0
30	When reading I think about information in both English and my mother tongue	n	3	5	24	22	6
		%	5.0	8.3	40.0	36.7	10.0

In Table 6, as seen in item 13 - *I use reference materials (e.g., a dictionary) to help me understand what I read,* shows that the respondents are very concerned about the needs to understand the text given. Item 29 nonetheless recorded a number of 42 respondents who stated that they frequently translate from English Language into their native language as compared to other items which shows a range of 13 to 35 respondents attesting to their frequency in resorting to the strategies provided under the Support reading strategies.

B. The Effectiveness of Reading Strategies Employed

The technique of using contextual clues in Global Reading Strategies is a skill the respondents need especially in making intelligent guesses about a certain lexis or vocabulary based on the context of the reading passage. Since the aim of this study is merely to measure their levels of awareness, to conclude the analysis and observations made on the validity and reliability of such techniques of gauging their level of awareness and perceived use of reading strategies, we applied a t-test and below is the summary:

TABLE 7:
T-TEST SCORE

	Mean	Std Deviation	p-value
GLOB	3.18	0.48	0.000
PROB	3.59	0.50	0.000
SUPP	3.17	0.62	0.000

From Table 7, with reference to the Global strategies, the average of this data recorded a mean of 3.18 which therefore can be inferred that the respondents themselves are consistent in using the much-discussed items provided in the SORS, in their daily readings of academic texts. It could also be said that these respondents do possess the necessary reading strategies and skills for efficient comprehension.

As for Problem – solving strategies, the average mean is 3.59 and it can be concluded that there is a tendency for the students to be involved in the actions and procedures in working directly with the text they read. Being active readers and thinkers as advocated by this study is highlighted in their level of awareness of such skills that necessitate better comprehension of the academic texts.

The mean for the Support Strategies meanwhile is 3.17 which indicates that the respondents have identified themselves well with the reading strategies in this sub-scale category.

Thus, it can be summarized that since the level of significance is lower than 0.05, therefore the difference between means of the samples is significant.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that learners are aware of some reading strategies which they use when reading academic materials. Their level of awareness may differ since they do not know that they perceive certain strategy unless someone tells them about it. Their preference to certain strategy is due to their ability to read and understand the materials and to know the purpose of doing so. Data indicate that a lower level of awareness and strategy use would be related to the low ability readers. Contrastively would be the high-ability readers who can easily identify themselves with a variety reading strategies. Instances of higher level usage strategies are re-reading, main ideas detection, meaning-analysis through context. The students used mainly problem-solving strategies that involve using their concentration while reading and monitoring one's comprehension. This shows that learners are more concerned about the text comprehension because this may somehow, helps them answering the reading comprehension questions better.

With these findings, the awareness of reading strategies (SORS) should be instilled or rather inculcated in students as the advantages of realising and putting them into actual use when reading academic materials far outweigh the disadvantages and the lack of awareness on these selected strategies. This would also enable them to acknowledge the needs and importance of reading comprehension skills. The realization on the relevance of this skill for the learners is basically for their daily academic tasks and for the performance and achievement in it. This may result in becoming active readers and thinkers.

This is especially significant and relevant in the case of these respondents since the course they are taking, outlines a 45% of the total assessment.

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