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THE EFFECT OF READING STRATEGIES BY IRAQI INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNERS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES ON READING COMPREHENSION: A CASE STUDY OF MISSAN HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstract: -

This investigated effect of reading strategies by Iraqi Intermediate EFL learners and their consequences on reading comprehension. The population selected for this experimental study was students of grade five at Missan high school in Iraq. The students were all male. In addition, sixty EFL teachers also participated in the study. 140 students were selected randomly. They were divided into control groups, each group 70 learners. Apart from this a list of reading strategies was distributed among six hundred fifth grade high school learners to see which strategy was applied more. A placement test, a reading comprehension test, and a strategies questionnaire were used as instruments. Then reading strategies, (Predicting, Prior knowledge, Graphic organizers, Summarizing, Note taking, Glossary, Skimming/scanning, and asking questions) were applied by teachers to the experimental group. After 10 weeks of instruction a post test was carried out. The result showed that the strategies applied by the teachers and learners were rather different. The instructors used Asking Questions (22%), Skimming / Scanning (21%), Summarizing (19%) and Graphic Organizers (14%). Meanwhile, learners used more than all of all the Glossary, then it went to Note Taking, Summarizing and Skimming / Scanning by 23%, 20%, 18%, and 17%, and the use of other strategies were 10% or less. Also, the similarity of the two groups of instructors and learners was non-use or the negligible use of prediction. The result of study revealed that reading strategies were effective on language learners.

Keywords: - *Iraqi EFL learners, Learners' strategies, Reading comprehension, teachers' strategies*

INTRODUCTION

At Missan high schools, students were required to get reading skill not only to pass the course and but also to get better prepared for the reading they would encounter in their future academic courses. Also, students are expected to develop reading strategies that help them better learn and understand concepts.

Without applying effective reading strategies, most Iraqi EFL students in high schools learnt from English textbooks which are mostly reading-based. Additionally, the reading strategies used by the students to understand the text are unknown. It was also important to recognize the complications the Iraqi students encounter in the procedure of learning English and whether their strategies were applicable in learning / using or not. It seems that by incorporating reading strategies into the curriculum, students would better cope with the language demands during their studies. The primary goal of the current study was to explore Missan high schools, English teachers' and students' strategies used in reading comprehension and strategy teaching.

In Iraq, the Grammar Translation Method is the dominant method in the high schools. Recently, although some adaptations to teaching reading are borrowed from other approaches and methods by the teachers, the results seem to be insufficient.

Several studies on reading comprehension have shown that reading comprehension is enhanced by instructing reading strategies (e.g., Bimmel, 2001; Goodman, 1998). As far as no single strategy can meet all students' needs and since different text types need different strategies, a mix of reading strategies should be given to the learners (Eskey, 1998; Masuhara, 2003). Can anyone count only on a definite strategy to accomplish the reading comprehension teaching classes? Of course it is very hard to select a worthy response to this demand because the conditions fluctuate very broadly. In regard to taking on strategies there looks to be a big challenge with the planning or giving of reading comprehension.

Implementing high standards, high quality instruction, teaching and assessing with research-based material by the schools can fill in this gap (International Literacy Association, 2016). Instructing reading comprehension can be done by explicitly teaching students how to apply the strategies so as to improve their reading comprehension (Stetter & Hughes, 2010).

In this study, the researcher, apart from studying the effect of reading strategies by Iraqi intermediate EFL learners and their consequences on reading comprehension, tried to survey the causes behind the failures of the Iraqi students to get the predictable level of ability in reading comprehension. Even though a lot of energy has been taken by the Iraqi educationalists for improving the condition of English language teaching for the past few periods in Iraq, an inadequate condition still is existent in the successes of English learning among the Iraqi students. Thus, it is really required to discover genuine causes behind the poor successes of the students in English.

Significance of the Study

It is likely important to inquiry EFL students' and teachers' strategies and show a relationship with their educational achievement. Teachers' and learners' strategies was inspected the probable efficiency of using numerous strategies further than the customary strategy such as generative (summarization, question-generation, and drawing) on reading comprehension. It is extremely imaginable that students are not cognizant of the strategies that can improve their comprehension (strategic knowledge awareness).

The results of the current study could be of high importance to the researcher since she will be responsible for future teacher education programs in Iraq. The researcher can employ the reading strategies which have been confirmed to be helpful and effective in this study in the context of Iraq to assist Iraqi teachers to effectively instruct reading strategies to their own students. Using reading strategies can also improve the students' academic achievement in all content areas. It was a useful contribution for teachers and which can be transferred to students based on their characteristics. By considering each student's characteristics and being able to use different strategies, one of the strategies can be chosen by the teacher to be used in teaching reading in order to be understood by the students. Consequently, by using the appropriate strategy in the teaching process, the teacher needs to possess a skill to make students ready to talk.

The results of this study might lead to the revisit of the methodology which is used in reading instruction at Missan high schools. Also, the findings may be helpful to reconsider the goals of the reading comprehension curriculum, and additional insights on reading skill might be provided. Additionally, it can help the school curriculum designers in planning and designing the methods to apply mixed strategies in the reading curriculum. The current research can also show the teachers' attitudes towards reading strategies, and indicate to what extent they get the students to utilize the reading strategies. The findings might raise the teachers' awareness that their role in promoting the students' use of reading strategies is inevitable.

Oxford and Crookall (1989) proposed that ESL/EFL learners apply reading strategies to learn the language more efficiently and effectively. Applying reading strategies can equip learners with proper models for writing, introduce new topics, arouse discussion, and it can make students study linguistic elements like vocabulary and reading (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Learning and using reading strategies might also assist students to successfully deal with reading challenges. This study might provide helpful ideas, for example teachers can correct poor strategic knowledge of students and help them to deal with the reading they encounter or even help them to strengthen their reading strategies. It helped the students to use as a new reference for learning English, especially reading. They can find out the types of strategies teachers use in teaching reading so they can easily understand and learn the information that has been conveyed by the teacher.

Thus, to find out what reading strategies the students need to apply in order to comprehend the reading text, improve their reading ability, and vocabulary and syntactic knowledge, it is essential to explore the reading strategies students use while reading.

A considerable body of research exists regarding the effects of strategies on reading comprehension. But very insufficient studies have been focused on the relationship between teachers' and learners' strategies and the investigation of the consequence of strategies (generative strategy) on reading comprehension.

Research Questions

To address the objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Is there any similarity between reading comprehension strategies applied by the teachers and learners?
2. Does applying reading strategies affect Iraqi high school reading comprehension?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is a significant similarity between strategies applied by teachers and learners
2. Applying reading comprehension strategies do not have any significant effect on reading comprehension.

Teaching and learning Strategy

Brown (2007) believed that strategies refer to the methods of tackling a task or problem to achieve a specific goal or a planned design to control certain information. Therefore, it means that the strategy which is applied by the teacher is based on the approach from which the implemented method has originated. Also, strategy is employed by the teacher to plan the material and manner in order to succeed in the teaching-learning process.

In teaching reading, teachers can use different strategies. By using the best strategy, the teacher can influence students to understand their reading. According to Harmer (2007), says that strategy is an action taken by the teacher to achieve one or more of the objectives of teaching and learning. The set of general directions can be defined as a reading strategy. Teaching strategies in reading comprehension are very important in the learning process and can greatly affect students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, to Brown (2004), has noted that teaching strategies can make teaching reading easier to apply various teaching methods and techniques. Therefore, teachers who successfully teach reading comprehension realize that reading can be taught using a variety of strategies.

According to David (1971), teaching strategy is defined as a plan, method, or different activities that are designed in order to achieve specific educational goals. Therefore, teaching strategy can be defined as a plan which includes different activities that teacher and students perform to achieve educational goals.

Learning strategies and learning styles are often intertwined. Styles can be blatantly obvious by learning strategies (overt learning actions or behaviors). A strategy could be helpful under these conditions: (a) the strategy is related to the task available, (b) to some extent the strategy is harmonious with the student's learning style, and (c) students effectively apply the strategy and connects it to other relevant strategies (Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003). Strategies which follow these steps make students learn easier and faster. They will enjoy learning more and become self-directed and independent. Ultimately, the students become a lifelong learner (Allwright, 1990; Little, 1991; Oxford, 1990).

Learning strategies can be defined as specific techniques used by students, which help them learn a language. Such an example of these strategies is repeating what the learners have learned (Lessard, 1997). Lessard (1997) also indicates that a learners' preferred learning style can be closely associated with the specific learning strategies they choose to utilize. Learning strategies can be defined as the activities which a student employs to assist learning, storing, and use of information (Oxford, 1990).

Oxford (1990) divides direct and indirect learning strategies into different categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. Lessard (1997) states that these strategies should be applied into the curriculum in order to assist language learners to obtain the essential abilities to learn a new language. He further proposes three steps for applying the strategies in the classroom: first, the teacher is expected to investigate the teaching situation, second, the teacher needs to directly instruct the learning strategies, and third, the teacher should reflect and ask all students to reflect on the language learning strategies. Finally, Lessard (1997) proposes a comprehensive and thorough approach of language learning strategies that seems to be relevant to language teaching and learning.

Classification of Language Learning Strategies

There are two primary types of language learning strategies: direct and indirect strategies. Memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies are the subcategories of direct strategies, whereas metacognitive, affective, and social strategies are the subcategories of indirect strategies (Oxford, 1990).

The type of direct strategies and their subcategories are as follows:

1. How to store and retrieve new information deal with memory strategies. Thus, memory strategies can be divided into:
 - (a) Being able to make mental links. Grouping and placing new words into a context can be good examples of this kind.
 - (b) Being able to use images and sounds like using imagery.
 - (c) Having the ability to review well
 - (d) Being able to employ an action for example using a physical response or sensations

2. How students think about the process of their learning, and understand and use the new language by different methods and approaches like repeating and analyzing refer to cognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies are divided into:
 - (a) practicing (repeating, formally practicing with sounds and writing systems)
 - (b) receiving and sending (getting and receiving the idea quickly)
 - (c) being able to analyze and reason like analyzing expressions, analyzing contrastively, and translating.
 - (d) being able to create a structure for input and output for example by taking notes, summarizing, and highlighting.
3. Compensation strategies mean enabling students to make up for their limited knowledge and win the battle in challenges they encounter while using the target language skills. Compensation strategies include:
 - (a) guessing intelligently (using clues)
 - (b) overcoming challenges and limitations in speaking and writing (getting help, using gestures, avoiding communication partially or totally)

Indirect strategies and their subcategories are divided into the types as follows:

1. How students manage the process of their learning, set their cognition, arrange plan and assess their progress refer to metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategies include:
 - (a) being able to center the learning process, in other words being able to link new information with already known material.
 - (b) Being able to arrange and plan the learning process. It can be done by organizing, setting objectives, identifying the goal of a particular task, planning for doing a task, and searching for practice opportunities.
 - (c) being able to evaluate the learning process. It can be done by self-monitoring and self-evaluating.
2. Students' feelings, emotions, and anxiety refer to affective strategies. Affective strategies can be divided into:
 - (a) being able to lower the anxiety. It can be done by deep breathing, meditation, or using music.
 - (b) having the ability to encourage oneself through making positive statements and rewarding oneself.
 - (c) being able to take one's emotional temperature. It can be done by using a checklist, writing a language learning diary, and discussing feelings with someone else.
3. Learning how to interact with others refer social strategies. These strategies include:
 - (a) being able to ask questions for example, asking for clarification or verification.
 - (b) being able to interact with others like interacting with advanced users.
 - (c) being able to empathize with others. It can be done by developing cultural understanding, and others' feelings and emotions.

Methodology

Participants

Two high schools at Missan province in Iraq were selected and from these two schools 140 homogenous participants were chosen and they were divided into experimental and control groups. The students are all male. 30 EFL teachers also participated.

Procedure

Data Collection

For conducting the study, the researcher as the assistant principal of Missan high school has the opportunity to convince the students to attend the program. Seventy students were selected randomly. A pretest, The Nelson test, was carried out for both groups. The participants were assigned as control and experimental groups randomly. Then reading strategies, (Predicting, Prior knowledge, Graphic organizers, Summarizing, Note taking, Glossary, Skimming/scanning, and asking questions) were applied to the experimental group.

The students in the control group experienced a common reading comprehension class. After eight weeks of instruction a post test was carried out.

Apart from the above treatment, the list of the above strategies was distributed among 30 teachers, teaching the fifth grade and 70 students, to see which strategy/ strategies applied more by the teachers and the learners.

Results

Descriptive Statistics:

1- Descriptive statistics of reading comprehension scores in the control group in pre-test and post-test in the following charts were shown. It was clear; there was little difference between scores in pre-test and post-test.

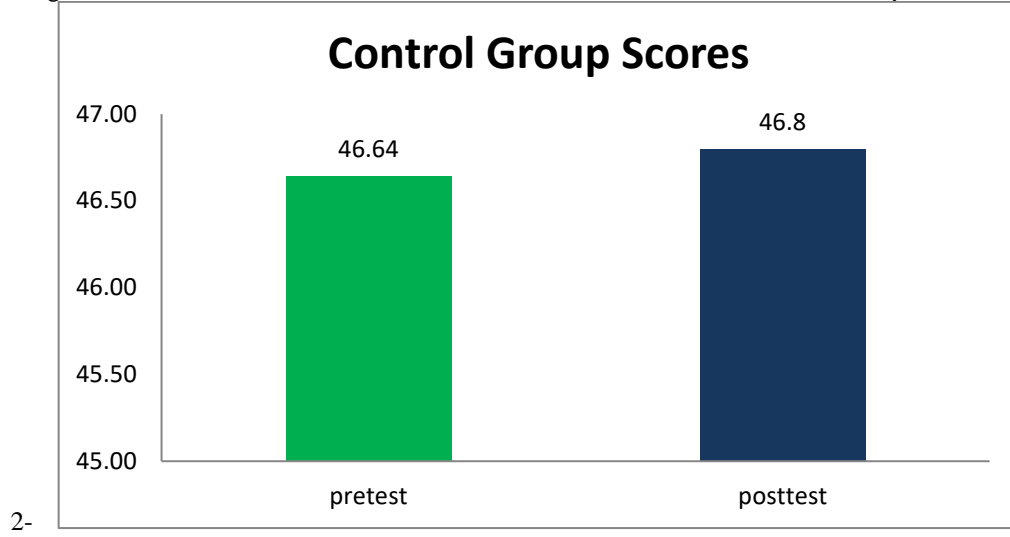


Figure 4.1. The mean scores of each learner in pretest and posttest in control group

The scores of each learner in pretest and posttest were shown in the control group.

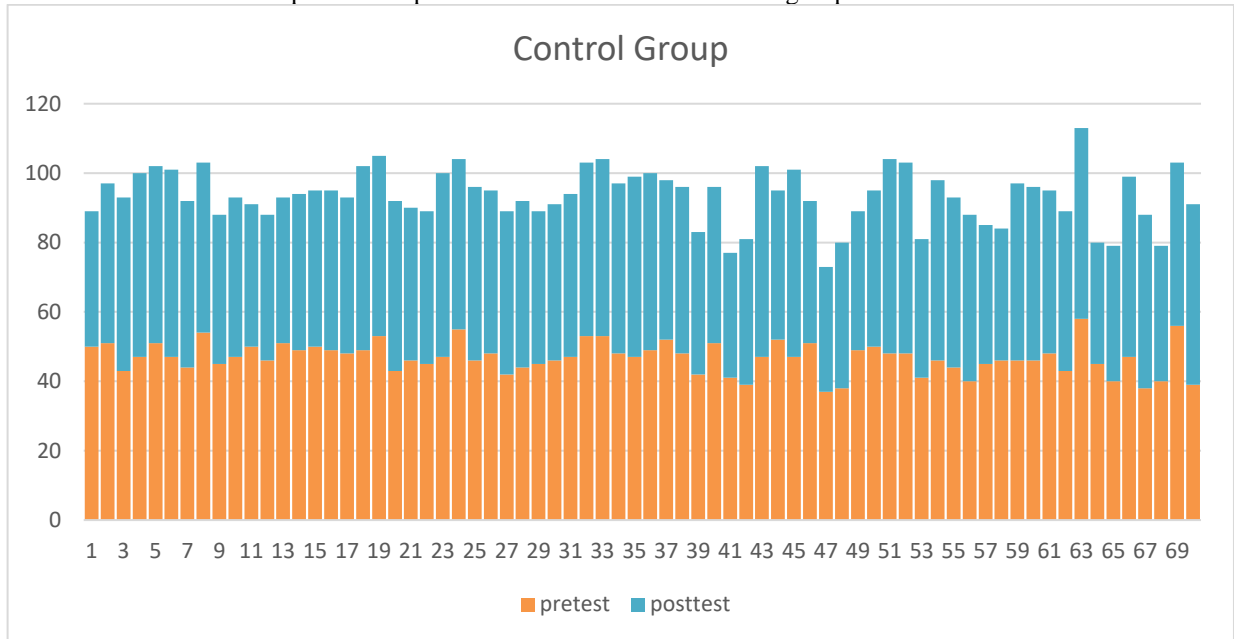


Figure 4.2. The mean scores of each learner in pretest and posttest in control group

2. Descriptive statistics of reading comprehension for learners in the experimental group before and after using reading strategies were shown in the following charts. As specifically, the average scores after reading strategies in the post test are considerably more than the scores in pre-test mode.

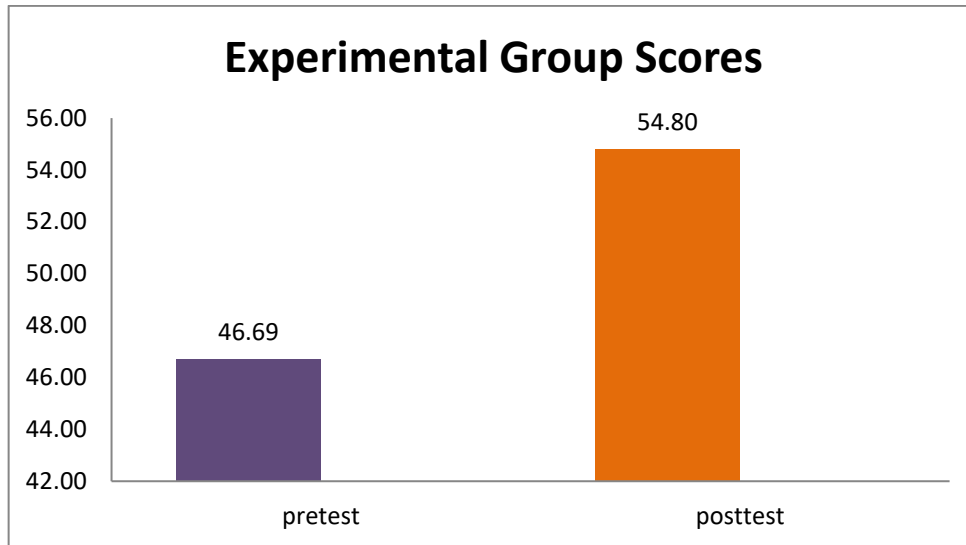


Figure 4.3. The mean scores of each learner before and after using strategies in the experimental group. The scores of each learner before and after using strategies in the experimental group were shown.

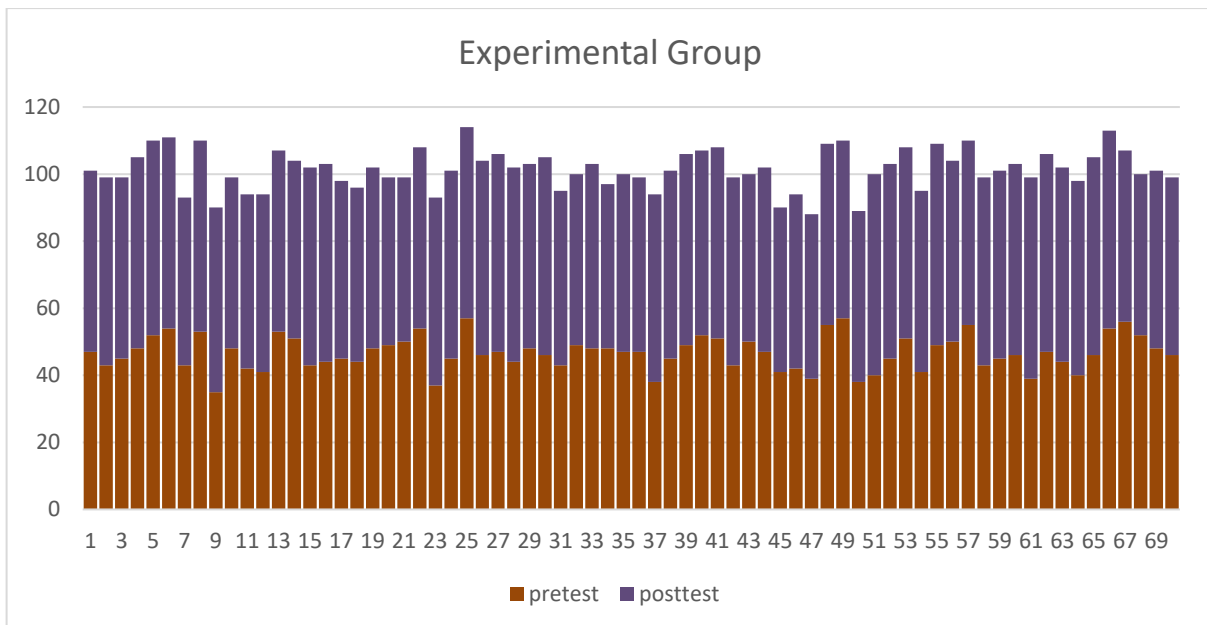


Figure 4.4. The mean scores of each learner before and after using strategies in the experimental group (pre-test and post-test)

Section 2:

1- In order to investigate the differences in reading comprehension scores between learners in two groups of control and experiment before and after the use of strategies, Independent T-test was used. First, descriptive statistics were presented and then the equality of their variance was checked

A- Before Strategies:

Table 4.1

The Group Statistics in pretest

Group Statistics					
	conexperi	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
pretest	control	70	46.6429	5.15003	.61555
	experimental	70	46.6857	5.02903	.60108

Based on the above table information, the average scores for the control and experimental group were 46.62 and 46.68, respectively. One of the assumptions, Independent T-test was equal to variances used for this purpose from Levene's Test.

B- After Strategies:

Group Statistics					
	conexperi	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
posttest	control	70	46.8000	4.46435	.53359
	experimental	70	54.8000	3.16503	.37829

4-2- Inferential Statistics:

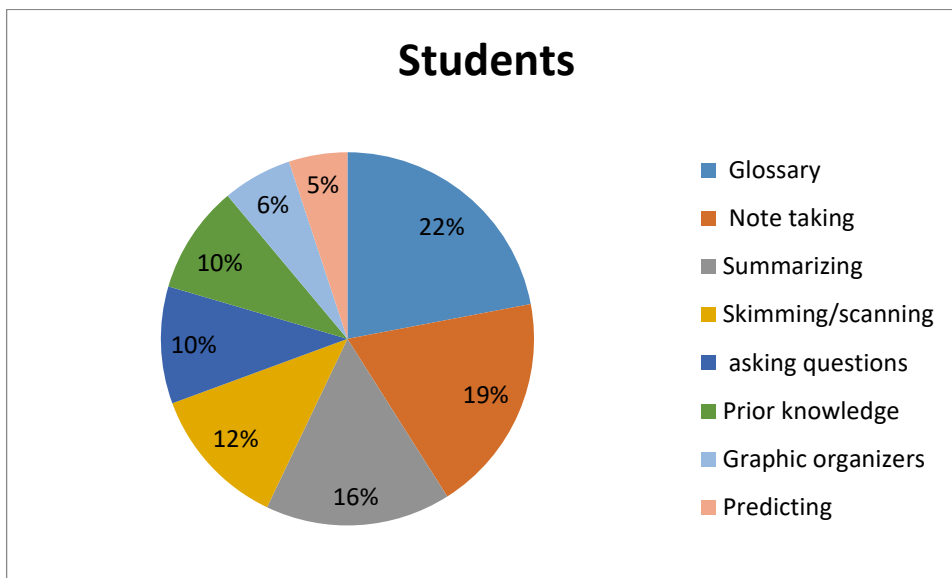
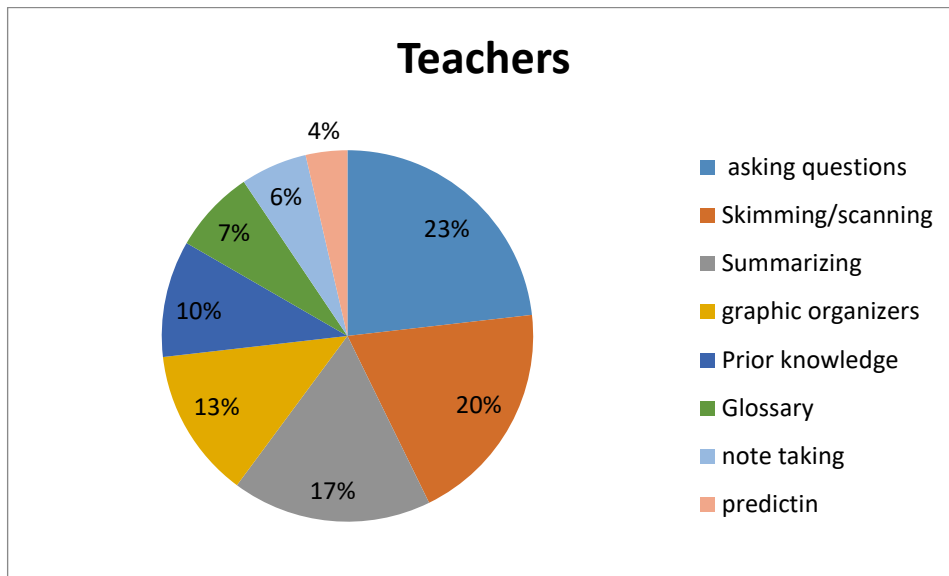
4-2-1 Test of normality

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

		precontrol	preexperimental	postcontrol	postexperimental
N		70	70	70	70
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	46.6429	46.6857	46.8000	54.8000
	Std. Deviation	5.15003	5.02903	4.46435	3.16503
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.076	.068	.100	.105
	Positive	.059	.068	.065	.058
	Negative	-.076	-.046	-.100	-.105
Test Statistic		.076	.068	.100	.105
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.200 ^{c,d}	.200 ^{c,d}	.078 ^c	.054 ^c

- a. Test distribution is Normal.
- b. Calculated from data.
- c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

Hypothesis testing The first hypothesis analysis (first research question)



As was clear, the instructors used Asking Questions (22%), Skimming / Scanning (21%), Summarizing (19%) and Graphic Organizers (14%). Meanwhile, learners used more than all of all Glossary, Note Taking, Summarizing and Skimming / Scanning by 23%, 20%, 18%, and 17%, and the use of other strategies were 10% or less. Also, the abundance of using strategies in the chart below was shown. Also, the similarity of the two groups of instructors and learners was non-use or very negligible use of prediction. It proved that strategies used by learners were different from instructors. However, instructors tried to teach generative strategies and encourage learners to use it. Also, the idea of instructors and learners about prediction strategy was the same. It was not supported.

4-3-2 The second hypothesis analysis (second research question)

H0: Reading strategies do not have any significant effect on learners’ reading comprehension.

H1: Reading strategies have a significant effect learners’ reading comprehension.

Paired-Sample T Test is used to test the hypothesis due to the normality of the variables.

Table 4.6

Paired Samples Correlations		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	preexperimental postexperimental	&70	-.047	.700

The tables above showed the average scores of language learners before and after using reading strategies. The average score before using the strategies was 46.97 and after that was 55.66. Table 4.7 illustrates the scores correlation. According to the significance level of the test ($\text{sig} = 0.752$), there was no correlation between the scores before and after the strategy, which of course was not the subject of this study (and has no application in this study).

Discussion

Results of research found the differences strategies used in reading comprehension classrooms by teachers and learners. In spite of choosing the differences strategies, teachers' strategies have significant effect learners' reading comprehension. The study showed how reading comprehension instruction appeared to serve two main purposes in the English L2 classrooms; high-frequency and low-frequency strategy instruction from teachers or learners' points of view. However, most instructors preferred asking the question to engage learners to be active in learning reading comprehension and attract their interest. It could be concluded that the majority of the learners had problem in using asking question strategy in learning reading comprehension and this strategy was not desirable among learners. Also, it should be investigated whether using special strategies by instructors, activate other strategies by learners. In another words, strategies instruction which was presented in the class, might not be accepted by learners. Therefore, the learners would choose special strategies based on their individual characteristics for reading comprehension. It was proved that Comprehension, or "understanding," by its very nature, is a phenomenon that can only be observed indirectly (Pearson & Johnson, 1978; Johnston, 1984).

The findings of the current study are in agreement with Gahungu (2007), Lien (2016), and Naseri and Zaferanieh (2012). Fathi and Shirazizadeh (2020), by employing a quasi-experimental design, found that participants receiving the strategy reading instruction outperformed the control group who were taught with no strategy instruction. Also, the findings showed that the reading strategy instruction can reduce the students' reading anxiety. According to Fathi Karizak and Khojasteh (2016), reading strategy instruction can significantly affect L2 learners' reading comprehension skill. They believe that the instruction of reading strategy can raise the learners' awareness towards reading strategies and encourage them to employ and use the strategies.

Data showed that 22% of teachers and 18% of learners chosen summarization as the most preferable and applicable strategy. The findings are in line with Ghazanfari and Sarani (2009), examining the summarization effect on reading comprehension and recall of short stories by EFL undergraduates, as well as with Ghabanchi and Haji Mirza (2010), a study which showed that generative study strategies have a significant effect on EFL learners' reading comprehension. It can be argued that generative study strategies make the reader better prepared to encounter a text.

The frequency counts of each of the learning strategies showed that the students exhibited greater use of three learning strategies: Glossary, Note Taking, and Summarizing by 23%, 20%, and 18%, respectively. Meanwhile for instructors were Asking Questions (22%), Skimming / Scanning (21%), Summarizing (19%) and Graphic Organizers (14%). It could be said to some extent the strategies used by learners and instructors were the same. The lack of awareness with strategies might be the reason for the low matching. Therefore, the learner would need to know how to use different strategies to solve their learning problems. However, the low matching strategies did not prevent learners from success. Another reason could be instructors who did care about their students' needs and believed that the students themselves had to be responsible for their own learning. Also, instructors might be unable to provide an instruction that suits the individual differences, in spite of that reading was a cognitive process. As Pearson and Cervetti (2017) stated that the cognitive science let the psychologists reconsider such constructs as human goal, purpose, and motivation, and also a greater range of psychological factors, like perception, attention, comprehension, learning, and memory. All of these psychological issues could play an important role in reading instruction. It indicated that teachers should not stay aside from teaching strategies.

According to this finding, it can be stated that students might not receive sufficient strategy training in which they can be trained how to use strategies and improve their learning strategies. Accordingly, this indicates that strategies which were used to teach reading comprehension skill for the experimental group were more favorable and beneficial. Based on the participants' responses, reading strategies led to the improvement of their performance on tests. Also, the findings of the study indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the post-test after the strategy training. The positive effects of explicit instruction of reading strategy could be obviously seen in the post-test mean scores.

Conclusions

This study shed some light concerning the application of EFL reading strategies among Iraqi high school learners and teachers. The findings exposed that students used EFL reading strategies; however, differently from teachers. The findings of this study could assist the high school teachers to better understand the use of the reading strategies by their students. By considering this study findings high school teachers can take some actions to help their students develop their reading skill. This shows that the application of suitable reading strategies can be productive in learning English reading comprehension instruction.

It was confirmed that the use of strategies was an effective way in teaching reading comprehension skills in Iraqi EFL learners. The results could remind the teachers of the important role of strategies because they can increase the students' awareness of the reading comprehension proficiency. Teaching reading strategies to students, for example summarizing,

might help them achieve a high reading comprehension proficiency. The results of this study can benefit both the reading teachers and the curriculum designers, especially in the development of appropriate learning and teaching resources for reading courses.

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