



RESEARCH PAPER

Reading Strategies of Male and Female Pakistani ESL Undergraduates in the Context of Reading Indigenized Academic Texts

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ABSTRACT

This study explores differences between 110 male and female Pakistani ESL undergraduates of a southern Punjab university as regard to their MCAP of reading strategies in the context of reading indigenized academic texts in English. MARSII was employed as the main instrument for data collection in this study. Collected data were analyzed through SPSS version 22. T-tests were conducted. Findings reveal that male and female ESL Learners gave mixed responses as far as their MCAP of individual reading strategies related to each subscale was concerned. However, females as compared to the males showed better response in collective strategy use for each of the three subscales of MARSII as well as for overall reading strategies (ORS). In the end, some recommendations were made by the researcher for future research in relation to the domain of metacognitive awareness of reading strategies for ESL Learners.

Keywords

Introduction

Reading constitutes the foundation on which a reader's comprehension is built. The significance of reading is multiplied manifold when we examine its significance in the realm of teaching and learning, specifically in ESL and EFL settings. In order for ESL/EFL students to become effective learners, they must become efficient readers. Students must have knowledge of the reading practices or strategies that are helpful in enhancing their reading ability along with comprehension. Thus reading can become an effortless but fruitful activity for them in enhancing their general understanding of the real-world phenomena that exist around them to which they can relate whatever is read. Before discussing in detail the various learning and reading strategies, it is important to understand the concept of strategy.

Strategy

These are ways of self-motivated and self-driven participation essentially required for nurturing a learner's ability to interact in the second language (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, Wenden, 1991, Wenden & Rubin, 1987, as cited in Oxford, 1992).

Learning Strategy

Learning strategies associated with second language learning (SLL) relate to usually mindful application of such conducts or methods on the part of learners that involve enhancement in their development as regards to aspects like adoption, retention, recovery and application of second language (Oxford, 1990b, after Rigney, 1978 as cited in Oxford, 1992).

Taxonomies related to Language Learning Strategies

Language learning techniques have been divided into three main categories by various researchers and theorists. Cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective learning strategies are the three main categories into which O'Malley and Chamot (1990) divide learning techniques to learn foreign languages. Metacognitive strategies deal with knowledge about learning and controlling learning by virtue of aspects like improved unification, improved training, operational scheduling, discriminatory consideration, self-control and learners' own observation that involve corroborating one's comprehension during a language task, and self-evaluation that focuses on evaluating their learning performances as compared to some set custom subsequent to its completion. On the other hand, cognitive strategies encompass the management of language learning material like availing of different means of learning, assembling, writing down important points, recapitulating, reasoning, visualization, aural depiction, and arriving at conclusions etc. Finally, the last category deals with involvement of the learner into collaborative and interactive activities with classmates or peers such as questioning, self-talk and getting engaged in problem-solving activities.

In contrast, Direct and indirect language learning strategies are two main categories of language learning strategies devised by (Oxford 1990). Strategies that are considered direct focus on the learner's direct involvement in the acquisition and utilization of the target language's content. These are then broken down even further into three subcategories that are known as compensation methods, memory techniques, and cognitive strategies. Whereas, indirect strategies of language learning include a more circuitous route to language acquisition but still yield effective results. Indirect strategies are further subdivided into three strategies: metacognitive techniques, cognitive strategies, and social strategies.

Reading Strategies

Reading strategies are processes that are based on comprehension and are utilized by readers in relation to decoding a text, developing an understanding of the elements that constitute it i.e., words, and establishing meanings of the content (Rycik & Irvin, 2005).

Metacognition

Researches have variedly defined the concept of metacognition emphasizing either the knowledge or regulative component associated with it. For example, Brown (1978) emphasised the knowledge component that was linked with metacognition, and he defined it as "knowing about knowing" and "knowing how to know" (p. 79). In the same way, "thinking about thinking" is one of the definitions that might be given for the concept of metacognition (Anderson, 2002, p.23). Some scholars have focused their attention on the regulating aspect of metacognition. For

example, the term "monitoring and control of mind" is used to refer metacognition in a research article (Martinez, 2006, p.696).

Components of Metacognition

The abovementioned definitions imply that metacognition constitutes two components i.e., one's awareness of knowledge and cognition as regards to the learning process. This is also endorsed by Flavell (1976), as regards to metacognition in general and by Baker and Brown (1984) in relation to metacognition associated with reading in particular as cited in Khurram (2015). Thus, exploring the metacognitive awareness and perceived use (hereafter MCAP) of ESL Learners in terms of reading of literary texts would open new gateways of understanding in relation to learners' awareness of the various approaches employed by them for reading purposes.

Literature Review

Pervaiz et al. (2022) in a recent study, employed MARSII to explore awareness of one's own metacognition regarding reading strategies amongst elementary level learners studying in various Pakistani schools. The respondents in this study comprised of 291 male and female 8th, 9th and 10th grade students selected from three different schools. The data shows a highly significant relationship between the two variables: students' metacognitive understanding of reading procedures and their academic achievement in reading-related subjects.

Studying the metacognitive awareness of reading strategy use among undergraduates at multiple universities in Lahore, Pakistan, Kazi et al. (2020) describes some interesting findings learners from both the public and private sectors of Pakistan's education system took part in this research. Participants from both sectors showed a preference for global solutions, which was correlated with their tendency for problem-solving and support approaches, as shown by the results. This preference was evident because both groups of respondents tended to prefer global solutions. Moreover, t-tests revealed learners of public sector universities to be possessing greater strategy awareness in all three subscales of MARSII in contrast to the private sector learners. However no such marked discrimination was revealed at the level of related department or field of study such as between participants of Humanities and Sciences group.

Likewise, Sheikh et al. (2019) conducted a study that included 571 male and female participants who were enrolled in an undergraduate business programme in Karachi, Pakistan, at universities that were affiliated with both the public and private sectors. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not there is a connection between students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies (MARS) and the degree to which they were able to recall the information that they had read and to what extent they were able to do so. According to the data, metacognitive knowledge of reading methods was a significant factor in determining the academic outcomes of these undergraduate students. Contrastively, in a study, Khurram (2018) revealed no positive correlation as regards to the performance in connection to reading and metacognitive reading awareness and strategy use amongst 32 Pakistani ESL undergraduates of a public sector university.

Skimming and Scanning based Reading Strategies

Yusuf et al. (2017) investigated the impact of skimming scanning techniques (SST) on improving Indonesian learners' reading comprehension in EFL contexts. The study specifically focused on reading comprehension in terms of identifying the main idea and detail information in recount texts. The participants of the study comprised of thirty-two eleventh grade EFL learners in an Indonesian senior high school. Findings revealed a 20 point improvement in the mean values obtained from the posttests of the participants after treatment indicating that employment of SST significantly enhanced the reading comprehension of learners in EFL contexts.

Relationship between Critical Thinking Skills and Use of Reading Strategies

Researches have revealed the metacognitive awareness of ESL Learners not only in relation to reading comprehension but also from other perspectives such as its relationship with critical thinking skills. For instance, in a Turkish descriptive study, Akkaya (2012) examined the interrelationship between the critical thinking skills of learners and use of reading strategies by learners amongst 420 teachers of a Turkish university. The study brought to light a positive association to exist amid participants' level of utilization of reading strategy and their critical thinking disposition. Moreover, strategy-based instruction can also play a pivotal role in developing reading comprehension of ESL Learners (Younus & Khan, 2017).

In Pakistan, ESL Learners are generally exposed to reading of two types of academic texts: indigenized texts that are marked by depiction of Pakistani culture and non-indigenized texts that are marked by depiction of western culture. Though, various studies have explored metacognitive awareness of reading strategies from various perspectives as discussed above, as per the information gathered by the researchers of this study, little has been explored as regards to gender-based differences in metacognitive awareness of Pakistani ESL Learners of southern Punjab particularly in the context of reading indigenized academic texts. Therefore, the researchers decided to explore the domain of reading strategies from this particular perspective which led to the formulation of abovementioned research objectives and research questions.

Material and Methods

Population and sample

The population of this research consists of all undergraduate students enrolled in BS 1st semester of various courses taught in all departments of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. In this study, 110 ESL students (62 males and 48 females) from the 1st semester of BS English (Language & Linguistics) Morning, session 2022-26 (Spring) in the Department of English Linguistics at T.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation of the study comprises of the following research tools that were employed to collect data in relation to research questions of the study:

Demographic Questionnaire

In order to collect data about learner's background information related to their age, gender, and place of birth etc a demographic questionnaire was distributed

among the participants. The researcher adopted it from Karbalaei (2010) after making few changes in the context of current study.

Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategy Inventory (MARSİ)

The researchers mainly used this MARSİ to inquire into the extent to which the respondents were aware of the reading techniques they were employing. The researchers used a questionnaire employed by Karbalaei (2010). Since Mokhtari and Reicherd (2002) support MARSİ, it must be legitimate. Researchers estimated the reliability coefficient alpha of this questionnaire for the current study to ensure its validity in a Pakistani context. The total reliability for reading methods was determined to be 0.754, which is considered reliable and hence applicable in the context of the current study, the alpha coefficient for the scale's internal consistency ranged from 0.61 to 0.71.

Description of MARSİ

A Questionnaire consisting of 30 items that included a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (never use this strategy) to 5 (often use this strategy) was used to conduct the study. It measures learners' utilization of reading strategies in three aspects and categorizes these accordingly: Strategies related to the Global or General aspect in Reading (G), Strategies related to the Problem-solving aspect in Reading (P), and lastly, Strategies related to the Supportive aspect in Reading (S).

Procedure

Firstly, the researchers collected background information of the participants through the demographic questionnaire as described in detail above. Second, the MARSİ survey was filled by both male and female study participants. Next, they were instructed to fill out a questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale, marking the number that best represented how often they used each of the 30 statements describing reading methods. Finally, it was conveyed to the participants that they were free from any sort of time restraints as far as filling of the questionnaire was concerned.

Results and Discussion

In order to find the answers of research questions, independent sample t-tests and SPSS 22 were used for data analysis. When reading indigenized academic materials, male and female Pakistani ESL students use different reading strategies in terms of their MCAP of techniques at undergraduate level, these are explored at the level of each of the three subcategories of reading strategies namely Strategies related to Global or General aspect in Reading (G), Strategies related to Problem-solving aspect in Reading (P), and Strategies related to Supportive aspect in Reading (S) first individually and then collectively. Findings of the relevant statistical data analysis for each subcategory in relation to the tables are explained as follows:

Table 1
Differences between Pakistani male and female ESL Learners in terms of Global or General aspect in Reading (G)

Statement (G)	Male		Female		t-value	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
1. I have a purpose in mind when I read	4.16	1.043	4.44	.873	-1.477	.143

7. I use tables, figures, and pictures in text to increase my understanding.	3.06	1.253	3.63	1.084	-2.466	.015
8. I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading.	3.32	1.142	3.92	1.088	-2.762	.007
11. I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.	3.68	1.212	3.92	.919	-1.138	.258
12. I preview the text to see what it is about before reading it.	3.53	1.376	3.83	.975	-1.286	.201
17. I skim the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization.	3.18	1.222	3.56	1.319	-1.583	.116
19. I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.	3.23	1.384	3.79	1.398	-2.117	.037
23. I use typographical aids like boldface and italics to identify key information.	2.68	1.212	3.31	1.475	-2.478	.015
24. I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text.	3.45	1.126	3.71	1.091	-1.202	.232
26. I check my understanding when I come across conflicting information.	3.27	1.270	3.63	1.044	-1.550	.124
27. I try to guess what the material is about when I read.	3.89	1.189	4.31	.803	-2.130	.035
30. I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.	3.85	1.226	4.10	1.096	-1.107	.271

Table 1 reveals significant differences between Pakistani males and females specifically in their perceived use of 5 out of 12 Strategies related to Global or General aspect in Reading (G) as p-value is less than 0.05 in all of these with females reported better perceived use of these strategies and higher relevant mean values. These include G 7 (p-value= .015), G 8 (p-value= .007), G 19 (p-value= .037), G 23 (p-value= .015), and G 27 (p-value= .035). However, for the rest of strategies, the differences were not statistically significant as the p-values were found to be greater than 0.05.

Table 2
Differences between Pakistani male and female ESL Learners in terms of Problem-solving aspect in Reading (P)

Statement (P)	Male		Female		t-value	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
4. I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	3.84	1.308	4.17	1.018	-1.433	.155
10. I guess the meaning of unknown words by separating different parts of a word.	3.10	1.364	3.92	1.127	-3.369	.001
14. I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose.	3.35	1.229	3.54	1.129	-.819	.415
15. I read slowly but carefully to be sure I understand what I am reading.	4.31	.916	4.42	.986	-.605	.546
18. I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading.	4.40	4.091	4.02	1.194	.627	.532
20. When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading.	4.03	1.241	4.69	.689	-3.285	.001

21. I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading.	3.56	1.154	3.71	1.166	-.645	.520
22. I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read.	3.45	1.197	3.92	1.252	-1.981	.050
28. When text becomes difficult, I reread to increase my understanding.	4.06	1.158	4.67	.781	-3.098	.002

Table 2 shows that there are statistically significant differences between Pakistani males and females, specifically in their perceived use of 4 out of 9 Strategies related to the Problem-solving aspect in Reading (P). The p-value is either less than or equal to 0.05 in all of these, with females reporting better-perceived use of these strategies and higher relevant mean values. These include P 10 (p-value= .001), P 20 (p-value= .001), P 22 (p-value= .050), and P 28 (p-value= .002). On the other hand, when it came to the remaining strategies, the differences were not determined to be statistically significant because the p-values were discovered to be higher than 0.05.

Table 3
Differences between Pakistani male and female ESL Learners in terms of Supportive aspect in Reading (S)

Statement (S)	Male		Female		t-value	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
2. I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read.	3.85	1.038	4.42	.794	-3.110	.002
3. I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text.	3.77	1.260	4.27	.818	-2.370	.020
5. I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	4.19	1.157	4.44	.965	-1.177	.242
6. I use reference materials such as dictionaries to help me understand what I read.	3.56	1.065	3.77	.951	-1.055	.294
9. I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.	4.03	1.173	4.19	1.085	-.711	.479
13. When text becomes difficult, I read to help me understand what I read.	2.97	1.557	3.44	1.398	-1.640	.104
16. I discuss what I read with others to check my understanding	3.44	1.210	3.98	1.139	-2.398	.018
25. I go back and forth in the text to find relationship among ideas in it.	3.68	1.198	3.85	.899	-.853	.396
29. I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.	3.68	1.238	3.81	1.197	-.576	.566

In a similar manner, Table 3 shows statistically significant differences between Pakistani males and females specifically in their perceived use of 3 out of 9 Strategies related to Supportive aspect in Reading (S) as p-value is less than 0.05 in all of these with females reported better perceived use of these strategies and higher relevant mean values. These include S 2 (p-value= .002), S 3 (p-value= .020), and S 16 (p-value= .018). However, for the rest of strategies, the differences were not statistically significant as the p-values were found to be greater than 0.05.

Table 4
Collective statistics for individual subcategories of reading strategies and Overall Reading Strategies (ORS)

Variables	Male		Female		t-value	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
Strategies related to Global or General aspect in Reading (G)	41.31	5.346	46.15	6.633	-4.237	.000
Strategies related to Problem-solving aspect in Reading (P)	34.11	5.519	37.04	4.042	-3.089	.003
Strategies related to Supportive aspect in Reading (S)	33.18	5.212	36.17	4.839	-3.077	.003
Overall Reading Strategies (ORS)	108.60	11.508	119.36	13.648	-4.482	.000

Table 4 reveals a collective p-value (.000) lower than 0.05 (i.e., level of significance) in regards to differences between male and female Pakistani ESL Learners in their MCAP of Strategies related to Global or General aspect in Reading (G) while reading indigenized academic texts at the undergraduate level. This means that when it comes to the MCAP for Reading (G) Strategies with a Global or General Focus, male and female ESL students differ significantly while reading indigenized academic texts at undergraduate level. Moreover, the collective mean scores also show that the female ESL Learners (M=46.15), as compared to the male ESL Learners (41.31) gave more positive responses as regards to their MCAP of Strategies related to Global or General aspect in Reading (G) while reading indigenized academic texts at undergraduate level. Likewise, Table 4 also shows how male and female Pakistani ESL students reading indigenized academic texts at the university level differ in terms of their MCAP of Strategies connected to Problem-solving component in Reading (P). As a group, we have a p-value (.003) that is less than 0.05, the threshold for statistical significance. This suggests that when reading indigenized academic texts at the college level, the MCAP of Strategies connected to Problem-solving component in Reading (P) is significantly different for male and female ESL Learners. Moreover, the collective mean scores also show that the female ESL Learners (M=37.04), as compared to the male ESL Learners (34.11) gave more positive responses as regards to their MCAP of Strategies related to Problem-solving aspect in Reading (P) while reading indigenized academic texts at undergraduate level. In a similar manner, Table 4 also reveals the differences between male and female Pakistani ESL students when it comes to their mastery of collaboratively applied strategies linked to the supportive element of reading (S) while reading indigenized academic texts at the college level. As a group, we have a p-value (.003) that is less than 0.05, the limit for statistical significance.

This means that when it comes to reading indigenized academic texts at the university level, male and female ESL learners differ significantly in their use of the MCAP of Strategies related to the Supportive component in Reading (S). Moreover, the collective mean scores also show that the female ESL Learners (M=36.17), as compared to the male ESL Learners (33.18) gave more positive responses as regards to their MCAP of Strategies related to Supportive aspect in Reading (S) while reading indigenized academic texts at undergraduate level.

Awareness of one's own metacognition regarding reading strategies (MCAP ORS) of Pakistani male and female ESL learners reading indigenized academic texts in English at the college level is described in Table 4. Overall, ORS has a p-value (.000) that is significantly smaller than the significance threshold of .05. In other words, when it comes to reading indigenized academic texts at the college level, male and female ESL learners differ significantly on the MCAP of Overall Reading Strategies (ORS). In addition, the mean scores reveal that female ESL students are more likely to report success with their MCAP of Overall Reading Strategies (ORS) when reading indigenized academic texts in English at the college level (M=119.36, against M=108.60 for male ESL students).

Conclusion

The current study intended to explore gender based differences in the MCAP of reading strategies in Pakistani settings, more specifically in relation to reading of indigenized texts by ESL Learners of a university of southern Punjab region of Pakistan. At individual strategy level, female participants of the study were found to be ahead of males in their MCAP of 5 out of 12 Strategies related to Global or General aspect in Reading (G), 4 out of 9 Strategies related to Problem-solving aspect in Reading (P) and 3 out of 9 Strategies related to Supportive aspect in Reading (S) as shown in related tables. However, for the rest of strategies in all three subscales, the differences were not found to be statistically significant. At collective level for each of the subscales of MARSIS, findings revealed female participants to have higher mean scores than the male participants and gave more positive responses as regards to their metacognitive awareness and reported use of each subcategory of reading strategy collectively. Moreover, females as compared to the males were also found to have higher mean values as regards to their MCAP of Overall Reading Strategies (ORS) while reading indigenized academic texts at undergraduate level. It is thus concluded that in the context of current study in Pakistani settings, gender as a factor can influence the MCAP of reading strategies of Pakistani ESL Learners as far as collective use of each of the three subscales of MARSIS is concerned.

Recommendations

The current study has its limitations in terms of generalizability of its results to all ESL Learners such as limited sample size and participants restricted to BS 1st semester of a single public sector university of southern Punjab only. The researchers of the study accentuate the importance of strategy-based instruction to augment the learners' performance as regards to reading comprehension. Teevno and Raisani (2017) emphasize on student-centered teaching methods enabling ESL Learners to employ different strategies related to their cognitive, metacognitive and social aspects that is ultimately helpful in enhancing learning outcomes in their weak areas of learning particularly as regards to reading comprehension. However, certain factors on the part of both teachers and students such as teachers' own metacognitive awareness of reading strategies, mode of instruction, level of students, their reading proficiency, socioeconomic status and familiarity with English language etc. should be kept under consideration. Though studies have explored differences in the metacognitive awareness of learners of public and private educational institutes of central Punjab region of Pakistan (Kazi et al., 2020), in future, comparative studies can be conducted to explore avenues in MCAP of reading strategies at the level of different provinces of Pakistan and with different types of texts involved.

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