

The Effectiveness of Using Reading Strategies in Comprehending Texts in the English Department at the Faculty of Education, Misurata University

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Abstract

Reading comprehension has always been one of the most complex tasks in the foreign language learning (FLL) process. It is considered the most significant challenge for both EFL teachers and learners. Due to its complexities, students encounter numerous difficulties in improving their communication, writing, and speaking skills. Therefore, the current study aims to explore the importance of integrating reading strategies into the classroom to enhance learners' understanding among first-semester students at the Faculty of Education in Misurata University. This study was conducted with the hope of investigating the effect of implementing reading strategies on eight students who were administered a pre-test and a post-test. The research hypothesizes that the EFL learners' level of understanding of different texts will reach its highest potential if they are taught using reading strategies. To achieve the study's objectives, an attitude questionnaire was distributed at the end of the treatment. The findings indicate that students view the use of reading strategies positively, and the post-test results are satisfactory, suggesting that this approach is beneficial.

Key Words:

Reading Strategies, pre-test, post-test, foreign language learning (FLL), learning process, foreign language learning, understanding, benefits.

تأثير استخدام استراتيجيات القراءة لفهم النصوص لدى طلبة قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية التربية بجامعة مصراتة

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ملخص البحث

يغد استغاب المقروء وادا من أصعب المهام في عملية تعلم اللغة الأجنبية، إنها تعد من أصعب التحديات لكلا الطرفين: معلمي ومتعلمي اللغة الأجنبية، وهذا بسبب صعوبة تعلم اللغة، الطلاب يعانون العديد من الصعوبات لرفع أو تحسين مستواهم اللغوي للتواصل، الكتابة، والتكلم؛ لذلك الدراسة الحالية معنية باستكشاف بشكل دقيق استراتيجيات القراءة في داخل الفصل الدراسي لتعزيز القدرة الاستيعابية للنصوص المقررة على طلاب الفصل الدراسي الأول في كلية التربية في جامعة مصراتة. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى تحقيق تأثير استراتيجيات القراءة على الاستيعاب لثمانية طلاب، وذلك من خلال اخضاعهم لاختبارين: قبلي وبعدي. هذه الدراسة تفترض ما إذا كان سيطراً على طلاب اللغة الأجنبية، الذين قد تعلموا من خلال تطبيق استراتيجيات القراءة، تحسن في مستوى استيعاب النصوص ليحققوا أعلى معدلات: لتحقيق هذه أهداف الدراسة أجريت استبانة بنهاية العلاج. النتائج أوضحت أن الطلاب يعتبرون استخدام استراتيجيات القراءة على أنها إجابيه، وأن نتائج الاختبار البعدي كانت مرضي؛ وبذا يكون استخدام هذه الطريقة ذو نفع كبير.

كلمات مفتاحية: استراتيجيات القراءة، اختبار بعدي، اختبار قبلي، تعلم لغة اجنبية، عملية التعلم، تعلم لغة اجنبية، الفهم، الفوائد.

Background of the Study

Introduction

Reading is an essential skill in English as a second/foreign language and it is one of the four skills that each English language learner should gain. Students who have good reading skills can make notable progress in most of their academic fields. Reading comprehension is a process that activates the readers' prior knowledge about life, as well as languages. According to Krashen (1985), reading skill is a comprehensible input and gives rise to competence in speaking and writing. It is an activity that can motivate them to activate their knowledge and their thinking process. Moreover, students may improve their level in all aspects of the language by reading different texts. Chastain (1988) explains that foreign language students need to read large amounts of authentic materials to enhance their background knowledge of language.

Reading comprehension has always been one of the most complex tasks in the foreign language learning (FLL) process. It is considered the most significant challenge for both EFL teachers and learners. Due to its complexities, students encounter numerous difficulties in improving their communication, writing, and speaking skills. Therefore, the current study

aims to explore the importance of integrating reading strategies into the classroom to enhance text understanding among first-semester students at the Faculty of Education in Misurata University. This study investigates the effect of implementing reading strategies on eight students who have undergone a pre-test and a post-test. The research hypothesizes that the EFL learners' level of understanding of different texts will reach its highest potential if they are taught using reading strategies. To achieve the study's objectives, an attitude questionnaire was distributed at the end of the treatment. The findings indicate that students view the use of reading strategies positively, and the post-test results are satisfactory, suggesting that this approach is beneficial.

Statement of the Problem

It has been observed by the researcher that students' problems in comprehending new texts is due to the traditional ways used in teaching reading; therefore, this research focuses on the implementation of the reading strategies that are used in the classroom to comprehend texts, and it attempts to find out solutions that face students when they read new texts.

Hypothesis of the Study

Based on the reviewed literature and studies, its hypothesized that using reading strategies can help students understand information in a text and interpret it appropriately and correctly. Besides, the study aims at helping learners to overcome the problems they face to comprehend texts been prescribed throughout their study. To enhance learners' performance, the current study aims to investigate the use integrating reading strategies which might be of great help to learners.

Questions of the Paper

The research is designed to address the following questions:

1. What is the effectiveness of the strategies that the teachers use in teaching reading comprehension?
2. What are the students' responses towards their teachers' strategies in teaching reading comprehension?
3. Does the knowledge of the reading strategies have any effect on the students' better comprehension of the text?

Significance of the Study

This study aims to highlight the importance of reading strategies and provide information about those strategies that facilitate the teaching and learning of reading skills. As a result, students will be able to engage with the texts they read in a meaningful way. According to Farris, Fuhler, and Wather (2004), teachers must be familiar with a wide range of instructional methods and understand how to apply them based on the needs of their students. Teachers should utilize various reading strategies in the classroom to effectively support students in their learning.

Literature Review

Reading is widely recognized as a complex cognitive process where readers interact with a text to construct meaning and comprehend its content. Researchers offer varying definitions of reading, but they agree on its complexity and the active role of the reader in deriving meaning.

- Nunan (1991) highlights that reading is a fluent process where readers activate their background knowledge to understand the text.
- Anderson (1999) emphasizes the importance of reading as a critical skill for ESL learners, describing it as an active process where interaction occurs between the reader and the text.
- Horowitz (2013) focuses on the intentionality and thoughtfulness required in reading, emphasizing the need for readers to pay attention to words, meanings, and comprehension strategies. This ensures that the reading aligns with their expectations and builds on their existing knowledge for immediate or future use.
- Cohen (1994) defines reading comprehension as the ability to predict the outcomes or consequences within a text.
- Song (1998) emphasizes the individuality of the reading process, influenced by each reader's background knowledge, motivation, and interest.

In summary, reading is an interactive process between the reader and the text to elicit the meaning, while reading comprehension is the most challenging aspect of this process. It demands conscious effort, reflection, and the application of strategies to fully understand and retain the material being read.

The Importance of Reading Comprehension Skill

According to Klingner (2007:2), reading comprehension is the process of constructing meaning by coordinating some complex processes, including words, understanding the meaning, and the relationships between ideas conveyed in a text. What's more, he summarizes reading comprehension instruction for the teacher by following a three-step

procedure: mentioning, practising, and assessing. That is, the teachers indicate the skills that the students need to use, then they let the students practise those skills through workbooks or worksheets, and finally assess whether the use the skill successfully or not.

Hillerich (1983:126) classifies reading comprehension into three levels: Literal Comprehension, which requires the reader to recall the facts that are stated in the text. For example, it is to remember names, things, and areas. Inferential Comprehension, which allows the reader to suggest relevant additional information based on the text encountered and personal experience. It refers to understanding what an author meant and what was said, developing general conclusions, inferring the main idea, making judgments, and predicting outcomes. Critical comprehension level that enables making judgments about the author's style and other aspects of the text.

The Importance and Use of Strategies in Teaching Reading

Reading strategies demonstrate how readers plan tasks and understand what they are reading. and what to do when they do not understand (Block, 1986). From context to the meaning of unknown words in broader strategies (for example, generalization and the association of reading with the reader's prior knowledge) (Janzen, 1996).

The importance of reading strategies is increasingly recognized. Reading strategies are crucial for improving students' comprehension of texts. Several studies have explored reading strategies and their connection to successful and unsuccessful second language reading (Hosenfeld, 1977; Knight, Pardon, & Waxman, 1985; Block, 1986; Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1995). Reading comprehension skills are complex and rely heavily on tasks, motivation, goals, and language ability. To read with understanding, readers need a certain level of reading competence and a clear understanding of reading comprehension strategies (Tierney, 1982). Since the late 1970s, many ESL researchers have also recognized the importance of strategies used by ESL students in reading.

Reading is seen as an interactive process between language and thought. There are three kinds of activities that are used in reading class activities: pre-reading activities, during reading activities, and post-reading activities (Mukhroji, 2011). Pre-reading activities: the very popular kind of activity is brainstorming (Wallace, 1992: 91). According to Crawford et al (2005: 29), brainstorming is a method for creating some ideas about a topic. In this activity, students can call out words, knowledge, and experience that are relevant to the text, language, and an expected meaning (Hood et al., 2005: 73 and Wallace, 1992: 91, see also Barnett: 1988). Another action that can be used is image sequence (Hood et al., 2005; Gibbon, 2002; Barnett, 1988; Wallace, 1992). It is the process of creating images associated with the text and providing relevant background knowledge to establish the desired meaning. (Hood et al,

2005: 75; Gibbon, 2002). It is also important for teachers to discuss new vocabulary with students. Discussing new vocabulary can help them comprehend the text. When students face problems of unknown words, the teacher can encourage them to use the dictionary. Wallace (1992: 86) states that the teacher can encourage students either to use a dictionary in the pre-while stage or to make predictions as class activities. This strategy is suggested to be used by Anderson (1999); Pelinscar and Brown (1984) as cited in Doolittle (2006). While reading activities, a teacher can generate appropriate strategies to help students comprehend the text. The common one is the reading aloud activity, which is recommended to be used by Gibbons (2002); Hancock and Leaver (2006), Nuttal (1996: 2). The next activity that the teacher can generate in this stage is silent reading. Anderson (2003), in Nunan (2003: 69), said that the majority of reading that teachers can do will be done silently. Anderson explained that silent reading is primarily for reading comprehension because it focuses on getting meaning from print. NCLRC (2007) also proposed rereading to check comprehension as one of the while-activities in reading comprehension. Post-reading activities, a teacher's activity is primarily to evaluate the students' comprehension in particular tasks as suggested by an online publication; the National Capital Language Resource Center (2007); Gibbons (2002: 91). In this case, teachers can conduct such activities; scanning questions, summarizing, learner's purpose, and following-up (Wallace, 1992; Barnet; 1988). Additionally, Brown and Palinscar (1984) in Doolittle (2006), Anderson (1999), and the USA National Reading Panel (2000), proposed predicting, questioning, clarifying, summarizing, monitoring comprehension, and justifying comprehension as the strategies that can be implemented in classroom activities in teaching reading comprehension.

The Role of the Teacher in Teaching Reading Strategies

According to Supriyadi (2013), the important role of the teacher in the teaching and learning process is as a director of learning, which means that the teacher is expected to direct students in learning activities to help students achieve success in their studies, so each teacher serves as:

1. Teacher as Designer of Instruction: This function requires teachers to have the ability to design a successful teaching and learning plan.
2. Teacher as Manager of Instruction: This function requires the teacher's ability to organize and control the activities
3. Teacher as Evaluator Students' Learning: it requires the teacher to observe the progress of students and evaluate their performance.

Many activities can be done in the classroom. Teaching reading usually has at least two aspects. First, it can refer to teaching learners who are learning to read for the first time. A second aspect of teaching refers to teaching learners who already have reading skill in their

first language. Brown (2007:119) states that strategies are special methods used to achieve a particular goal, a design for controlling and manipulating certain information. According to David (1971:80) teaching strategies is a plan, method, or series of activities designed to achieve particular educational goals. Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that a teaching strategy is a plan that involves activities that teachers and students use to achieve specific educational goals.

Research Methodology

Introduction

This study followed the quantitative design to identify the impact of using effective reading strategies on the students' comprehension. Quantitative method refers to the methodology of research to maximize objectivity by using numbers, statistics, structure and control. "Quantitative research is a means of testing objective theories by examining the relationship between variables. In turn, these variables can usually be measured using instruments so that statistical techniques can be used to analyze numbered data. The written structure of the report includes an introduction, literature and theories, methods, results and discussions" (Creswell, 2008).

Participants and Settings

The participants will be the students enrolled at Reading I in the English Department at the Faculty of Education in Misurata University.

Instrument

In order to find out the answers to the research questions, the researcher used multiple data collection devices, which include a pre-test, a post-test, and a questionnaire for the students' attitudes. Taylor (2008) asserts that quasi-experimental design allows researchers using a pre-test and post-test to investigate learning outcomes and test theories by analyzing change in post-test scores; moreover, the researcher conducted the pre-test to test the students' level in comprehending texts at first, and then followed by the treatment using strategies. At the end of the course, a post-test will be conducted to test the effectiveness of using reading strategies. The questionnaire aimed to examine the students' use of reading strategies. The questionnaire will consist of 10 item statements.

Procedures

Data Collection.

The researcher first secured all needed permission from authorities in the conduct of the study. The pre-test, post-test and questionnaire are the main sources of quantitative data for this research. The experiment will be divided into three stages: pre-test, treatment, and post-test. The pre-test will be administered before the treatment. The second step is the questionnaire, which will be distributed to the experimental group during the course after the treatment. The researcher will hand out 10 copies of the questionnaire. After gathering all the requirements, the researcher will analyze the data using appropriate statistical tools.

Data Analysis

A proper quantitative data analysis will be utilized by the researcher to address the determined research questions.

Results and Discussion

Since pre-test, post-test, and questionnaire were used in this study, quantitative analysis would be used through them. After conducting the pre-test, the participants in the experimental group were taught how to comprehend text using different reading strategies. All the strategies that have been used are chosen by the researcher to help motivate learners. First, the teacher asks the students due to pictures to predict what the text will be about, then they read it silently. Secondly, they read the text aloud and discussed the new vocabulary. Afterwards, the teacher made students discuss the idea of the text in order to activate their prior knowledge.

In the early stage of the treatment, the learners were somewhat hesitant and uncomfortable as they were not used to just reading and answering questions. Although they were confused at first; however, they were amused and understood the process at the end.

Pre-test and Post-test Analysis

The scores are gained from students' results in both the pre-test and post-test. The findings revealed that their scores in the post-test were higher than their scores in the pre-test. Therefore, this demonstrates that reading strategies can be a valuable tool to help students comprehend texts effectively and support them to know how to understanding the meaning of new words from the context.

Table 1

Student no.	Pre-test	Post-test
1	4	6
2	6	7
3	4	7
4	4	8
5	5	8

6	7	10
7	5	9
8	4	7

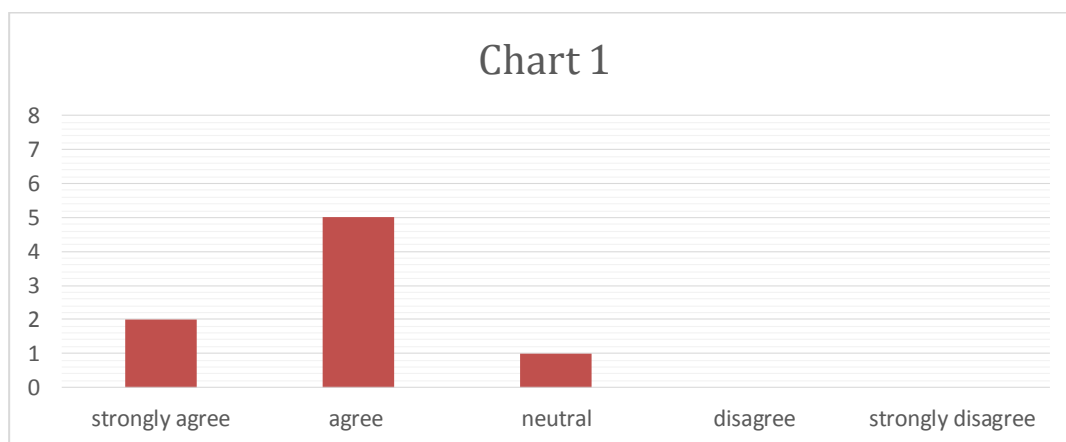
Average Score for the Experimental Group

To investigate the effectiveness of using reading strategies to comprehend texts, the average of the results in both the pre-test and post-test is presented in the table below.

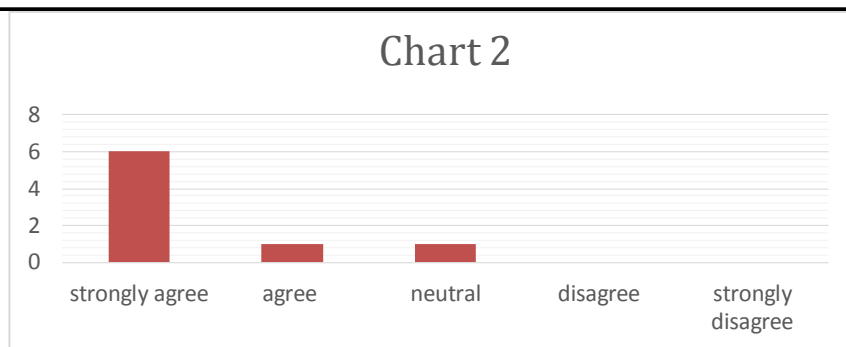
Table 2

Tests	Average
Pre-test	4.87
Posttest	7.75

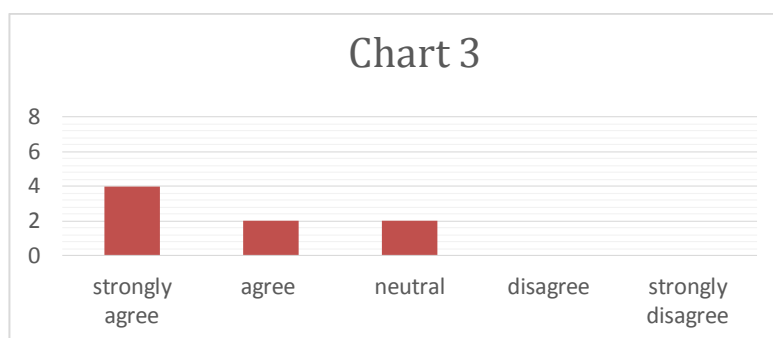
Table 2 shows participant performed better in the reading test compared to their scores in the pre-test. Subsequently, the overall results showed that students' total average score has increased by 10 points in the score in the post-test. This can be attributed to using reading strategies as a tool. Therefore, the tool has a positive effect on the learning process of the student.



As it can be seen in the above chart, 25% of students have strongly agreed and 62.5% of them agreed that the traditional way of learning has not helped them anymore. On the other side, 12.5 % were neutral. From the outcomes shown by the figure, it appears that the majority of the students notice that the traditional way is becoming useless in helping them comprehend the texts.



As can be seen from the chart above, 75% of students strongly agree that guessing the meaning of unknown words is useful in comprehending texts, and 12.5% of them agreed with the statement. And 12.5 of students were neutral; on the contrary, none of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed.



The third chart demonstrates that 50% of the students strongly agreed that using reading strategies motivates students and increases their interest in reading. Among them, 25% only agreed. Whereas only 25% were neutral. From the presented results, it is obvious that students provided the researcher with different opinions. Nevertheless, the majority believed that reading strategies help improve their skills.

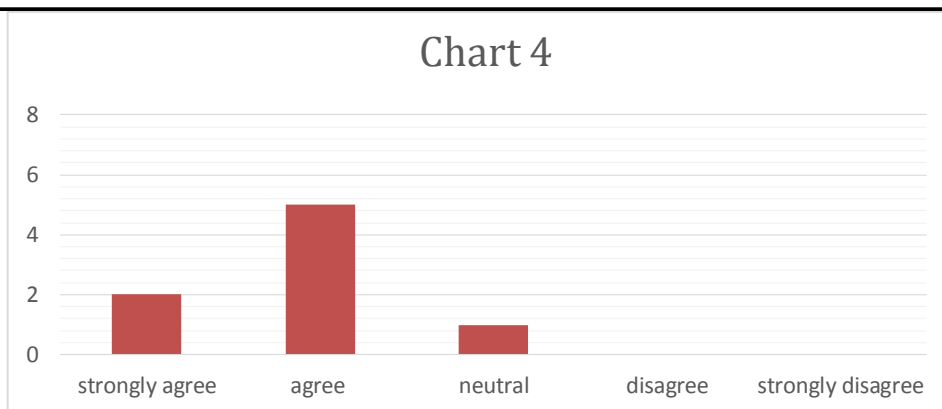
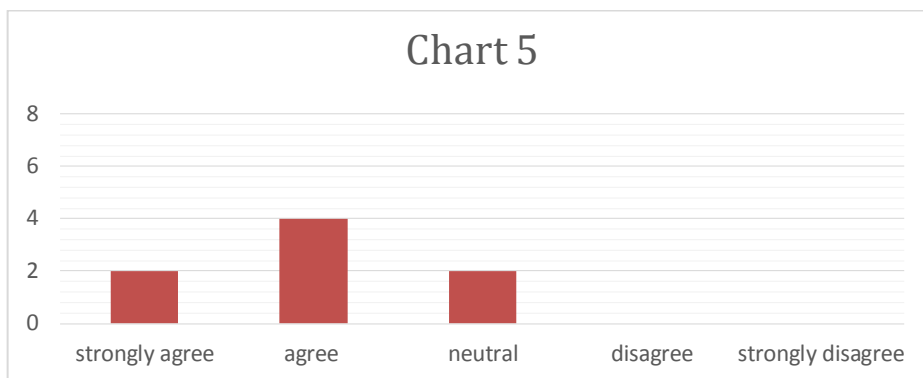
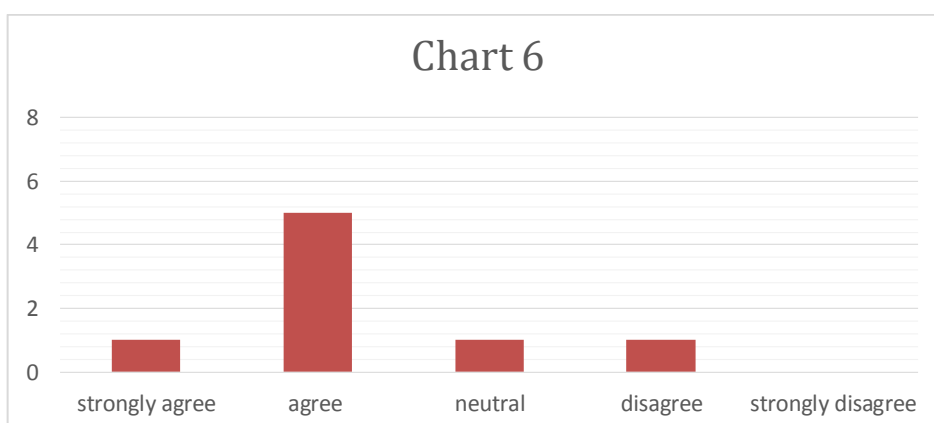


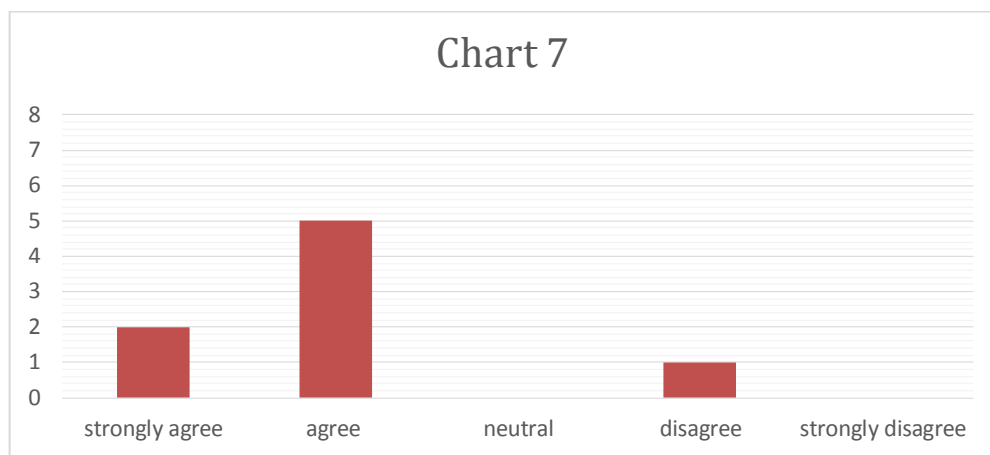
Chart 4 depicts the percentage of students' responses to the statement "I gain new information when I use reading strategies while reading texts." From the chart, it is clear that 25% and 62.5% strongly agree and agree. Only 12.5 % were neutral. This demonstrates the strong belief that students' understanding is affected by the use of reading strategies.



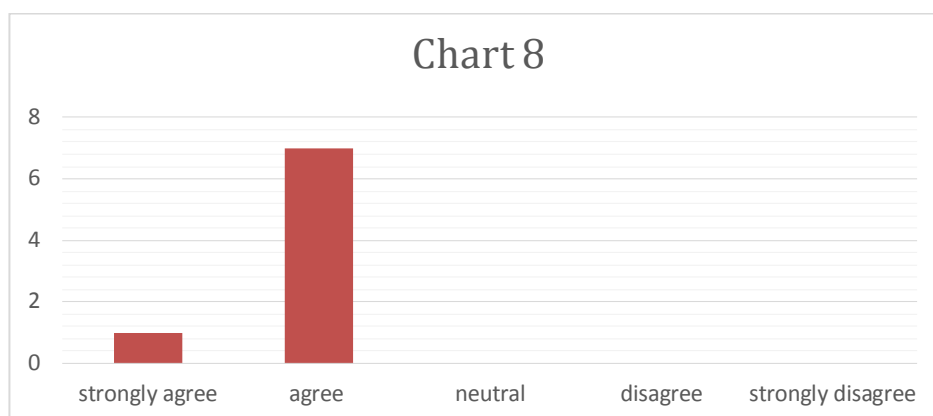
The fifth statement was about if students understand the importance of using reading strategies in reading. 25% strongly agreed, and 50 % agreed as well. In contrast, 25% were neutral about this statement.



The bar graph shows that the answer of the sixth statement which demonstrates using context clues to predict the meaning of the statement. 12.5% of the students agreed that they have used context clues while they read. 62.5% agreed and 12.5% were neutral. In contrast 12.5 disagreed.



The above figure shows the outcome of the seventh statement that using a dictionary can be beneficial. 25%strongly agreed and 62.5% agreed. However, 12.5% disagreed.



The eighth statement was about whether the students would use reading strategies for independent learning from now on. 12.5% strongly agreed with this idea, and 87.5 % agreed as well. Moreover, this shows that students are aware of the benefits that reading strategies can provide for them.

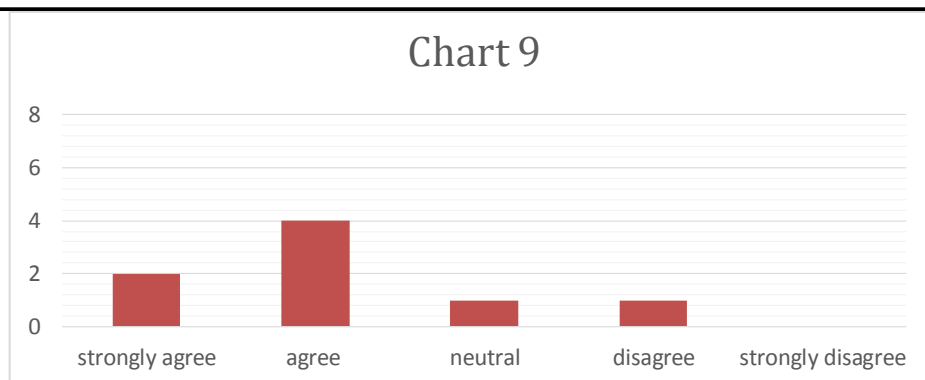
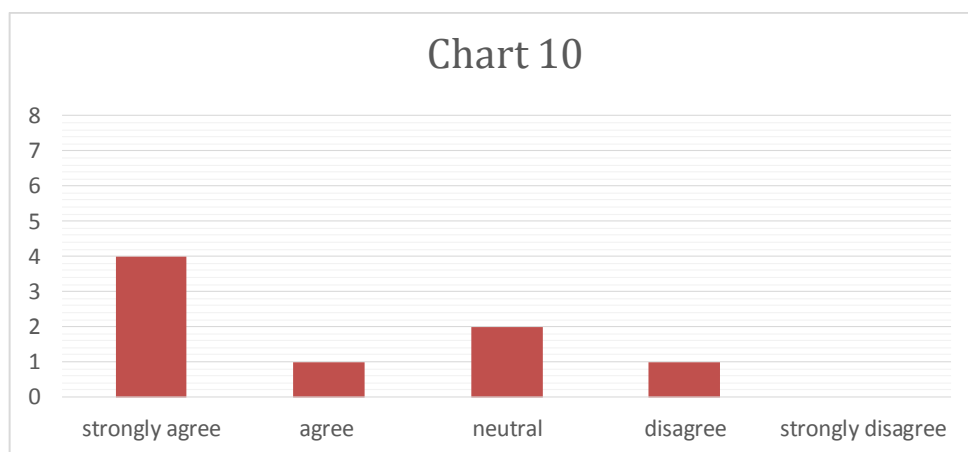


Chart 9 shows the result of the ninth statement, which asks if the students get the benefits of identifying grammatical units to make them understand texts better. 25% strongly agreed, while 50% agreed only. 12.5% were neutral. However, 12.5% disagreed.



According to the figure, it was apparent that half of the students strongly agreed that intonation while reading aloud is important in understanding the meaning. Moreover, 12.5% also agreed, and 25% were neutral. However, 12.5 disagreed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This chapter presents the summary of the main findings. The conclusion drawn from the study and the recommendations for future researchers. This current research was intended to investigate what effect the use of reading strategies had on learners' comprehension in EFL classrooms by conducting a pretest and a posttest. Furthermore, a questionnaire was conducted as to investigate what students thought of such a tool. The results of this study provided answers to the research questions and proved the accuracy of the hypothesis as well. From the collected data, it was clear that the students' performance had improved after the

treatment. They had a positive view about the effectiveness of using reading strategies in comprehending texts. In the first place, the restrictions such as limited time and small sample size were barriers to a full confirmation of the research findings. However, this study can be used as a base for further research work in order to obtain results on a large scale.

Recommendations for Future Researchers and Teachers

The writer has come to these recommendations that might be an indicator and guide for any further research in the future.

The results of the current study may serve as a related study for other researchers who deal with variables that have been limited in the study.

- 1- This study has only investigated the influence of reading strategies on comprehending texts. Other studies can go beyond the comprehension of new texts and focus on more elements of reading in general.
- 2- Encourage students to use English beyond the classroom through debates, role-plays, and presentations.
- 3- Provide explicit instruction on reading/speaking/writing strategies instead of assuming students will develop them naturally
- 4- Use formative assessment (quizzes, oral feedback, peer review) to identify weaknesses early and address them.
- 5- Incorporate authentic materials (news, podcasts, short stories) to improve both comprehension and motivation.
- 6- Balance accuracy and fluency—create safe spaces where students can speak or write freely without fear of mistakes.

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