



Dişlen-Dağgöl, G., & İşpınar Akçayođlu, D. (2018). Reading under investigation: Dispositions of university students in an EFL setting. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 5(4),735-751.
<http://iojet.org/index.php/IOJET/article/view/401/289>

Received: 09.03.2018
Received in revised form: 30.07.2018
Accepted: 13.09.2018

READING UNDER INVESTIGATION: DISPOSITIONS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN AN EFL SETTING

Research Article

Gökçe Dişlen Dağgöl 

Adana Science and Technology University
gdislen@adanabtu.edu.tr

Duygu İşpınar Akçayođlu 

Adana Science and Technology University
diakcayoglu@adanabtu.edu.tr

Gökçe Dişlen Dağgöl is an assistant professor in the Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies at Adana Science and Technology University. She is interested in student and teacher cognitions as well as affective factors in language learning and teaching.

Duygu İşpınar Akçayođlu is an assistant professor in the Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies at Adana Science and Technology University, Turkey, holds an MA (TEFL) and a PhD (TEFL) from Çukurova University. Her research interests include teaching English to young learners and English learning processes of gifted and talented students as well as university students.

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Gökçe Dişlen Dağgöl

gdislen@adanabtu.edu.tr

Duygu İşpınar Akçayoğlu

diakcayoglu@adanabtu.edu.tr

Abstract

Metacognitive awareness in reading has been subject to much concern in various language levels and learning environments. This study aims to explore university students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies in English as a foreign language from both qualitative and quantitative aspects. The study adopted a mixed method approach to explore the reading dispositions of 187 preparatory class students who were enrolled in Adana Science and Technology University. Students' metacognitive awareness for reading was investigated under Global Reading Strategies, Problem-Solving Strategies, Support Strategies, and General Reading Tendencies sub-categories. Data obtained from the study revealed students' various reading habits which provided insights from their perspectives and implications for the learning and teaching processes in the context of preparatory programs at university level.

Keywords: Reading, English, Metacognitive Awareness, EFL, Preparatory Program

1. Introduction

Reading in a foreign language is challenging (Gonzalez, 2017), highly complex (Wurr, 2003), and the most important skill required from students (Khaki, 2014). It is also an interactive process between reader and writer (Lopera Medina, 2014). Therefore, it requires both comprehension of each word and surface structure represented in the reading text and the ability of making an interpretation on the meaning through the interaction with the text (Rajab, Zakaria, Rahman, Hosni, & Hassani, 2012). In other words, knowing equivalence of the words is not enough in reading a text; students need to interpret the material to achieve reading skill in real sense. It is a complex cognitive activity required for today's knowledge society, and it is not one type skill. In addition, there are different kinds of reading such as extensive reading, oral reading, intensive reading, critical reading, active reading and speed reading (Jose & Raja, 2011). Each type of reading undoubtedly involves different strategies and purposes.

Reading could also influence grammar and vocabulary improvement in different ways such as learner engagement in summary and comprehension tasks, exposure to new words, use of metacognitive strategies, reading proficiency and familiarity with topics, use of cues, and involvement in discussion tasks (Chio, 2009). Accordingly, reading is not an independent skill that only benefits itself; it enhances vocabulary, oral production and writing ability (Burt, Peyton & Adams, 2003). For this reason, it is impossible to consider reading as an island skill isolated from other language components. Furthermore, reading both makes information gathering fun and brings wisdom (Sadiku, 2015). Apart from language skills, reading may influence student behaviour positively as reported in the study by Gunn, Smolkowski, Biglan, Black and Blair (2005), who referred to the possibility of a decrease in problem behaviours

through effective reading instruction. All these positive influences of reading are likely to present themselves through the effective use of reading strategies.

Reading strategies mirror the way learners perceive a task, what kind of clues they attempt to use, the way they comprehend what they read and what kind of reaction they show when they do not understand; and these strategies signify active readers, who interact with the text (Mehrpour, Sadighi, & Bagheri, 2012). Thus, reading strategies enable learners to comprehend the general information in the text and remember the lexical items easily. Furthermore, they can make reading process more active since learners, as the active recipients of information, are able to use these strategies while constructing meaning (Chen & Chen, 2015), and reading strategies occupy a significant role in reading comprehension (Saengpakdeejit & Intaraprasert, 2014). Hence, using integrated strategies boosts reading fluency of students (Shan-Shan, 2013). Especially awareness in such strategies can make reading process more concrete, and it is possible for students to be trained to benefit from reading strategies. According to Lai, Tung and Luo (2008), reading strategies should be instructed, and strategy instruction could lower EFL students' reading anxiety (Marashi & Rahmati, 2017). All these portray the function and importance of using reading strategies since they make reading process smoother, easier and more systematic. Accordingly, inability to use reading strategies and lack of understanding them cause most university students not to achieve effective reading comprehension (Souhila, 2014). For this reason, awareness in reading strategies enable students to benefit from what they read, which eventually contributes to other skills in language learning as well.

One type of these reading strategies presents itself as metacognitive reading strategies. In general, metacognition includes awareness and control of planning, monitoring, repairing, revising, summarizing, and evaluating (Karbalaei, 2010). The metacognitive strategies make students become conscious of their thinking while they are engaged with reading tasks, and awareness and regulation of one's thinking during reading process enhances comprehension. Hence, metacognitive strategies might be a solution to the problem of poor reading (Meniado, 2016). Albazi and Shukri (2016) reported that metacognitive strategy instruction among university students improved general English proficiency. Mehrdad, Ahghar, and Ahghar (2012) also claim that teaching metacognitive strategies could not have the same effect on different levels, and it has more significant influences on higher level students.

Metacognition is known to have positive effects on reading comprehension. Iwai (2011) asserts that since metacognition is essential in the development of several linguistic, cognitive, and social skills, it has a key role in reading comprehension. The role of metacognitive reading strategy awareness in reading comprehension has been well documented in literature (Collins, 1994; Boulware-Gooden et al., 2007; Schoonen et al., 1998; Ahmadi, Ismail, & Abdulla, 2013). Several studies revealed that students using these strategies become more successful in tests and courses (Pressley, et al., 1998; Magogwe, 2013; Hong-Nam, 2014; Zhang & Seepho, 2013; Phakiti, 2006; Kummin & Rahman, 2010). In fact, metacognitive strategies were found to be a predictor of reading comprehension test scores (Ilustre, 2011). Metacognition is related with language awareness which involves language, language learning and language teaching (Haukas, 2018). Therefore, use of metacognitive strategies in language instruction could pose an impact upon the efficiency of learning. Metacognitive intervention boosts academic achievement and language performance (Raofi, Chan, Mukundan, & Rashid, 2013) not only in reading but also in writing performance (Yanyan, 2010) and listening comprehension and oral proficiency (Rahimi & Katal, 2013). Additionally, Tavakoli (2014) notes that metacognitive strategies have cognitive, social and linguistic benefits; therefore, its use is supported in process, and these strategies help produce more effective learners since they allow learners to individualize the language learning experience. Hence, teachers could enrich their

language instruction by raising awareness in metacognitive strategies on what they are and how they can be benefitted in language learning.

Three categories of metacognitive strategies used by adolescents and adult learners were introduced as Global Reading Strategies, Problem-Solving Strategies and Support Reading Strategies (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002). Huang et al. (2009) also explain that learners intentionally and carefully plan the Global Strategies in order to monitor their reading. Some examples include having a purpose in mind, previewing the text, checking the text content and its purpose, and predicting and guessing the text's meaning. As to Problem-Solving Strategies, they are utilized when learners are directly working with the text, particularly when the text becomes difficult for them. Some examples include guessing the meaning of unknown words, adjusting the reading rate, or rereading the text in order to help comprehension. Finally, Support Strategies are used by students to help comprehension. Using a dictionary, taking notes, highlighting, or translating are some of the support strategies utilized by learners (Huang et al., 2009).

Metacognition is viewed as a late-developing skill, and not many high school graduates and beginning university students are meta-cognitively mature as regards reading (Griffith & Ruan, 2005). On the other hand, undergraduate education requires the use of higher order thinking skills, and students need to develop reading strategies so as to apply these skills in their courses at university (Köse, 2016). Hence, this study looks into university students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies in foreign language. Given the importance of foreign language in university setting, the present study deals with both metacognitive reading strategies and students' dispositions towards reading in EFL context, and aims to explore metacognitive awareness and reading dispositions of university students in the context of preparatory program at university level.

2. Method

This study aims to explore university students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies in English as a foreign language. It utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data. The data were collected through a) the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory and b) Open-ended questionnaire on reading.

2.1. The Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI)

The Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory was developed by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002). This measure was designed to gauge adolescent and adults' metacognition. Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) reported internal reliability to range from 0.86 to 0.93. The 30-item inventory, which has three sub-scales, is responded on a 5-point Likert scale (1. Never or Almost Never, 2. Only occasionally, 3. Sometimes 4. Usually, 5. Always or Almost Always). The students were provided with the translated version of the inventory, and the Cronbach's alpha co-efficient score for the Turkish translation was found to be 0.93 by Öztürk (2012).

2.2. Open-ended Questionnaire on Reading

The data collected from the *Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory* were triangulated with 10 open-ended questions prepared by the researchers. Those questions aimed to reveal more detailed information about the students' views about reading in their life. Such exploration enables to examine the perspectives of different research participants, highlight similarities and differences, and generate unanticipated insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006; King (2004). Hence, the students were asked to complete unfinished sentences such as

“I think note-taking while reading is...”, “To understand a text better...”, “When I do not understand something while reading ...”, “I think guessing while reading ...”, “If there is an unknown word while reading...”, “I like reading when ...”, “I do not like reading if ...”, “I generally read when...”, “Things I daily read...”, and “Things I rarely read are...”.

2.3. Participants

The participants of this study were 187 students in the preparatory program at Adana Science and Technology University. Those students were all enrolled in English mainstream programs at various departments. Of all the students participating in the study, twelve students did not respond to the open-ended questions. Hence, quantitative findings included responses of 187 students while the qualitative findings were collected from 175 students. However, some students answered only some of the open-ended questions but not others. Thus, frequencies in the qualitative findings indicate the number of citations.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data obtained from the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory were analysed using SPSS. Findings were demonstrated using numbers, percentages and mean scores. As for the qualitative findings, all students’ responses to the open-ended questions were subjected to content analysis methods. Content analysis is defined as a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding and categorizing (Weber, 1990). In the present study, the data were initially read and reread to have ideas about what is in the data; as suggested by Braun and Clarke, (2006), this phase involves initial production of codes, an activity that requires the researcher to keep revisiting the data. Through coding, specific characteristics of the data are simplified and focused on. The themes emerged by studying the raw data and key words used in the participants’ responses. A theme is dependent on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes that seem marginally relevant could be quite important as they may play a significant role in adding to the background detail of the study (King, 2004). At the end, researchers have a good idea of the different themes, how they fit together, and the overall story they tell about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study followed the qualitative data analysis techniques in line with the related literature and demonstrated the emerging themes based on the number of times they were cited.

3. Findings

The Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory is comprised of three sub-categories as Global Reading Strategies, Support Reading Strategies and Problem Solving Strategies. Table 1 below portrays the mean scores of each sub-category and general mean score of the inventory.

Table 1. *Scores of metacognitive awareness of reading strategies*

	N	X	Ss	Min.	Max.
Global Reading Strategies	187	3.30	.60	1.38	4.49
Support Reading Strategies	187	3.05	.58	1.67	4.56
Problem Solving Strategies	187	3.58	.61	1.63	5.00
General Score of Inventory	187	3.30	.52	1.73	4.70

Mokthari and Reichard (2002) grouped the levels of strategy usage and put forth three levels as high (mean of 3.5 or higher), medium (mean of 2.5 to 3.4), and low (2.4 or lower); these levels offer a helpful standard that can be utilized for the interpretation of the average scores gathered from individual or groups of students. In the present study, mean scores of Global Reading Strategies (3.30), Support Reading Strategies (3.03) and general score of inventory

(3.30) were found to be lower than 3.50. In accordance with this, the students seem to use metacognitive reading strategies at a moderate level in general. However, the students' use of Problem Solving Strategies was found to be high, which implies that they try to cope with the difficulties they face while reading a text. It also indicates that students have a tendency to use metacognitive reading strategies, which is indicated in the narrow range between the standard deviation scores, as well.

The findings are also presented separately based on these categories, and Table 2 below pictures the Global Reading Strategies applied by students while reading a text in English.

Table 2. *Global reading strategies*

	ITEMS	X
26	I try to guess what the material is about when I read	3.90
1	I have a purpose in mind when I read	3.80
29	I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong	3.72
25	I check my understanding when I come across conflicting information	3.53
4	I preview the text to see what it's about before reading it	3.52
14	I decide what to read closely and what to ignore	3.41
3	I think about what I know to help me understand what I read	3.30
19	I use context clues to help me better understand what I'm reading	3.29
10	I skim the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization	3.11
23	I critically analyse and evaluate the information presented in the text	3.04
7	I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose	2.97
17	I use tables, figures, and pictures in text to increase my understanding	2.92
22	I use typographical aids like bold face and italics to identify key information	2.48

Table 2 pictures the general strategies that students apply while reading English texts. Nearly half of the students claim to usually have an aim in mind when they read, which shows that reading is a purposeful process for them. Similarly, most of the students try to guess the content of the text and prefer checking the content of reading whether it fits their purpose. Most of the students also use their background knowledge to make sense of what they read. More than half of the students seem to preview the text generally before reading. Nearly half of the students generally seem to care length and organization of the text, and it is possible to say that they benefit from such aids as tables, figures and pictures to increase their comprehension. In a similar vein, almost half of the students claim to take advantage of contextual clues in the text. When it comes to critical analysis of the text, while 33,2 % of the students claim to evaluate the text critically *sometimes*, 12,3 % of the students seem to never do this. However, most of the students appear to check their understanding upon seeing conflicting information.

Table 3. *Support reading strategies*

	ITEMS	X
15	I use reference materials such as dictionaries to help me understand what I read	3.89
12	I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it	3.69
24	I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it	3.28
28	I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text	3.09
2	I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read	3.04
9	I discuss what I read with others to check my understanding	2.96
20	I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read	2.87
6	I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text	2.60
5	When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read	2.11

Support Strategies used by students are displayed in Table 3. One of these strategies is note-taking. The highest frequency of taking notes while reading ranges between *sometimes* and *usually*. However, 11,2 % of the students seem to *never* take notes while reading. Next, reading aloud does not seem a preferred strategy since 39 % of the students *never or almost never* read

aloud to support their understanding of the text when text becomes difficult. Summarization does not also appear to be a frequently used strategy since 33,2 % of the students *only occasionally* summarize the text to reflect upon the important information. Only 6,4 % of the students reported to use summarization as a support strategy. When it comes to discussion, 30,4 % of the students *sometimes* discuss what they read with others to check their understanding. Likewise, paraphrasing is *sometimes* utilized by nearly 30 % of the students. Furthermore, about 40 % of the students *sometimes* go back and forth in the text to find the connections among ideas. On the other hand, most of the students use underlining or circling strategy to remember the information in the text. A majority of the students (34,8 %=usually; 35,3 %=always) use reference materials such as dictionaries to help them understand the text in English.

Table 4. *Problem solving strategies*

ITEMS		X
27	When text becomes difficult, I re-read to increase my understanding	3.86
30	I try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases	3.74
16	When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I'm reading	3.69
8	I read slowly but carefully to be sure I understand what I'm reading	3.67
11	I try to get back on track when I lose concentration	3.46
13	I adjust my reading speed according to what I'm reading	3.46
18	I stop from time to time and think about what I'm reading	3.42
21	I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read	3.37

Problem Solving Strategies to which students consult when they face difficulty in reading an English text are given in Table 4. Reading slowly but carefully seems to be one the most frequently used coping strategy (36,9 %= usually; 24,6 %= always). Accordingly, 40,6 % of the students usually adjust their reading speed depending on what they read. Most of the students try to pay close attention when the text becomes difficult. Similarly, re-reading is a frequently-used coping strategy against difficult texts. Moreover, 36,9 % of the students usually try to get back on track when they lose concentration, and they stop from time to time and think about what they are reading. Visualization of the information is usually applied by 39 % of the students to help them remember the information in the text. As for the unknown words, most of the students seem to prefer guessing the meaning.

3.1. Qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questionnaire

Qualitative data collection tool utilized in the present study aimed to explore the students' views about reading in general; thus, the participants were asked to complete the following statements as they wished: "I think note-taking while reading is...", "To understand a text better...", "When I do not understand something while reading ...", "I think guessing while reading ...", "If there is an unknown word while reading...", "I like reading when ...", "I do not like reading if ...", "I generally read when...", "Things I daily read...", and "Things I rarely read are...".

Initially, the participants' views about taking notes while reading were explored and presented in the table below. Of the 17 themes emerging from this question, 13 included positive views about taking notes while reading. The most frequently cited ones include taking notes while reading *enhances remembering* (f=38), *is important and effective* (f=34), *helps comprehension* (f=24), *enables active learning* (f=9), and *helps to save time* (f=3). While the other less frequently cited items included *helps to visualize the text* (f=2), *helps to learn vocabulary*, *helps to answer questions*, *helps to make sentences*, *helps to focus*, and *is perfect* (f=1 for each). On the other hand, the four themes mentioned negative views such as taking notes while reading *is unnecessary* (f=7), *is waste of time* (f=3), *distracts attention* (f=3), and *is difficult* (f=2).

Table 5. Findings about taking notes while reading and understanding a text better

I think note-taking while reading ...	To understand a text better, I ...
enhances remembering (f=38), is important and effective (f=34), helps comprehension (f=24), enables active learning (f=9) is unnecessary (f=7) is waste of time (f=3) distracts attention (f=3), is difficult (f=2) helps to save time (f=3) helps to visualize the text (f=2) helps to learn vocabulary (f=1) helps to answer questions (f=1) helps to make sentences (f=1) helps to focus (f=1) is perfect (f=1)	read again and again to internalise (f=35) learn the meanings of words in the text (f=22), read in a quiet place (f=16) read slowly (f=13) underline (f=13) use supplementary materials and dictionary (f=12) take notes while reading (f=12) search about the topic (f=10) translate (f=5) focus on the key words and summary (f=4) ask someone who knows (f=3) read aloud (f=3) check tables, figures and other clues (f=3) try to understand every sentence (f=2) write with their own sentences (f=1)

The participants were also asked what they do in order to understand a text better. Responses included 15 themes. Hence, the participants were found to *read again and again to internalise* (f=35) and *to learn the meanings of words in the text* (f=22), *read in a quiet place* (f=16), *read slowly* (f=13), *underline* (f=13), *use supplementary materials and dictionary* (f=12), *take notes while reading* (f=12), *search about the topic* (f=10), *translate* (f=5), *focus on the key words and summary* (f=4), *ask someone who knows* (f=3), *read aloud* (f=3), *check tables, figures and other clues* (f=3), *try to understand every sentence* (f=2), and *write with their own sentences* (f=1).

Table 6. Findings about the difficulties and guessing while reading

“When I do not understand something while reading...”	I think guessing while reading ...”
I read again and again (f=80) I use a dictionary (f=46) I ask a friend or someone who knows for help (f=22) give up reading (f=14). I read again later (f=8) I read more carefully (f=5) I underline the sentences (f=5) I translate (f=4) I read slowly (f=4) I read aloud (f=3) I make guesses (f=3) I take notes (f=2) I divide the text into parts (f=2) I read the simplified version (f=2) and I write (f=2)	helps comprehension (f=47), is useful (f=23) improves their guessing ability (f=25) might cause misunderstanding (f=14) is unnecessary (f=10) should not be applied (f=4) helps to concentrate (f=3) saves time (f=3) is fun (f=3) is waste of time (f=1)

The participants were asked to complete the sentence starting with “When I do not understand something while reading...”, Their responses revealed 15 themes, with most frequently mentioned ones as follows: *I read again and again* (f=80), *I use a dictionary* (f=46), *I ask a friend or someone who knows for help* (f=22), *I read again later* (f=8), *I read more carefully* (f=5), *I underline the sentences* (f=5), *I translate* (f=4), *I read slowly* (f=4), *I read aloud* (f=3), *I make guesses* (f=3), *I take notes* (f=2), *I divide the text into parts* (f=2), *I read*

the simplified version (f=2), and *I write* (f=2). However, some students reportedly *give up reading* when they have difficulty in understanding a text (f=14).

The participants were asked about their views about guessing while reading. Their responses revealed 14 categories most of which favoured the guessing strategy. The participants were found to think that guessing *helps comprehension* (f=47), *is useful* (f=23), *improves their guessing ability* (f=25), *helps to concentrate* (f=3), *saves time* (f=3), and *is fun* (f=3). On the other hand, to some students guessing *might cause misunderstanding* (f=14), *is unnecessary* (f=10), *should not be applied* (f=4), and *is waste of time* (f=1).

Table 7. Findings about unknown things and liking reading

“If there is an unknown word while reading...”	I like reading when ...	I do not like reading if ...
look up the dictionary (f=107)	when I am alone (f=21)	when the conditions are not available (f=58)
take notes (f=20)	when I am happy/peaceful (f=14)	when the text is complicated for me (f=28)
guess (f=20)	before I sleep (f=12)	if I am not interested in the topic in the text (f=20).
first guess then use a dictionary (f=16)	when I am in a quiet place (f=14)	if I cannot focus (f=16)
learning the meaning of the word (f=5)	when I am interested in the topic I am reading about (f=8)	if the text is too easy (f=6).
asking friends (f=3).	while I am lying on the bed (f=6)	
	when I have free time (f=5)	
	when my mind is fresh (f=4)	
	when I do not have to read (f=2)	

When the participants come across words they do not know while reading, they mention the things they do in six main themes. These themes included *looking up the dictionary* (f=107), *taking notes* (f=20), *guessing* (f=20), *first guessing then using a dictionary* (f=16), *learning the meaning of the word* (f=5), and *asking friends* (f=3).

The participants were asked to write down when they liked reading in their life, to which the top four responses included *when I am alone* (f=21), *when I am happy/peaceful* (f=14), *before I sleep* (f=12), and *when I am in a quiet place* (f=14). Other responses included *when I am interested in the topic I am reading about* (f=8), *while I am lying on the bed* (f=6), *when I have free time* (f=5), *when my mind is fresh* (f=4), and *when I do not have to read* (f=2). They were also asked when they do not like reading. The most frequently cited theme was *when the conditions are not available* (f=58). The second and third frequently mentioned items included *when the text is complicated for me* (f=28), and *if I am not interested in the topic in the text* (f=20). The last two themes were *if I cannot focus* (f=16) and *if the text is too easy* (f=6).

Table 8. Findings about the general ideas about reading in English

General ideas about reading in English	Things I daily read...	Things I rarely read ...
improves our English (f=51)	None (f=39)	articles/newspapers(f=26)
is beneficial (f=40)	internet sites (f=33)	novel/long texts (f=18)
is fun (f=25)	short/simplified texts (f=32)	memes/quotes (f=3)
improves our vocabulary	books/magazines (f=15)	poems (f=2).
knowledge (f=17)	movie subtitles/lyrics (f=10)	
is difficult (f=12)	and computer games (f=10)	
is boring (f=10)		
helps us learn general knowledge (f=5)		

The participants were asked to indicate their general ideas about reading in English. Their responses revealed six positive and two negative themes. The positive views were *improves our English* (f=51), *is beneficial* (f=40), *is fun* (f=25), *improves our vocabulary knowledge* (f=17), and *helps us learn general knowledge*. On the other hand, the negative items include *is difficult* (f=12) and *is boring* (f=10).

The participants were asked about their daily reading habits in English. This question was replied as “none” by 39 students, who indicated that they read English only when they have to. Other responses included *internet sites* (f=33), *short/simplified texts* (f=32), *books/magazines* (f=15), *movie subtitles/lyrics* (f=10), and *computer games* (f=10). What the participants “rarely read” included answers such as *articles/newspapers* (f=26), *novel/long texts* (f=18), *memes/quotes* (f=3), and *poems* (f=2).

4. Discussion

The present study explored the metacognitive strategies that university students tend to use while reading in English. In general sense, students were found to use the strategies at moderate level. They seem to have an inclination to apply metacognitive strategies; however, it was also found that they mostly benefit from problem solving strategies.

In addition to the general dispositions in using reading strategies, findings of the present study are also discussed separately in line with the Global Reading Strategies, Problem-Solving Strategies, and Support Strategies sub-categories. Results of the Global Reading Strategies suggest that nearly half of the students have an aim in mind when they read, indicating that reading is a purposeful process for those students. Reading for purpose paves the way for motivation, which reflects an aspect of being a good reader (Bojovic, 2010). In a similar vein, most of the students try to guess the content of the text and prefer checking the content of reading whether it fits their purpose. The study conducted by Gorjian, Hayati and Sheykhiani (2008) indicated that experimental group who received contextual guessing outperformed the control group, and contextual guessing influenced the students’ rate of reading comprehension positively. Another remarkable finding is that most of the students also use their background knowledge to make sense of what they read. According to Alfaki and Siddiek (2013), successful reading comprehension occurs through reader’s interaction with the text, and in this process background knowledge will be primarily important for EFL readers. That is why, they suggested using pre-reading activities to activate students’ schema, and they found a positive correlation between activation of prior knowledge and better reading comprehension. Similarly, in a study done by Engin and Seven (2005), topic familiarity and background knowledge were found to be important and effective to understand a reading passage. The students also stated that they benefited from such aids as tables, figures and pictures to increase their understanding the text.

The second sub-dimension was Support Strategies. Findings about taking notes revealed that although there were some students who never benefitted from this strategy, more than half of the students utilized note-taking sometimes or usually. Data obtained from the qualitative analysis methods indicated that majority of the themes included positive ideas regarding note-taking. A great many of the students were found to consider taking notes as something that enhances remembering, is important and effective, helps comprehension, and enables active learning. On the other hand, few students were found to think that taking notes is unnecessary, it is a waste of time, or it distracts attention. As a matter of fact, note-taking contributes to retention of knowledge, allowing students to go back what is read again and again. Stating that note-taking could both increase students’ attention and save time, Bahrami and Nosratzadeh

(2017) found note-taking to be effective in reading comprehension. However, reading aloud does not seem to be a favourable activity for students in that nearly half of the students indicated that they never read aloud. In line with this, Ilona (2009) claims that reading aloud slows down reading process, and inhibited learners feel more inhibited due to fear of making mistakes while reading. Similar results were found about summarization; students reported that they summarized only occasionally. However, summarizing strategy enables students to express what is understood in their own words concisely, and it allows teachers to check students' comprehension. Likewise, the findings of a study by Khoshsima and Tiyyar (2014) showed that summarizing strategy poses a significant influence on reading comprehension. Other support strategies such as discussion and paraphrasing also do not seem to be favoured much, which seems to be a worrying result because disinterest in discussion and restatement can signify lack of comprehension, analysis of text and critical reading. Providing students with open-ended questions instead of one-answer close ended multiple choice questions may have limited influences on their expression skills. On the other hand, most of the students utilize underlining and circling strategy to remember the information in the text and use reference materials. As Yue, Storm Kornell and Bjork (2014) note, highlighting can facilitate long-term retention. Open-ended questions also revealed what the participants do when they do not understand a text. Reading again and again, trying to learn the meanings of words, reading in a quiet place, reading slowly, underlining, and using supplementary materials and dictionary were some of the most cited themes. Although students seem to be aware of the importance of such strategies, they were found to have the lowest score in Support Reading Strategies among the other categories, so students should be trained more to gain such habits as summarizing, paraphrasing, note-taking and using reference materials.

The third strategy is Problem Solving Strategies that explore what students do when they face problems while reading. Parallel to the findings obtained from both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools, the most favoured strategies were found *reading slowly but carefully, paying close attention, re-reading, and guessing the meaning*. Hence, data obtained from the open-ended questions also revealed that *reading again and again, using dictionary, asking for help, reading more carefully, reading slowly, and making guesses* were some of the main themes obtained from the students' answers to the open-ended questions. Similar findings such as *re-reading and adjusting the reading speed to increase comprehension* were reported in a study done by Zhang and Wu (2009). Like in Global Reading Strategies, to majority of students guessing seems to be a good strategy as they were found to think that, *guessing while reading helps comprehension, is useful, improves the guessing ability, and helps to concentrate*. Problem Solving Strategies may encourage students not to give up in face of a difficulty and to cope with them. Estacio (2013) also found that Problem Solving Strategies correlated positively with reading comprehension.

The present study also aimed to identify students' general reading tendencies through open-ended questions. Accordingly, many students liked reading *when they are alone, when they are happy, before they sleep, and when they are in a quiet place*. The participating students also stated that they do not like reading *when the conditions are not available, when the text is complicated, and when they are not interested in the topic*. Apparently, complexity of texts (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016) and topics that are related to students' interest (Salikin, Bin-Tahir, Kusumaningputri & Yuliandari, 2017) pose an influence on reading. As in Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis (1985), choosing materials that are suitable for students' level maintains persistence in reading, which also enables students to keep their interest and motivation alive. As these findings revealed students' general reading tendencies, the students were also asked about their general ideas about reading in English. The most favoured themes included *reading improves their English, it is beneficial, it is fun, and it improves their*

vocabulary knowledge. As regards the strong bond between reading and vocabulary learning (Matsuoka & Hirsh, 2010), students were found to acquire a high percentage of new vocabulary in reading class, though it was on receptive level (Tabrizi & Farokhmanesh, 2013). However, it is also important to note that to some students reading in English is boring and difficult. This boredom and sense of difficulty may also result from students' linguistic level; as Chang (2012) claims, lack of automation in decoding words meaning can lead to slow reading, and automation of lower skills such as word recognition, syntactic parsing and working memory activation constitute a requirement for reading fluency although they are not enough for achievement of full reading fluency; students also need higher level processes such as meaning construction, interpretation and strategy use. Appropriate application of reading strategies might provide students with a direction to follow and boost reading rate and comprehension. Especially use of metacognitive strategies among adult learners is likely to increase their awareness in both the strategy itself and reading process. In the study by Rastegar, Kermani and Khabir (2017), a significant positive relationship was found between the use of metacognitive reading strategies and reading achievement.

Finally the students were asked about their daily reading habits in English. The most remarkable finding is that majority of students do not read anything in English in their daily life. In other words, these students read in English reportedly only when they have to. Likewise, Al Nazhari, Delfi and K (2016) found that students in English Study Program at university read English materials not frequently although they are conscious of its importance for their future. In the present study, other students indicated that they read something English in internet sites, in short/simplified texts, books/magazines, movie subtitles, lyrics, and computer games. Given their generation, it is quite natural to expect them read a text in an audio-visual form. Finding texts that attract their attention might be a solution to gaining the habit of reading regularly.

Reading can be both challenging and enjoyable process. Raising students' awareness in use of possible reading strategies may help them to make the most of what they read. Especially metacognitive strategies gain greater importance in university setting. As a consequence, students should be gradually offered these strategies to make reading a more fruitful process for them.

5. Conclusion

Reading is one of the most important skills that boost students' language proficiency. Therefore, students should be encouraged to read more and more in English in order to help them to gain the habit of extensive reading since language learning cannot be confined to only classroom practices. When they read something in English every day and make reading a part of their life, they could gain reading habit, which is one of the fundamental elements of lifelong learning. Given the significance of reading in their undergraduate and graduate programs, it is quite natural to expect students to integrate reading into their both academic and daily lives. When it comes to influence of strategies on reading comprehension, it is safe say that students should be trained to benefit from such ways to make it a conscious process. Activities that accustom students to use the strategies easily and gradually could be carried out in the classroom. Considering the study findings, tasks could be designed to help students use and interpret tables, graphs and charts in a reading text, which could facilitate their reading process. Discussion tasks could also allow them to voice their opinions about the text better; moreover, students could be encouraged to paraphrase or summarise the reading material, which could also ensure understanding. Reading topics that interest students could also increase their motivation; even different groups could be provided with different texts in accordance with their levels as an extensive reading activity. This study was conducted with university students

in preparatory programs. Given the place of reading in undergraduate and graduate programs, a different study can be conducted with those groups to see any probable differences. Likewise, it is also possible to carry out other studies with English-major students to reveal their reading habits in a foreign language.

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