**THE EFFECT OF READING STRATEGIES INSTRUCTION IN L1 ON RAISING READING ABILITY OF IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS IN L2**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the effect of reading strategies instruction in L1 on raising reading strategies awareness and use and reading ability of Iranian EFL learners in L2 (English) and L1 (Persian). To this purpose, 82 students of elementary English proficiency levels constituted the control and experimental groups. Then, a test of reading comprehension and a reading strategy questionnaire in L2 and L1 as pretests were distributed to the participants. After giving the experimental groups reading strategy instruction the post tests were distributed to all participants. Data analysis showed the experimental group outperformed the control group in the English and Persian reading comprehension strategies use and reading comprehension ability.

**Keywords:** Reading, Reading Strategies, Reverse Transfer, First Language, Second Language

**INTRODUCTION**

Language students need large amount of intelligible input, and reading material provide the most readily available source. As Chastain (1988) states “reading is a basic and complementary skill in language learning.” It enables the learners to work at their own speed and to increase their world knowledge. In foreign language learning, reading is the means of getting information from authentic and different sources including scientific and legendary books and journals as well as the internet. Students with learning disabilities in reading or dyslexia often have trouble comprehending text in books and other reading material that is written at their grade levels. This can occur for several possible reasons. First, the material may be written is beyond their current independent reading skill level. Second, they may have limited prior knowledge about the content of reading or have limited vocabulary knowledge. Third, they may not be aware of how the reading material is structured as in the elements of story structure, the organization of the material in a text book, or the characteristics of the type of text being read. Fourth, the meaning of sentences and passages may become lost as the reader struggles with the workings of reading. This leads to trouble recall what was read. Fifth, they may have difficulty determining what information is essential in written passages. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) found indications that more successful learners be different from less successful ones in their use of strategies. They found that students who were chosen by their teachers as more effective learners use strategies more frequently and use a greater variety of strategies than students who were chosen as less effective. Teachers, therefore, need to understand the advantage of L2 learners who possess the ability to transfer the prior linguistic knowledge, prior skills or existing schemata to facilitate their learning of reading in the target language. This enables teachers to teach the students ways to help them use the second language more effectively. Other value of this study is that we will aware of the EFL learner's ability in their first language so can fix their short comings of this important skill in Iranian's reading comprehension in Iran's schools.

**Review of the Literature**

What is reading? What is the relationship between L1 and L2 readings? Do learners have any problem in their mother tong or not? What reading strategies will a second language reader use in L2 reading? Will she be able to transfer L1 reading strategies automatically to L2 reading? Reading is a complex process in which cognitive and psychological functions of different levels interact with each other in making the meanings of the text. Rum el hart (1977) define reading as involving flexible processing and multiple information sources, depending upon contextual circumstances.
In particular the focus is on different aspects of this area:
1. Definition of language and the origin of language,
2. What is reading and what are the components of reading?
3. Nature of L1 and L2 reading processes and influence of L1 on L2 reading;
4. Transfer as a contributing factor in second language reading;
5. And cognitive strategy awareness.

The role of the mind is very important in storing information and recalling them, it seems, this matter is another cause of difficulty in reading. In this process, readers need to use all the knowledge they have, as well as their linguistic knowledge, their background knowledge of the topic in the text, and their knowledge of the cognitive and Meta cognitive reading strategies. This study is tended to overcome shortcomings in this area and provide opportunity to facilitate this skill by using L2 strategies and improving L1 students reading comprehension ability, because, we believe in transferring L1 reading ability on L2 reading. Transfer of mother tong’s (L1 to L2) pattern may cause the problem but there is some opposite claim of this idea because some scientists believe in the advantages of transferring as in the contrastive analysis. Among some other studies that supported the results that comprehension strategies are transferred are Escamilla (1987) and Jimenez, Garcia and Pearson's (1995; 1996) studies. Escamilla (1987) studied native language reading achievement and second language oral proficiency as predictors of second language reading achievement. The subjects in that study were third and fourth grade Spanish-speaking students who were enrolled in bilingual education programs. The results of the study showed that Spanish reading comprehension skill best predicted scores on both the English vocabulary test and the English comprehension test In Allen et al., adolescents (ages 14-17 ) with English as a first language read four passages in French, German, or Spanish as part of their secondary school instruction. statistical results indicated a very clear increase in comprehension scores based on the level of language. As a result the more language one has, the higher the comprehension score.

Topic familiarity and culture familiarity are those prominent issues in reading comprehension. These factors affecting comprehension may require the use of various strategies. There are many strategies to improve reading comprehension in struggling readers. When the L2 learners are exposed with the tasks with familiar topics or when they have prior information about the topics of the tasks to be performed, in fact, they automatically focus-on-meaning rather than form (Long, 1990; Schmidt-Rinehart, 1994). Chang (2006, cited in Asghar and Sima) revealed that while reading comprehension monitoring efforts were motivated by topic familiarity, assumption events were primarily facilitated by topic familiarity. Pulido (2007) also found that familiarity of the learners with the topics of the reading tasks leads to better comprehension of the texts. Combs (2008; as cited in Asghar and Sima, 2012) revealed that neither typographically enhanced text nor the topic familiarity training had a significant impact on the acquisition of form.

A number of different studies have taken place in culture familiarity. Some of these studies were conducted on L1 and L2 learners, on L1 learners or L2 learners only, or on bilingual students. Cultural knowledge Studies have revealed that cultural knowledge which is part and package of background and topic knowledge has an effect on reading comprehension. It is best to describe the expression ‘culture’ first. The simplest definition of culture embodies the shared beliefs, values, and practices of a given group of people (Zieghan, 2001; cited in Linda, 2008). Cultural familiarity may refer to a person’s- familiarity with a variety of different cultural aspects. Readers’ cultural backgrounds influence reading strategy selection because second /foreign language learners who are from different cultural backgrounds with different L1s may use considerably different reading strategies when comprehending the same English text (Jia-Yinglee, 2011). Accessible research shows various examples of this. For illustration, Pulido (2004; cited in Hilda) used script-based narratives on familiar and unfamiliar activities and scenarios in students’ lives as the cultural component in her study.

In a study of Hong Kong and British children, Dolan 1994 (cited in Hilda) discovered that students reading stories from their own cultural background had better recall on those than on readings to do with unfamiliar cultural background. This study was done on L1 and L2 children.
MATERIALS AND METHODS

Method

Participants
The subjects of this study were Iranian male and female students with the age range of 12 to 16. Initially, 120 students at the beginning level of English language in Modiran institute asked to participate in this study. The subjects matched as closely as possible for socioeconomic background to minimize the effect of social class and also their background knowledge, at the end 82 subjects were elicited. Methodology used at school, number of hours spend to the teaching of English, level of language proficiency by taking KET test and their identity by using questionnaire.

Instruments/Material
The following instruments were used in this study:

Language Proficiency Test
In order to make sure of the homogeneity of the control and experimental groups in terms of their English language knowledge, a test battery of KET was employed.

Test of Reading Comprehension in English and Persian
In developing the test of reading comprehension in English three passages were selected from the reading section of English for everyone.org site. The reading comprehension test in Persian had three passages, each containing different items, and in all 20 items.

Questionnaire
The strategic approach was deliberate by means of survey of reading strategies, Kouider Mokhtari and Ravi Sheorey, 2002 which contained 30 items of a scale reading strategies questionnaire (Never/ occasionally/ Sometimes/ Usually/ and Always ). All the 30 items in this study were modified from different related questionnaires adopted for the purpose of this study. The cause why these items were selected was the effortlessness of use by students, no difficulty of training to the students in the experimental group as far as the time limit was concerned, and finally being of great importance in reading both in L2 and L1. The strategy questionnaire was in English but the identity questionnaire was in Persian so that students felt more comfortable with the questionnaire.

Procedure
First the KET English language proficiency test was administered to 120 students through which two groups were identified, that is, those who are KET score fell within one standard deviation (9.31) above and below the mean of 66.66. 82 students whose score were between 57 and 76 were selected. The selected subjects were then put into control and experimental groups, each containing 40 and 42 students respectively. To find out the current reading ability of subjects in L2 reading comprehension, both English and Persian language reading test as a pretest was administered among the subjects, which was immediately followed by the reading strategy questionnaire as a retrospective measure of their strategic reading behavior. This would determine what strategies students applied before, during, and after reading in their L2. After the pretest, the experimental group received strategy treatment along with their regular classroom materials and they were taught same parts of speech which are similar in both languages such as morphology, plural, singular, present and past tenses and some English strategies like skimming, paraphrasing, summarizing on the Persian reading comprehension by considering familiarity and interest learners in the topics in 5 sessions and half an hour each session spend time but the control group was only taught their regular classroom materials. Quarter for teaching and quarter for practicing such reading activities after two weeks the post test was done at the same condition as pre test. Both pre-test and post-test was done by their teacher in the calm atmosphere.

Data Analysis
In this study, I analyzed the data in the following phases according to T-test independent. In phase one, I calculated participants’ identity and also their strategic awareness by Questionnaire. To identify possible problems with data collection procedures, a pilot study was conducted to test the research instruments and procedure; the time allotted was 1:30 minutes. The test was piloted on a similar group of thirty students and the reliability of the test scores according to the KR-21 formula turned out to be .90. Next, multiple
questions developed in both languages, in all there were forty items for all six passages in English and Persian. The nature of the items in terms of recognizing main ideas, vocabulary knowledge, and inference was the equal for all passages. The reliability of the test of L1 reading as calculated through the Cronbach’s Alpha formula turned to be .88. The reliability of the L1 scores of this test according to the Cronbach’s Alpha formula at the piloting stage was calculated to be 0.86. I calculated participants’ scores on their reading comprehension tests collected and analyzed the qualitative data from those 82 remaining participants’. After instruction and practicing some different reading text and administration of two interval exams, in phase three, I submitted the qualitative information obtained from phase two to the statistical analysis. Finally, I combined the qualitative and quantitative results and interpreted them together.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results
To ensure the homogeneity of the participants, the KET Proficiency Test was administered to 120 participants. Those students whose KET score fell within one standard deviation (9.31) above and below the mean of 66.66 were selected as homogeneous participants for this study. Therefore 82 students whose score were between 57 and 76 were selected.

Independent Sample Test for Comparing L1 Reading Pretest of Control and Experimental

Comparison in the L1 Pre-test

Independent Sample Test for Comparing L1 Reading Pretest of Control and Experimental has been done. T-test results revealed no significant difference in L1 reading pretest of control and experimental (t = .58, p = .56, p > α) in which the t-observed was less than the t-critical of 2.00, and the Sig. was more than .05. Thus, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in L1 reading of control and experimental group before the treatment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
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<td>.478</td>
<td>.492</td>
<td>.582</td>
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</table>

Comparison in the L2 Pre-test

Independent Sample Test for Comparing L2 Reading Pretest of Control and Experimental has been done. T-test results showed that there is no significant difference in L2 reading pretest of control and experimental (t = .47, p = .63, p > α) in which the t-observed was less than the t-critical of 2.00, and the Sig. was more than .05; consequently, it can be claimed that there is no significant difference in L2 reading of control and experimental group before the treatment.

Independent Sample Test for Comparing L2 Reading Pretest of Control and Experimental
Comparison in the L1 Post-test

Independent Sample Test for Comparing L1 Reading Posttest of Control and Experimental has been done. T-test showed significant difference in L1 reading posttest of control and experimental ($t = 3.63, p = .000, p < \alpha$), in which the $t$-observed was more than the $t$-critical of 2.00, and the Sig. was less than .05. As a result, the first null hypothesis which stated that critical thinking pedagogy has no effect on the improvement of reading skill for students in language proficiency classes was rejected, and, with high degree of confidence, it can be claimed that critical thinking pedagogy has a significant effect on the improvement of reading skill for students in language proficiency classes.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
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<td>2.044</td>
<td>.157</td>
<td>3.63</td>
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</table>

![Figure 1: The Mean reading L1 pre test and post test](image)

Comparison in the L2 Post-test

Independent Sample Test for Comparing L2 Reading Posttest of Control and Experimental has been done. T-test detected significant difference in L2 reading posttest of control and experimental ($t = 3.09, p = .003, p < \alpha$), in which the $t$-observed was more than the $t$-critical of 2.00, and the Sig. was less than .05. Accordingly, the null hypothesis which predicted that L1 reading comprehension ability does not have a statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners’ L2 reading comprehension ability” was rejected, and, with high degree of confidence, it can be claimed that L1 reading comprehension ability has a statistically significant effect on Iranian EFL learners’ L2 reading comprehension ability.
**Independent Sample Test for Comparing L2 Reading Posttest of Control and Experimental**

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error Difference</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Upper</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</strong></td>
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<td>.339</td>
<td>3.094</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>2.305</td>
<td>.745</td>
<td>-3.787</td>
<td>-.823</td>
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</table>

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Spoken and written are the two forms that any language appears in. The written language involves reading that is a significant skill in learning. Reading effectively and efficiently is of the greatest importance in learning L2 language. It is the only make available of words, phrases, expressions, and structures that improves speaking and writing simultaneously. But reading in an L2 needs to be done skillfully. One of the most important factors in expert reading is the awareness of reading strategies. Although different readers apply reading strategies differently, they help the readers in comprehending the text (Treiman, 2001).

According to the results of the present study, there was a significant relationship between using metacognitive reading strategies and reading comprehension among beginners L2 learners. As Phakiti (2006) maintained, in examining the relationship between reading strategies and reading performance, only cognitive strategies affect L2 reading comprehension. Although the variable of age was not taken into consideration, the female participants proved higher tendency toward strategy use compared with their male counterparts.

The review of research studies shows that there is a correlation between L1 and L2 reading ability. Strategy instruction to learners; it has also shown that an increase in L1 reading ability, and reading strategy awareness and use will result in an increase in L2 reading ability, and reading strategy awareness and use as a result of transfer of reading strategies from L1 to L2. Studies in L1 and L2 showed that reading strategy instruction can help poor readers improve their reading comprehension and L2 learners transfer prior linguistic and cognitive skills from L1 to facilitate their reading in L2. Transfer of reading skills has an overwhelmingly facilitative influence on L2 reading. Most importantly, investigating and understanding reading transfer strategies will help us to better understand the influence first language knowledge has in the reading and writing of another language.
Implication of the Study
The 1990s experienced an accumulation of research studies investigating the relationships between L1 and L2 reading. Many studies included readers’ L2 linguistic proficiency as a predicting variable and attempted to identify its effect on the relationship between reading ability in two languages. Learners by learning this skill will be able to make familiar with another country’s costumes and culture, also, it can provide learners an authentic source in L2. Reading comprehension causes the best understanding of other skill such as grammar, vocabulary in the text. The study of transfer strategies of reading may assist us to better understand the positive influence first language has in the learning of reading in another language. Teachers should understand the advantage to transfer the prior linguistic knowledge, prior skills, or existing schemata to facilitate their reading achievement of the target language. If teachers focus on the positive transfer skills that students have, it may be positive to teach these ways to help them use the second language more efficiently (Jiang and Kuehn, 2001). ESL and counteractive programs may provide two different kinds of courses: one for L2 students who have had L1 education and have high L1 academic language proficiency and cognitive skills, and the other for students who have had little or no L1 education with little L1 proficiency and cognitive skills. Thus, teachers can address the different needs of the two groups and provide more appropriate instruction for each type of student. When two languages are indistinguishable (e.g., Spanish and English) it appears that learners utilize the same essential reading behaviors and use more transfer strategies. Teachers in these cases can provide implicit instructions of transfer comparing L1 and the target language. As in O’Malley and Chamot’s (1990) study, they showed that transfer strategies can be directly and effectively taught in the classroom. The subjects in their study were being taught particular cognitive reading strategies, which included transfer of cognates and similar sounding words in the L1 languages that could be practical to understanding new words in the L2. Study of transfer can facilitate teachers to do the early transmission of reading processing skill in children’s L1 or L2 as a tool for determining children at risk for later reading difficulties in English or other alphabetic orthographies (Gottardo et al., 2001).

REFERENCES
Research Article


