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Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

MOHAMED SEDDIK BEN YAHIA UNIVERSITY- JIJEL

FACULTY OF LETTERS and LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

A Descriptive Study of a Problems that Hinders Students' Reading Comprehension

A Case Study of Second Year LMD Students, Mila University Centre

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the Master Degree in Language Sciences

Submitted by: BENASKEUR Souhil   Supervisor: Ziad Khaled

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Chair Person   Bennasser Fouzia (University of Jijel)

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Curiosity is the wick in the candle of learning"

William A. Ward
Professor and Egyptologist

DEDICATION

In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, All the Praise is due to God alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds

First and foremost, we would give our undeniable and unforgettable thanks to the most graceful and most compassionate, the Almightily (Allah), as He ought to be glorified and praised.

We dedicate this work:

To all the members of our families, especially to whom paradise is under their feet, our mothers. To our fathers, for we are the fruits of their sacrifices,

To all the teachers who have taught English in Mila University Centre, with no exceptions, for they were so kind with us,

To all our colleagues, who have studied with us, in Mila University Centre, especially to DAAS Houssem, and in memory of the pure spirit of his mother, who has left this world to a better one,

To all those who love us , prayed for us and besought God to help us.

...OWLEDGEMENTS

Abstract

The following study is meant to investigate a problem that may contribute and affect the reading comprehension task of students of English. That problem is the misuse or the non-use of reading strategies by students of English as a foreign language. Second year university students of English at the level of Mila University Centre, have been our population of the study. The hypothesis of this study is that Second Year Students of English are not aware of the importance of using the right reading strategies while reading. In case it is true, those students will certainly face problems in reading comprehension. In order to check whether this hypothesis applies for second year university students of English, a questionnaire containing 21questions has been delivered to a sample of 25 students. The data obtained from that questionnaire demonstrates that the majority of students exhibit an unconscious knowledge of reading strategies. Sometimes they use that knowledge optimally, but most of the time they misuse it.

D: Decoding

E.A.P: English for Academic Purposes

E.F.L: English as a Foreign Language

E.S.P: English for Specific Purposes

FL: Foreign Language

FVR: Free Voluntary Reading

ICTs: Information and Communication Technology

IM: Inferential Mediation

L2: Second Language

LC: Linguistic Comprehension

MCQs: Multiple Choice Questions

LMD: License-Master-Doctorat

N: Number of Subjects

N.R.P: National Reading Panel

OERP: The Ontario Education Research Panel

RC: Reading Comprehension

RAND R.R.S.G: RAND Reading Study Group

SL: Second Language

S.V.R: Simple View of Reading

TV: Television

%: Percentage

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...eral Introduction

1. Statement of the Problem

Learning a foreign language is a multi-dimensional process that requires the development of all the skills that shape that language. Those skills often include reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Some linguists tend to classify the latter into receptive skills (reading and listening) and productive ones (writing and speaking).

Although all the above mentioned skills have equally received considerable amounts of study, research in reading seems to continue attracting many researchers' attention. A plethora of books, articles and dissertations have been written by so many authors who spent a great deal of time in approaching the ultimate truth about reading.

Reading chaotically (without conscious use of strategies) is a very common problem. Such behaviour hardens comprehension. Readers of English as a foreign language (EFL) develop their reading skills in order to facilitate comprehension of any readable piece of writing. Yet, reading strategies and reading models are taught to learners of EFL for the sake of handling reading obstacles. So, good readers are said to implement the appropriate and the most effective reading strategies according to each particular context that surrounds the texts being read. But, do Algerian university students of English as a foreign language use each strategy in its appropriate place? Put another way, do they use them in an orchestrated way?

2. Aim of the Study

The purpose of the present study is merely descriptive, in the sense that, it attempts to explore some of the problems, if not all, which stand behind Algerian Foreign language students' inability in reading comprehension. In order to make this study more amenable to

on reading strategies since they ostensibly represent most of the students' troubles.

3. Hypotheses

For the purpose of this study, the following hypothesis are put forward:

1. Second Year Students of English are not aware of the usiness of the right reading strategies while reading.

4. Means of Research

For the sake of gathering the necessary data for the present study (knowing some difficulties that hinder students' reading comprehension), a questionnaire was opted for. The latter has been given to second year LMD students in the English Department at Mila University Centre. The results of the students' questionnaire is analysed in the light of the literature reviewed in the theoretical part.

5. Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is basically composed of two parts. The first and the second chapter contain the literature review. Both of them deal with the concept of reading, reading strategies, and reading comprehension. The third chapter is the practical part of the study that represents the field investigation.

The first Chapter is devoted to highlight the notion of reading by providing a historical overview of this concept, its different components, models and approaches.The second chapter provides a detailed explanation of several reading strategies and their relationship towards reading comprehension.The last chapter deals with data analysis. It outlines a detailed analysis of the learners' questionnaire. It will help see whether the results go in the same direction of the hypotheses of the study.

Introduction

The reading skill is very prominent and very important in our lives. Through it, we can access reality as it is represented in the world. Because today's world is based on technology and the language of machine, it would be impossible for an illiterate man, who is not able to read, to use the internet or even read the newspapers.Evidently, linguists have done their best to describe the ambiguous nature of reading. This chapter gives you the opportunity to, theoretically, explore the nature and the components of reading as it is defined by many linguists.It would be insufficient to completely clarify, or limit ourselves in dealing with the notion of reading through just one point of view. Thus, the first section of this chapter reveals some different points of view on reading.

I.1. Definition of reading

Through history, reading has gained a place of paramount importance in the field of language teaching/learning . Still, we need to study every researcher's work on reading to get maximum knowledge about this sophisticated concept. In simple laymen's terms, reading may signify that capability of understanding written language. In what follows are some definitions of reading as viewed by some scholars.

McShane (2005: 07) defines reading as

"A complex system of deriving meaning from print, that requires: an understanding of how speech sounds are related to print, decoding (word identification) skills, fluency, vocabulary and background knowledge, active comprehension strategies, and a motivation to read."

uncovers mostly all the aspects that surround reading as a general concept. McShane reveals that the ultimate goal from reading is understanding the meaning. For such a process to happen, a combination of some cognitive processes must take place in a harmonious synchronization. So, meaning may represent the sum of those cognitive processes that take place in the brain.

Using very simple words, Grabe (2006: 279) defines reading as "a complex cognitive activity, almost a miraculous one, in fact, since it involves the secondary uses of cognitive skills in relatively new ways, at least in terms of evolutionary development". It could be clearly noticed that when Grabe defined reading, he related it directly to cognition. This in turn, may necessitate several technological advancements to reveal what is exactly happening inside our brains during the reading process. This fact may make reading a very complex notion as it involves perception and thought.

According to Alderson (2000: 03), reading reflects the link between a double entity, a process and a product. For him, it is very important to make a distinction between what he calls "the process of reading" and its result, which represents the "product". Alderson (*ibid*) states that the process means the interaction between the reader and the text as it is manifested through the same reader, who not only examines the piece of writing being read, but also tries to decipher the marks on the page, and decides what they signify and links them with each other. He also mentions that while reading, the reader is thinking about what he is reading. This signals a possibility that the reader predicts the meaning of the words he is reading through recalling his background knowledge.

Harmer (1983: 153) portrays reading as a   behaviourwhich results from the participation processing of the eyes and the brain. He means that the eyes first perceive the graphics of the written print, then it sends it to the brain where it tries to recognise it through

either recognises the meaning of the word through its stored image, or through its relevant sound. In case the brain fails in doing so, it attempts to present the nearest meaning that may look like the original one.

Caroll (1964: 62) attempts to define reading, relating it directly to the phonics that each word represents. According to her, the words are recognised basically on an auditory basis as she described reading as "the activity of reconstructing reasonable spoken message from a printed text and making responses to the reconstructed message that would be made to the spoken message."

A different point of view concerning the essence of reading has been established by Goodman (1971: 135) who depicts reading as "a psycholinguistic guessing game." As opposed to Caroll, Goodman believes that reading is beyond just the auditory decoding principle. He comes with the idea that reading is not passive, but rather a purposeful active behaviour, where the reader participates, to a large extent, in the process of building meaning.

Goodman is not alone in this perspective, Grellet (1981: 07) joins him and supports the idea of guessing as he reveals that guessing about the text could be considered more important than what a text provides. Undoubtedly, Grellet neglects the importance of word recognition, and makes the reader as active as Goodman does.

I.2. Types of Reading

It is certain that, reading does not take place in just only one form or one way. Obviously, reading is meant to help the reader to understand the meaning of written texts.Researchers, including linguists and educators, have categorised reading to consist of some specific types of reading, naming: extensive reading, intensive reading, silent reading,

...wever, deal with only two very types which fall down within the scope of our study: extensive reading and intensive reading.

I.2.1. Extensive Reading

In his attempt to differentiate between extensive and intensive reading, Harmer (2001: 204) suggests that "extensive reading, is often done for pleasure and in a leisurely way… it frequently takes place when the students are on their own, reading materials written especially at their level…". Harmer's point of view about reading reveals that extensive reading is most of the time intentional, as the students tend to read just to satisfy their pleasure. Moreover, as the students read extensively, they read a written input convenient to their level. Extensive reading may occur even with small children as they may read short stories, especially when the stories are depicted in a delightful way through illustrative pictures and photos.

Implementing and introducing extensive reading to the learning process can be very beneficial and profitable. Davis (1995: 335) warns about the neglecting of an extensive reading program as he claims that "…any classroom will be the poorer for the lack of an extensive reading program, and will be unable to promote its pupils' language development in all aspects as effectively as if such a programs were present". Davis goes further as he emphasises the role of extensive reading in improving the overall comprehension skills of the students (*ibid*).

Day and Bamford (1998: 12) mention that extensive reading is shaped by two main goals. One is to enable the students to read continuously without stopping. The other goal is meant to increasingly develop the students' word recognition. For them, there is no better way for improving automaticity than extensive reading. That is the automatic recognition of words as immediately seen by the readers.

ernative name to extensive reading. He calls it "free voluntary reading". For Krashen, reading extensively is the key that enables the students to gain reading ability, linguistic competence, vocabulary, spelling and writing. Reading extensively then, is by no means, very profitable.

The importance of extensive reading could be clearly noticed from the above-mentioned passages. This fact may urge the teachers of EFL to encourage and to reinforce this kind of reading. The task of the teachers becomes easier if they really find that the students are cooperating and participating in the learning process as those students develop words' recognition on their own, and through a utilitarian means.

Extensive reading is not the only known type of reading. There is another type, which involves achieving some tasks more than enjoyment.

I.2.2. Intensive Reading

Intensive reading is another different sort of reading. Harmer (2001: 204), describes intensive reading as it "…tends to be more concentrated, less relaxed, and often dedicated not so much to pleasure as to the achievement of a study goal. Intensive reading is often done with and/or intervention of the teacher". Harmer prominently demonstrates the role of the teacher intervening in this kind of reading. He argues that intensive reading is (but, not exclusively) a teacher chosen and directed.

Nuttal (1982: 23) mentions that intensive reading represents the reader's behaviour as s/he tends to explore the meaning so that to be acquainted with the writing mechanisms. The more intensively they read, the better the learners will be equipped with full text comprehension which allows them to form critical views. In this way, the readers develop the ability to express their opinions about the content of texts, including the arguments of the

...ctives of those texts. Nuttal *(ibid)*, admits that the students, during intensive reading, make some efforts as they are supposed to pay careful attention to the written texts so that they reach a deep and detailed understanding of the texts.

Hafiz and Tudor (1989: 05) argue that the students, when reading intensively, are at a continuous exposure to short texts that carry specific syntactic, lexical or discoursal system of the language, or to provide the basis for targeted reading strategies.

From the afore mentioned definitions of intensive reading, it could be observed that reading intensively is very demanding from the part of readers (the students). The whole process is controlled with the success/failure factor. As opposed to reading extensively which neglects this factor when students read intensively, they find themselves compelled to reach a specific point of success that is mentioned by the teacher or the tutor. They may become bored if they have always to read intensively. As a result, they may completely lose motivation to carry on the reading process in general.

I.3. Models of Reading

It could be worth watching what is going on while someone is reading. we want more than just looking at the eyes of the reader when s/he is reading, as those eyes tend to follow the written text, segment after segment. It could be more interesting if the brain of the reader allows us to investigate what it is happening inside it when reading.

Due to the fact that the human cognition is very complex to be examined in vitro, educators and linguists tried to manifest reading according to some models. What the researchers could do, so far, is to present an abstract depiction of reading. That attempt hoped at providing a scientific theory for reading comprehension. This section of the study deals

bottom-up model, the top down model, the interactive model, and the transactional model.

I.3.1. Bottom up Model

Gough (1972: 331) proposes that the bottom-up view of reading emphasises the sequential processing from letters, to sounds, to words, to sentences, then finally to meaning. He means by this process of comprehension, that the reader first begins by word recognition as he/she starts from combining the letters of words together. It could be understood that the eyes play a major role by sending the brain symbols of letters to be deciphered. Gough is probably the only one looking at reading in this approach. Davies (1995: 50) describes Gough's models as a reading letter-by-letter progression through the text. This progression is followed by sounds' recognition of those letters until the words. After this, the meaning becomes accessible.

Basically, for the bottom-up model proponents, success in the reading task is guaranteed only if the readers could succeed in the written input identification (word recognition) as this latter, to a large extent, controls the whole reading process

The hierarchy given by Gough may seem logical, but it underestimates the role of the reader, as it describes him/her as just a simple decoder of written symbols. In addition to that, there is something happening in the brain that is beyond what the eyes are doing. Probably what happens at the level of the reader's cognition is much more important than what the eyes do.

I.3.2. Top-down Model

A model as such has come to existence just to make up the shortcomings of its predecessor's view of reading, which is the bottom-up model. Goodman (1971: 135) does

a "psycholinguistic game". For him, the reader is not just a passive machine. According to him, only a set of cognitive processes can allow us to get meaning from what we read. While reading, the reader take the initiative of predicting what is in the text. At this specific time, the reader checks whether what he/she has predicted goes with what is already available in the text, giving importance that the nature and information found in the text may help the reader in this task. Finally the reader associates his/her predictions with the expected meanings he/she has inside the brain. So, the reader if consideredaccording to the top-down model of reading, would be an active participant in that process as he/she always relates the information he/she finds in the text with the previously acquired linguistic knowledge.

Davies (1995: 61) supports this idea as she claims that the top-down model of reading represents the activation of prior knowledge to construct meaning while reading a text. This model gives little importance to the graphic representation of letter symbols as the reader could reach the meaning from top-downward.

It could be clearly noticed that the top-down model of reading differs, to a large extent, from the previously mentioned: bottom-up model of reading. The former involves the appliance of several advanced cognitive processes. Thus, Prediction on the one hand, and the previous background knowledge on the other hand are given more importance as they become a basic feature of reading comprehension.

The top-down model, however, could be criticized as it gives little importance to visual decoding (Davis, 1995:63). Further, a reader may probably have a poor background knowledge on which he can rely.In fact,this may reduce the value of this model of reading. It can be also noted that top-down model gives prediction more importance than necessary while a text can be processed in a very fast manner.

The interactive model of reading is mostly associated with two famous researchers: LaBerge and Samuels. This model has come to compile the strengths of both the bottom-up and top-down models. Samuels states:" the model assumes that an individual will work at the highest level (comprehension) and drop down to lower levels (word recognition) when processing at the highest level becomes ineffective" (1974: 323). Typically, the main focus of this model is on the high level which represents the top-down model. That is, a reader, in most cases, tends to use the top-down model (processing the meaning from the previous gained background knowledge), but, in case he/she is confronted with an unfamiliar word, he/she activates and shifts to the lower level which is represented by the bottom-up model. i.e. the reader moves to check the graphemes of that word.

Rumelhart (1977:600) comes with a new concept depicting reading with regard to both background knowledge, and the possibility that the text itself can play the role of a stimulus. That model is called the "interactive model". It was the sum of so many attempts to explain how the readers process information or knowledge from multiple sources at the same time. The reader may use his/her previous linguistic knowledge as a prediction generator, then immediately checks its compatibility with the text, or the text itself may play the role of a stimulus, providing the necessary hints that facilitates the task of knowledge recalling by the reader.

I.3.4. Transactional Model

Rosenbaltt (1998: 918) believes that the reading theories that sum up the whole reading process in just decoding, or favour the reader above the text as incomplete. She rejects those theories. Instead, Rosenbaltt devotes great importance to the situated "relationship" between a reader and a text regarding knowledge transfer. Rosenbalt (1994: 16) defines reading as an

... a approach that highly estimates the process of knowledge transfer, as it involves a relationship between a reader and a text. Furthermore, reading happens at a particular time and in a particular place, in which each element conditions the other.

The principles of the transactional approach of reading differ, to a large extent, from the principles of the previously mentioned theories of reading. Rosenbalt (1985: 100) differentiates between her view of reading and other approaches as she states:

"Instead of ... the dualistic, mechanistic, linear, interactional view, in which the text, ... and the personality of the reader ... can be separately analyzed, with the impact of one on the other studied in a vacuum, we need to see the reading act as an event involving a particular individual and a particular text, happening at a particular time, under particular circumstances, in a particular social and cultural setting, and as part of the on-going life of the individual and the group. We can still distinguish the elements ..not as separate entities, but as aspects of phases of a dynamic process, in which all elements take on their character as part of the organically-interrelated situation."

Clearly, Rosenbaltt calls to review the reading fact in new dimensions as she applies a shift from separately considering the factors contributing in reading, to engage in dealing with the variables affecting reading as they happen in real time, giving them equal concern. So, the transactional approach of reading could be linked with broader theories of behaviours that are typically based on the inter-connectedness of the human activity (Rosenbalt, 1994: 16)

Rumelhart (1985: 580) thinks that beyond the three above mentioned models of reading (the bottom-up, the top-down, and the interactive model) there is another model that could be added to the list. He comes with the assumption that the process of comprehension goes in

xt. That notion can be described as the transactional model of reading.

Kamhi (1997:67) believes that the transactional model is built on three strategic instruction principles: first of all, the reader is an active thinker who uses the written language as a starting point for meaning construction. Second, as far as individual differences are concerned, the interpretation of texts may, but not necessarily, differ from one reader to another. Thirdly,the social context of the text plays a crucial role as it affects the transaction of reading.

Dealing with inferring and prediction as reading strategies, Moreillon (2007: 21) describes the nature of reading as " … if we understand reading as a transaction between a text, a reader, and the context in which the work is experienced, then the literal denotation of the words on the page and the content of illustrations are only parts of the story."

As it was mentioned earlier, the transactional nature of reading imposes that the readers differ in their interpretations of texts as every reader exhibits a unique transaction while reading. So, the role of the reader, in making meaning, is highly honoured as it is as much important as the text is.

I.4. Reading Strategies

Reading is, by no means, an arbitrary behaviour. It should be systematic and following some criteria, such as the use of reading strategies. Alexander and Judy (1988: 376) describe a strategy as a "goal-directed procedure … planfully or intentionally evoked … that aid in the regulation, execution, or evaluation of a task."

McNamara (2007: 06) defines reading comprehension strategy as a "cognitive or behavioural action that is enacted under particular contextual conditions, with the goal of

sion.".To illustrate this definition, he has given the example of checking the dictionary by the pupils, when confronted with ambiguous words, as a behavioural strategy. Whereas, the action of reading that same word in the dictionary may demonstrate some sort of cognitive processing.

If well implemented, reading strategies, to a large extent, facilitate the task of the readers in comprehending written materials. However, readers may exhibit an unconscious use of reading strategies, as they may not be equipped with a formal knowledge concerning these strategies. Reading strategies are likely to be taught to novice readers who are struggling and reading with difficulties.

Anderson (2002: 20) emphasises the importance of "orchestrating" more than one reading strategy. Such integration of those strategies makes the difference between successful and unsuccessful language learners. Pressly et al (1998:171) argue that the reading proficiency that helps in text comprehension relies on the use of one or more metacognitive strategies. These authors declare that if a repertoire of strategies was given to the students, comprehension would significantly improve.

It is clear that using reading strategies is just more than necessary for foreign language readers.

The implementation of the reading strategies is said to help both the students and the teachers in the task of teaching reading. The students who tend to optimally adopt those strategies make the teaching/learning process more rapid. However, if the students exhibit a poor use of those strategies, they may be hindered to continue the teaching/learning process.

Skimming is a very common term among researchers, teachers and learners. Harmer (2001: 202) defines skimming as "… running your eyes over a text to get a quick idea of the gist of a text…". Harmer gives "skimming" a great importance as he mentions that encouraging the students to get a rapid look, or a rapid eye movement at the text, before going deeper for more details, is very profitable. By doing so, the students will be able to access a torrent of texts, and understand their "gist" without wasting time in obsessively reading every detail. So, the power of skimming as a strategy can be clearly noticed because it saves time and reduce effort.

Brown (2001: 308) emphasises the importance of skimming as a reading strategy. He declares that skimming reflects the behaviour of quickly running the eyes through a whole piece of writing, be it an essay, an article or a chapter, for the general gist. It is advantageous, in the sense that, it gives the readers the ability to predict and to expect the purpose of the passage and its main topic.

Skimming can frequently occur in the classroom, as the students are usually asked to read, for a limited time, before they embark on other types of activities. So, this strategy of reading is widely encouraged.

I.4.2. Scanning

This reading strategy may have other labels. Harmer, for instance, refers to -scanning- as "reading for specific information"(2001: 202). Harmer argues that when we jump directly to a specific piece of information in a text, we exhibit the use of "scanning" as a reading strategy. Harmer (*ibid*) gives an example for implementing this strategy. " We may quickly look through a film review to find the name of the director or the star. In both cases, we

until we come to the specific item we are looking for." Other examples illustrating the scanning strategy may include checking the schedule of a specific programme on T.V.

Brown (2001: 308) argues that the purpose of scanning is to extract specific information without reading through the whole text. While scanning, the students (the readers) quickly search for some particular piece of information in the print. Exercises which require as scanning may lead the students to look for names, dates, or even to find definitions of a key concept. Brown, declares that in academic fields, scanning is absolutely essential. However, in vocational English, scanning may be given little importance.

I.4.3.Reading between the Lines

Generally speaking, this strategy of reading is usually referred to as "inferring".Moreillon (2007:76) states that "inferences require that readers go beyond literal meanings; they use the print and illustrations plus prior knowledge and experience to interpret the text." It is through such implementation of these processes, that readers become able to detect hints, connect points, make either prediction or inferences, and finally draw conclusions.

Moreillon (*ibid*) differentiates between "predicting" that is built "on the line", and inferring that is built "between the lines". She sharpens the differences as she claims that predictions are just expectations about what will happen next in the coming lines of the written prints, based on what has been previously declared or mentioned.

Brown (2001: 310) states that, sometimes, the written print may mean more than just what is printed. He suggests that certain words may mean the opposite of what could be superficially understood, as the same word may contain a literal meaning and a hidden

s the importance of distinguishing between literal and implied meanings. To be able to do so, the readers should demonstrate a very sophisticated top-down processing skills. As a fact, not all the language is interpreted by just processing the literal, syntactic surface structure. Henceforth, implied meanings are likely to be derived from processing pragmatic information.

McNamara (2007: 49) states that it is very essential to ensure a good understanding of written texts through inference-making as the writers do not, obsessively, include every little detail in their pieces of writing. Otherwise, the texts become lengthy and possibly boring. Now, the role of the reader as an inference-maker comes. S/he is supposed to make up the gaps that are not explicitly stated or shown in the text. The reader would likely to do this either by the integration of statements in the text, or simply by activating a general knowledge with information found in the texts.

Teaching inference strategy is said to be very rewarding to both students, and educators, as the former are asked to interact with the literal meanings found in the print. The students would not be limited to read just simple language. Sometimes, a text necessitates that the students should be equipped with the capacity of analysing the deep meaning of the texts.

I.5. Reading Assessment

Assessing reading comprehension can be of paramount importance. It could be implemented especially in designing programs that teach reading strategies. It may also help in diagnosing the readers' weaknesses concerning reading itself. This can allow the trainers, and educators to adapt programs of reading, responding to the particular needs of the readers.

…searchers who are investigating "reading assessment", may demonstrate great concern in how well reading performance, if tested, would predict how examinees (readers, students) tend to read in other real-world settings. These same researchers may have more interest in exploring the cognitive characteristics and background variables contributing in test performance.

Undoubtedly, Alderson estimates that reading assessment is very important for so many aspects. It could be directly understood that testing the reading performance may uncover the readers' behaviour as it occurs in the natural environment.

The nature of reading assessment may also be affected by various factors. Alderson (*ibid*), states that "…Thus, reading comprehension assessments that seek to support instructional decision-making for language learners from different cultural/linguistic backgrounds must take into consideration how cultural/linguistic differences affect test performance.". He means that reading comprehension assessment is not as simple as it seems. One of the most serious factors that should be taken into account during the process of assessment is the cultural backgrounds and its influence, with the linguistic settings, on the reading comprehension process as being tested.

Even though reading assessment becomes an urge in the fields of linguistics, current reading assessment approaches seem to be inconvenient. Snow (2002: 53) criticises the currently available reading comprehension assessment. She argues that those assessments, persistently, generate complaints that these instruments "inadequately represent the complexity of the target domain". She also argues that the pioneering assessment methods confuse comprehension with vocabulary, word reading ability, domain specific knowledge, and other capacities involved in comprehension. Furthermore, they are unidimentional and

...ed in addressing minimal requirements of validity and reliability.

Conclusion

This chapter has,theoretically, explored the nature of reading as it exists in reality, though every scholar, intentionally or unintentionally, focuses more on a specific point concerning the reading fact. However, all of them agree on some assumptions that reading is very complex in nature; as it involves several cognitive processes to be activated, not arbitrarily, but rather systematically and harmoniously. It becomes widely agreed that reading is the sum of two activities, decoding (word recognition) and comprehension.However, it would be very interesting if importance is given to both the reader and the text together, as reading may represent a phenomenon that is controlled not only by a contributing factor, but by so many.

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Introduction

Although research in reading comprehension has enormously progressed, its application in actual teaching/ learning settings is still in its infancy. Learners face difficulty in reading comprehension, and teachers often take trouble to implement the appropriate strategies to avoid this problem. This chapter, will present the reader with an overall view about reading comprehension, its components, its strategies and the various variables that affect this process.

II.1. Definition of Reading Comprehension

Although it is commonly acknowledged that reading comprehension is an important skill for school and social success, there is no consensus about its definition. Comprehension literally means understanding what one reads. Reading comprehension is a very complex process, and this explains why it remains a topic of intense debate. It is a process that involves constructing meaning by connecting what the reader has read with the stored mental framework. Reading comprehension is regarded as " the essence of reading". It entails many definitions:

Durkin (1993: 31) defines it as an "intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interaction between text and reader". In counter point, Perfetti (1995) suggests that "reading comprehension is thinking skill guided by print"(cited in Behjat et al., 2012: 248)

Holding to the same position, Harris and Hodges (1995: 18) claim that reading comprehension is "the construction of the meaning of a written text through a reciprocal interchange of ideas between the reader and the message in a particular text".

dd more specificity to their descriptions of reading comprehension. Sweet and Snow (2003) define reading comprehension as a dynamic and interactive process between three elements the reader, the text, the reading activity, and the large socio-cultural context. (p. xiii-xv).

II.1.1. The reader; where s/he involves his/ her cognitive processes (memory, attention, inferencing…etc.), motivation (interest, self-efficacy), knowledge (vocabulary), and experience. In other words, learners need to become engaged readers.

II.1.2. The text; where the individual constructs the different representations of the text. These representations include the *surface code* (the word as it is mentioned in the text), the *text base* (the main ideas representing the meaning of the text), and the *mental models* (the way in which information is processed for meaning).

II.1.3. The reading activity; which refers to the ultimate end of reading. Any activity is done for a particular purpose. It may have one or more aims.

The previously mentioned elements occur within a large socio-cultural context as it is represented in "*Figure 1.1ö*. The latter influences, and is influenced by the reader who is already interacting with the three elements.

II.1.4. The large socio-cultural context; which refers to the various capacities that learners bring in the reading environment (classrooms) which are influenced by their experiences in their homes.
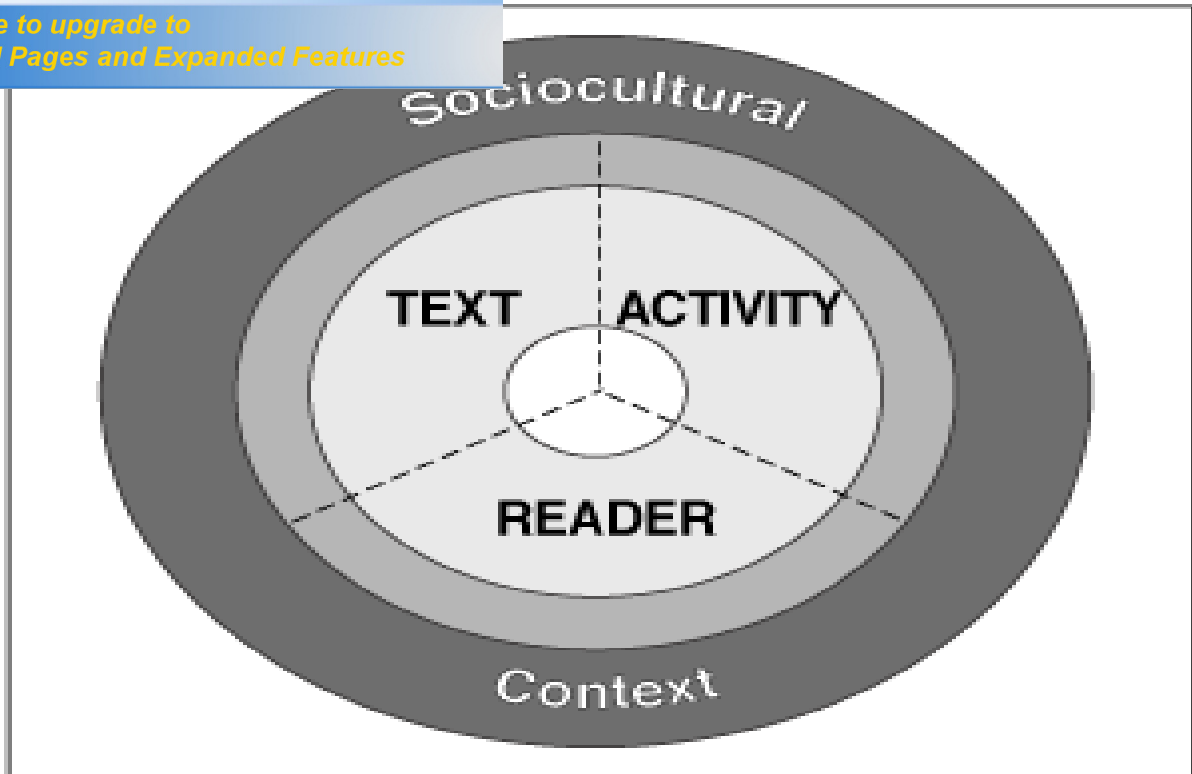
Figure 01 A Heuristic for Thinking About Reading Comprehension (Adapted

from RAND Reading Study Group, 2002)

Comprehension includes higher level processes, for example, memory, inferencing, word identification and so forth. The production of these latter processes is the reason that lead to low level/ automatic processes (Perfetti, 2007: 358).

II.2. Levels of Reading Comprehension

Gough and Tunmer (1986: 07) have broadened the notion of reading as the latter could be divided into two independent elements: decoding (word recognition), and linguistic comprehension.

Decoding has been regarded as the ability to convert the written input into semantic information. It is considered to be the genesis of reading comprehension, as beginner readers, may first, acquire this feature before moving to the upper level of linguistic comprehension.

Brian (1993: 06) defines decoding as the ability to, immediately, derive meanings from graphic representations of words. He used another term, referring to decoding, as "word recognition". Word recognition has been previously investigated by Gough and Hillinger (1980: 113). The latter expand the notion of word recognition to include two types of mechanisms. The first deals with phonological coding (*ibid*). Gough and Hillinger (*ibid*) state that "phonological coding is based on knowledge of the cipher, which captures the letter-sound correspondence to the rules of the language. This will ,then, be used as a door access to the meanings of words in the mental lexicon. This mental lexicon is thought to be organized by phonological codes as a result of language acquisition" (cited in Leybaert &Alegría, 1999: 28).

Spencer and Hay (1998) assert the importance of word recognition as a critical element in the mastery of reading (cited in Al-Farra, 2011: 17). Thus, novice readers would be inhibited in the process of reading, as they lack an rapid automatic word recognition. On the other hand, advanced and expert readers tend to use a set of orthographic data in recognizing letters, morphemes, word patterns, and letter clusters.

Decoding has taken so many different names, despite those suggestions may differ in nature with decoding. For instance, "phonics" has been used interchangeably with the term decoding by Chall (1967: 05).

Linguistic comprehension may seem similar, or an alternative term for "reading comprehension". However, there is a great difference between the two.

Brian (1993: 08) clarifies the concept of linguistic comprehension in simple terms, as he reports that it is the ability to generate interpretations for sentences and discourse, based on the semantic information at the lower word level. He differentiates between reading comprehension and linguistic comprehension. For him, there is a great contrast between comprehension that seeks for the extraction of all the surrounding significances that can a printed material reveal, which is the linguistic comprehension, and the reading comprehension that just allows the reader to access a general idea, or scanning for a specific detail.

Gough and Tunmer (1986: 07) note that:

Reading equals the product of decoding and comprehension. Or R=D*C, where each variable ranges from 0(nullity) to 1 (perfection). We trust that it is clear that by comprehension we mean, not reading comprehension, but rather linguistic comprehension, that is, the process by which, given lexical (i.e., word) information, sentences and discourses are interpreted.

It could be clearly understood, from what Gough and Tunmer havementioned that reading is decomposed into two levels. One, is word recognition (presented as decoding), andthe other is, linguistic comprehension which is certainly different from (reading comprehension).

istic
comprehension

Reading
Comprehension
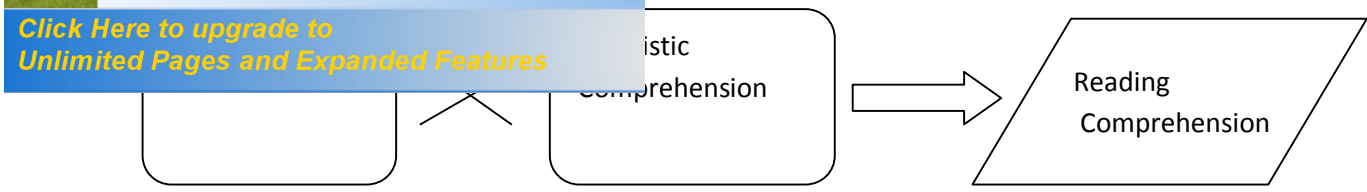
Figure 02 TheSimple View of Reading (SVR)

II.3. Components of Reading Comprehension

Cromley and Azevedo (2004)introduce the model of reading comprehension, named the Inferential Mediation Model (IM) (cited in Cromley, 2005: 08). This model shows the relationship between: Background knowledge, inferencing, Strategies, Vocabulary, and Word Reading Accuracy. The latter presents the components of the reading comprehension process.

II. 3.1. Background knowledge

Background knowledge is, simply, the existing information that one already knows about a topic, or an event. It is regarded as the starting point for understanding (Meyer & Rice, 1984: 350). Background knowledge/ prior knowledge helps the reader make connections and predictions. Thus, facilitating comprehension.

The reader's background knowledge of the world around him/her in the top-down model is referred to as schemata. Schema theory states that all knowledge is organized into units, within these units of knowledge, there is stored information. Schema, then, is a generalized description or a conceptual system for understanding knowledge; how knowledge is presented, and how it is used.

II.3.2. Inferencing

Nikki (2013) notes that inferencing is among the noticed skills that are needed in the acquisition of the reading comprehension process (p. 55). It is   an on-line strategy (Van

or device that the reader uses when he/she makes a kind of combination between sentences of the same text, or even between his/ her prior knowledge and the encountered text. As such, it can be simple as associating the pronoun "she" with the previously mentioned female pronoun, or complex as combining the conveyed message with one's prior knowledge (Kispal, 2008: 02). According to Crowe (2007) inferencing is "an essential skill for students to comprehend a wide variety of texts" (p. 54). It has been seen that inferencing is a principal factor for overall comprehension regardless of the other components if they are controlled or not (Cain & Oakhill 1999 as cited in Nikki, 2013: 68).

In a chart adapted by Perfetti in 1999, he claims that the cognitive architecture for reading moves through certain steps. Among the steps mentioned, there is inferencing which is the one that creates a coherent referential model for what is being read (Perfetti, 2001: 12801). Yuill and Oakhill (1991) suggest three possibilities to explain inference-making differences between skilled and less-skilled comprehenders: " (1) General knowledge deficits restrict less-skilled comprehenders' inference making. (2) Less-skilled comprehenders do not know when it is appropriate to draw inferences. (3) Less-skilled comprehenders have processing limitations, which hamper their ability to make inferences and integrate text information with prior knowledge." (Perfetti at al., 2005: 232).

Thus, proficient readers opt for inferencing as a key tool for the sake of understanding the missed words in the text opposing to the less proficient readers.

II. 3.3. Strategies

Strategy use is among the three characteristics of engaged reading, including: reading motivation and reading comprehension (Guthrie et al., 2004: 404). Reading comprehension

nitive strategies. These strategies help the reader to describe, organize, evaluate (Ediger, 2006: 307) and understand better what has been read.

In general, proficient readers are not necessarily conscious about their strategies, but they are able to verbalize them whenever they are asked. They are aware about which type of strategies they need , and when to use them. On the contrary, novice readers face difficulty in using their metacognitive strategies.

II. 3.4. Vocabulary

One of the basic aspects of comprehension is the ability to deal with unfamiliar words conveyed by the text. Vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental contributor for reading achievement (Richek, 2005 as cited in OERP, 2007: 53) and word recognition (Learning Point Associates, 2004: 22). Rich vocabulary underpins the ability to understand, and to use words effectively and appropriately to foster better comprehension. Its development is an on-going process that continues throughout instruction and practice.

According to the NRP (2002), readers can learn the new vocabulary either implicitly through rereading what they have already seen in the classroom, or explicitly through communicating with others (p. 04).

II. 3.5. Word Reading

Word reading is a word-level skill. It includes the association of both phonological and visual skills. According to Oakhill and Cain (2007) "Word reading and reading comprehension are highly related skills" (p. 47). Word reading is different from vocabulary knowledge in the sense that, word reading does not necessarily ensure good comprehension. It is reviewed that a successful word reading depends basically on decoding abilities (Paratore et al., 2010: 110).

...trategies

Successful reading comprehension depends on the ability to, reliably, have access to all the strategies that enable learners to understand, without the interference of the teacher or other devices. One of the methods described by researchers to foster reading ability, is reading strategy instruction, which is concerned with reading comprehension problems that impede learners' understanding.

According to the New South Wales (2010) "Comprehension strategies are the cognitive and metacognitive strategies readers use to accomplish the goal of comprehension" (p. 4). In fact, the NRP (2000) suggests, within the literature, a number of strategies to make from learners purposeful and active readers.

II.4.1. Activating or Building Background Knowledge

Background knowledge is what the learner brings when s/he is engaged in the reading process. Activating background knowledge helps the reader make connections between new, and known information. It should be implemented before, while, and after reading to enhance understanding.

Some researchers use a kind of charts called the K-W-L (What do we already *Know*? What do we *Wonder*about? What did we *Learn*?). It was elaborated by Ogle in 2004. This

K	W	L
What I know?	What I wonder?	What I learnt

chart assists learners in how to use their background knowledge (Moreillon. 2007: 20).

Table01 Ogle's (1987) K-W-L Chart

...claim that using the background knowledge is divided into three categories of connection: text-to-self (it is the connection made between the text and the reader's personal experience), text-to-text (It is the connection between the text being read and the already read text), and text-to-world (it is the connection between the text being read and what actually occurring in the reader's real world) (cited in Moreillon, 2007: 21).

II.4.2. Using Sensory Images

Multiple intelligences theory of Gardner (1983) suggests that each person possesses several intelligences which enable him/ her to learn in different ways: learners who are gifted with visual or bodily-kinesthetic intelligences use their senses to connect the characters, events, and ideas to clarify the picture and to comprehend what they encounter during reading. Visualizing requires learners to create pictures in their minds (Gardner, 2011: 01). According to Moreillon (2007) this strategy is a crucial feature of our prior knowledge and schema (p. 39).

II.4.3. Questioning

"Questioning is among the social competencies that children bring with them to their schooling" (Moreillon, 2007: 58). It, first, begins at home with childrens' parents and surroundings: the child asks questions, and the parents answer. As a child progresses, this strategy will be switched: the teacher asks questions, and the learner is supposed to answer.

Good readers ask and answer questions before, during, and after their reading; in this way, they will promote a deeper understanding and raise their awareness about the significant points of the text.

nferences

This strategy requires readers' background knowledge to find information that can be clues to answer questions . It involves also the "reading between the line" strategy of inferencing and "on line" strategy of predicting to anticipate what will happen next (Moreillon, 2007: 76).

In fact, good readers who make predictions and inferences along the three phases (before- during- after), are likely to be actively engaged in their construction of meaning and the evaluation of their prediction.

II.4.5. Determining main ideas

It requires learners to recall, and to arrange the important ideas. It is the ability to separate the most important ideas from the least important ones. Determining the main ideas strategy depends on the purpose of reading the text, the passage, the chapter…etc (*ibid*). Good readers use this strategy to imply main ideas, to summarize texts, and to make value judgments.

II.4.6. Using Fix-Up Options

It is among the strategies that good readers opt for. Because, unlike novice readers, good readers know how to monitor their progress. The Fix-up options give the readers anopportunity to use a variety of strategies such as re-reading, reading ahead, clarifying words to recover the meaning. (Moreillon, 2007: 114).

Synthesizing is the ability to summarize or to create a single overall understanding from a variety of sources. It involves combining the elements, questioning, and inferring. Like determining the main ideas, synthesizing involves making valuable judgments, since the reader may encounter an agreement in text as well as s/he may find disagreement (Moreillon, 2007: 132). Synthesis usually occurs together with analysis. This latter will result into a conclusion which is based on the reader's interpretation and evaluation. (*ibid*).

Roughly speaking, good readers opt for the previously mentioned strategies to both unlock their comprehension and to recover it. However, novice readers need an organized and explicit instruction that teach them when, and how to use the already defined strategies. (Bader, 2007: 58).

II.5. Factors Affecting Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is controlled by some factors for which great attention should be given.Palincsar and Brown (1984) regard reading as a process which is governed by various factors.Within this view, Snow (2002: 36) on the other hand , suggests that the possible factors may include, but not exclusively, the text itself, the reader, and the contextMoreover, Nagy (1988) considers "vocabulary" to be the main factor influencing reading.Some factors are related with the text; others target the reader (Lattimer, 2010: 79).

This section of chapter two is intended to, briefly, discuss some of the factors that control reading. Broadly speaking, factors which affect reading comprehension can be classified into two general categories: text variables and reader variables.

Text variables are factors that are exclusively related to the text. There are various variables intervening in texts. It would be time consuming to deal with every factor in detail. Thus, five factors will be briefly discussed in what follows:

II.5.1.1. Vocabulary

Probably the most prominent obstacle that face students while reading, is the limitless lexical items that every language has. Every day, readers find themselves encountering completely unfamiliar new words. This, obviously, has an impact on the students general comprehension of texts.The nature of the English language imposes that certain words have different meanings. For instance, the word "smart", initially, signals an adjective describing an intelligent person; however, if it is used as a verb, "smart" it would mean, according to the oxford advanced dictionary "to feel pain".

Haynes and Baker(1993: 141) come with the assumption that the most terrific obstacle forL2 readers, is probably not the lack of reading strategies, but vocabulary deficiency. These two researchers mean that vocabulary is much more important than reading strategies as long as vocabulary could be implemented in assessing difficulty. Nuttal (1982: 51) mentions that vocabulary, for a very long time, has been a unit measurement of reading evaluation. Proficient readers tend to exhibit a considerable amount of vocabulary understanding.

Vocabulary difficulties are examined by William and Dallas (1984: 183). They mention that a text would be considered to be difficult, if lot of abstract words are used. In addition to this, using idiomatic expressions too much renders the text difficult to comprehend. Also, specific terminology that is imported from a scientific field or different culture hardens understanding.

A text would, probably, influence the reading comprehension of the students. This may depend on how it is organised and structured. As texts may vary in both form (structure, length) and content (type of the subject matter being discussed in the text), the readers may exhibit contrastive levels of understanding and comprehension among the students' side. It is obvious that every type of text implements a specificterminology. Texts of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) differ from those of Academic English (A.E).

Invernizzi (2002: 464) criticises the fact that the type of text has not been given the importance it deserves. Researchers focus more on the degree to which a text is difficult. Armbuster et al (2003: 07) claim that the younger the readers are, the shorter the text must be.

Sousa (2004: 86) argues that a text should fit the level of the readers. A text whose level is beyond the capacity of the readers, makes them focus merely on word recognition. As a result, they will not develop fluency very fast, or probably they will not develop it at all, due to the considerable time spent in decoding.

McEwan (2002: 22) calls teachers to implement very simple texts especially with beginners. So, the choice of reading materials is left to the estimation of the teacher.

II.5.1.3. Coherence and Cohesion

Good cohesion and coherence are the duty of the writer. The latter must avoid making the reader feel lost when the latter is reading. The readers assisted with the presence of balanced coherence and cohesion. They serve as a map guiding him/her to the world of the writer; otherwise, the readers find themselves in a huge maze.

herence as the connection that links the ideas of a text. A writer must move smoothly, when writing his/her ideas. Coherence is shaped with continuity of thoughts from the very beginning until the end without interruptions. A beginner reader would detect some sort of dispersion, in a text that lacks coherence, but cannot tell exactly what is wrong. This in turn, would make the reading task very time consuming and very difficult.

Cohesion, on the other hand, deals with the relation between words at the sentence level. It represents, according to Davies (1995: 100), the basis for coherence. Thus, an imbalanced cohesion leads to an imbalanced coherence. Halliday and Hasan (1976: 18) state that cohesion is aimed at relating text parts, one with the other. Doing this, the print is textured with a sense of continuity; this in turn, provides the reader with the ability of interpretation. Halliday and Hasan (*ibid*), exemplify five components of cohesion: "*reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction,* and *lexical cohesion*." Lexical cohesion deals with lexis; reference, substitution, and ellipsis are grammatical cohesions; whereas, conjunctive cohesions fall into both categories.

II.5.1.4. Automaticity

Logan (1997: 127) gives four characteristics of automaticity: speed, effortlessness, autonomy and the absence of conscious awareness.

The increasing speed of the readers while reading shapes the reading performance. Perfetti and Hogaboam (1975: 465) differentiate between good comprehenders and poor ones, in terms of the speed of decoding single words. Both researchers come with the assumption that poor readers suffer from the absence of automatic word identification.

e classrooms, some students read fast; others read at a slower pace when reading. Instead, they hardly pronounce words. That is due to lack of automaticity. Greene et al (1994: 161) agree that the reading rate is just a result of the efficiency of decoding skills and comprehension.

In this respect, LaBerge and Samuels (1974: 296) put two standards to measure the reading skill development, summarised in: *accuracy and fluency*. For them, improving the skill of decoding to the level of automaticity is critical (O'Shea et al., 1985: 131). This assumption is later supported by Samuels and Flor (1997: 161) who state that the reading process involves rapid decoding and synchronic comprehension. Thus the fluent reader is able to simultaneously perform two tasks such as recognition and word comprehension altogether.

II.5.1.5. Syntax

As it is suggested by Cromer and Wiener (1966: 07) that novice readers tend to avoid relying on syntax to decode written materials. Vogel (1975: 13) confirms this theory when he conducts a research on syntax and reading. He finds a correlational link between productive syntax scores and reading comprehension scores. Following that, Anderson (1982: 58) argues that poor readers have syntactic deficiencies. A hypothesis called "the Structural Deficit Hypothesis" (SDH), supported by Scarborough (1991: 218) who claims that the absence of grammatical knowledge interferes, negatively, with higher level text.

A text would be, especially for novice readers, difficult if it contains a complex structure at the sentence level. Coleman (1964) points out that the readability and comprehension of texts are likely to be improved, if the simple structure active voice is widely used in texts. Similarly, Klare (1984: 704) supports this notion, stating that structures such as nominalisation are more difficult to process.Gabriele et al (2005: 1523) state that: "a

se and a subordinate clause such as *The woman saw a man who ate a sandwich* is considered more complex than a coordinate structure as in *The woman saw a man and ate a sandwich*, because the former comes later in acquisition than the latter".

Chomsky (1969: 53)sets out four criteria for linguistic complexity. First, if grammatical structures, at the sentence level, are not directly pointed out in the surface structure. Second, if a word is frequently varying with the syntactic structure associated with it. Besides, it may become difficult for the learners to cope with comprehension if, for instance, a particular verb has two potential conflicting structures. Finally, only certain limited conditions can control the grammatical operations.

However, simplifying syntactic structures for advanced readers may have no significant impact on improving the reading comprehension task. Ulijn and Strother (1990:49) mention that:"…at advanced levels, syntactic simplification into a more common register does not really increase readability"(Woolley, 2011: 33)

II.5.2. Reader Variables

For better understanding, The reader needs to be actively engaged in the reading process by using his/her cognitive abilities, as well as affective ones. These abilities include factors such as: reader's motivation and interest about the topic, his/her purpose of reading, his/ her knowledge about the topic, language proficiency and culture. All these factors should be interacted with the previously mentioned text variables, in order to produce an overall understanding.

II.5.2.1. Purpose for Reading

Before reading any passage, the reader should decide his/her purpose/objective of reading. The purpose of reading depends on the strategy the reader implements i.e., if the

will not pay great attention to all the details mentioned in the passage. Having no predetermined objective in a reader's mind, will provoke pointless reading.

It is worth noting that the purpose for reading a passage may change. So, whenever, the purpose is changed, the passage will be understood differently (Labiod, 2007: 28). In other words, the reader , at first glance, may read any passage just for pleasure. Whenever the instruction is changed, the reader will deal with the encountered passage in a different way.

II.5.2.2. Interest Level in the Text

Interest or motivation plays a crucial role in the process of reading comprehension. A well-organized passage or text, in terms of vocabulary, style and aesthetic aspects, is likely to attract the reader to read it *(ibid)*. Roughly speaking, a reader usually reads what suit his/ her interest and not what they are pushed to read. Thus, it is of a great value for FL teachers to know their learners' preferences and to take them into account.

II.5.2.3. Reader's Language Proficiency

According to Feng (2011) language proficiency is the best predictor for reading comprehension (p. 45). Some scholars including, Krashen and Mason (1997)give emphasis to reading as a way of strengthening language proficiency through intensive and extensive classroom reading (cited in Williams, 2006: 361, van Elsäcker, 2002: 124). If the reader masters the different sentence structure, his/her overall comprehension will never be hindered. And if the reader is not proficient, s/he is likely to face problems, while processing the text. For that reason, the lack of language proficiency can lead to failure in comprehending any text (*ibid:* 29).

According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), culture can be seen as a set of beliefs, behaviours, values and attitudes that are being used in a subjective way to transmit others' actions and their ways of thinking (cited in Usó-Juan &Flor 2006: 15).

There is a hot debate among researchers concerning the influence of culture on the reader. On one hand, protagonists see culture as a motivating factor, which helps the reader to fully adapt the target culture. Thus, the exposure to the target culture helps readers in free recall, and sentence recognition tasks; and that helps readers to build knowledge (Lahuerta,2009 :39). On the other hand, counter currents claim that the full understanding of the target knowledge does not make the reader possess a full cultural background of the text being read (ibid).

II.5.2.5. Knowledge of the Topic

Being familiar with the meaning of words does not necessary bound up with familiarity of the topic. The reader may understand all the words encountered in the text, but the meaning of the whole text is still vague. Labiod (2007) gives an example about one of the daily problems that face readers when dealing with poetry. Readers face difficulty in analysing the poetic verses; despite, their familiarity of the words, that is why they consider it as a hard task (p. 29). A reader's knowledge about a particular topic, be it poetry or prose, contributes in his/her understanding. Thus, the familiarity of the topic fosters reading comprehension.

II.6. Effective Reading Comprehension Instruction

The reader moves through a series of steps while reading progresses. These steps are named phases of reading. Though there is no consensus about the labelling of these steps among researchers, they are essentially the same.

The use of the different reading comprehension strategies such as activating background knowledge, setting purposes, predicting, brainstorming, warming up…etc. is the core of the pre-reading phase. Among the main goals of the pre-reading phase: to prepare students for the reading material, that the teacher has adapted, to help students to make predictions about the text's content (Clark &Ganschow, 1995: 72). Ringler and Weber (1984) suggest a label for pre-reading activities as enabling activities, since they provide a reader with necessary background to organize activity and to comprehend the material (cited in Ajideh, 2003: 06).

The pre-reading phase helps the learner to move to the next phase easily. Without it, the while reading phase might be difficult and less enjoyable.

II.6.2. While-Reading Phase

The while-reading phase mainly focuses on the exploitation of the text through multiple choice questions, paraphrasing and translation. It involves skimming, scanning, making inferences, note-taking, reading silently, reading intensively for the supporting ideas…etc.The while/during reading phase takes a longer period of time more than the first phase (Ashraf, 2011: 75).

III.6.3. Post-Reading Phase

To check students' comprehension and retention of the information of a text that they have already read, teachers should implement the last phase which is the post-reading phase. It is used to check the fulfilment of reading tasks, evaluate the application of reading strategies, apply what has been learned and to integrate reading with other skills. In the post-reading phase, teachers should engage their students in discussions to evaluate what they have learned from their reading (*ibid*: 73).

es by which learners compare their post-reading gains with their pre and while-reading suppositions. Either their pre-made assumptions will be confirmed or unconfirmed (Labiod, 2007: 37).

II.7. Measuring Reading Comprehension

Testing/measuring is the final loop of the chain, in that, it should follow the teaching process, as well as, support it. Reading is probably the most common of the four skills to be measured. Unlike writing and speaking skills, the reading skill is difficult to be tested. Because, the writer's or the speaker's performance is fully observed; whereas, the reader's performance is not observable.

Actually, one of the common difficult tasks that face EFL teachers, when measuring reading comprehension, is the selection of the appropriate reading texts. This selection should be based upon certain criteria including; readability (i.e., how easily written materials can be read and understood), language proficiency...etc. (Ajideh&Mozaffarzadeh, 2012: 11159).

In fact, there are many ways to test reading comprehension. Some scholars like Heaton (1991) proposes true/false reading tests, multiple choice items, completion… .On the other hand, Brown (2004) speaks about: reading aloud, matching test, filling the gap test…(cited in Palupiningsih, 2011: 03).

There is a controversy among researchers about which technique better reflects a reader's comprehension. We have chosen two main tools: the cloze procedure and the multiple choice questions.

II.7.1. Cloze Procedure

This term was first developed by Wilson Taylor in 1953 (McKamey, 2006: 114). Cloze procedure refers to any text or a passage with every *n-th* word deleted. *N* is the number of

distance between two deletions; it can be the fifth, sixth, seventh…or tenth word. The students are asked to read and then to fill in the blanks with the appropriate words or their equivalents, taking into account that, the first and the last words should not be deleted in order to make the picture for the reader clear. This technique is considered to be an effective means (Hale et al., 1988: 01) when assessing second language proficiency, readability and reading comprehension (Rankin &Culhane, 1969: 193). However, Cloze procedure has been criticized, on the basis that, it may involve using redundancy (Ajideh&Mozaffarzadeh: 11160).

II.7.2. Multiple Choice Questions

Multiple choice questions (MCQs) are common devices for measuring readers' comprehension. "Multiple-choice questions are an inadequate means of assessing comprehension of readers in general and of ESL/EFL students in particular" (Aslan: 39). Namely, they refer to the various answerswhich represent the options that are given to each particular question. Where, the reader is asked to cross the right answer. Though the MCQs are widely used, they have been criticized for being less reliable and less valid; in that, the testee can just select the answers haphazardly, without fully understanding the piece of writing (Ajideh&Mozaffarzadeh: *ibid*).

Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with the umbrella notion of reading comprehension. Itcovers the different definitions proposed by scholars, its various components, models, and strategies that should be implemented before, during and after reading instruction to foster better understanding. Also, this chapter dealswith the and the readers' and texts' variables that affect this process.

Introduction

The present chapter which stands as the fieldwork of our study is devoted to the analysis and interpretation of the results of students' questionnaire. The latter was relied on, due to time constraints, as the sole research tool to find out about reading comprehension problems that face second year university students and the use of reading strategies. The findings there in will represent the basic upon which we judge the hypotheses of the study.

III.1. The population of the Study

Sophomores (2nd year students) of English, in Mila University Centre, have been used as the target population for the study. For various reasons, it has been agreed to select sophomores as they have not been yet specialized in either one of the following options (Language Sciences, Civilization and Literature, Applied Languages). Certainly, this fact would push them to "read" too much, in order to get oriented to the most appropriate option. On the other hand, sophomores of English, in Mila University Centre, have a full time program covering 11 modules (Grammar, Linguistics, Phonetics, Written Expression, Oral Expression, Literature, Civilization, E.S.P, Translation, Research Methods, French, ICTs). This, in fact, increases their reading frequency, in its broader sense, to a very high extent.

III.2. The Sample

As a rule of thumb, researchers choose 20% of the population. Our population consists of 200 students. So, the sample will be 40 students. Our questionnaire was given to 40 students but only 25 brought it back. Six (6) males and nineteen (19) females, enrolled as second year students of English. This sample is largely representative of the whole population.

nnaire

The questionnaire is built on 22 questions. These questions are divided into 2 sections.

Section One: Background Information Q1————————Q2

This section seeks to obtain general information about second year LMD students. They were asked to declare their gender, and for how many years they have been studying English.

Section Two: Students' Reading habits Q 3———————— Q21

This section has been left to include some specific points about reading habits (Q03, Q04, Q06, Q08), and the environment of the population and its contribution to their reading comprehension capabilities (Q07).

To make the task of filling in the questionnaire as easy as possible, the questions of this latter have been gradually stated, from the simplest to the most complex because the sample of the study would likely better cooperate if they began with the easiest questions, that provide them with self-confidence to go further. On the other hand, the population have not been confined with only one kind of questions. Some questions (e.g. Q 02) need a yes/no answer. Other questions (e.g. Q 22) have the feature of making the students select up to 4 choices. In some questions also (e.g. Q 17), the students could mention their answers freely, in case the appropriate one is not indicated with the possible choices.

Question 01

- How many years have you been studying English?

ecognise the number of years that the students have spent studying English, not only at the university, but also at the middle and secondary schools.

Question 02

> Was it your choice to study English at university?

Yes ☐   No ☐

This question was asked to see whether studying English was the students' preference, or their alternative choice.

Question 03

> Do you like reading?

A lot ☐   A little ☐   Not at all ☐

This question was intended to measure how much students like reading**.**

Question 04

> In case 'you like reading', what kind of materials that most attract you?

Newspapers ☐   ovels   Scien☐ fiction   ☐

The nature of this question involves to analyse only the results obtained, from those students, who have mentioned that they like reading in "question 01". As the data collected from "question 01" shows that 64 % of students have mentioned that they like reading a little, and only 20% have claimed that they do like reading a lot. With this item, it was intended to know the preferences of those students who have mentioned that they like reading, which is to say in the laymen's terms, what kind of materials they prefer to read**.**

> Do you read novels?

Yes   No   ☐   ☐

This question was included to check whether the students make use of novels, if available, as they are supposed to read novels in the module of "Literature".

Question 06

> In case 'yes', how many novels have you read till now?

The question 04 was asked to see the number of novels that is read by students.

Question 07

> When reading a novel or any book, do you start reading it from the beginning, or you go directly to the points that interest you?

Yes (Directly to the point)   ☐   No (From the beginning)   ☐

This is an indirect question that implies checking whether the students use "Scanning", as a reading strategy, or not. It was stated like this, as the majority of the students may unconsciously use this strategy.

Question 08

> Why do you read in English?

  1. For pleasure   ☐

  2.   To increase your knowledge about the target language   ☐

……………………………………… ☐

Using such a question, this item comes to show the motives that push the students to read. Three options have been included to let the students determine their motives freely.

Question 09

➢ Are there enough books, in the library of your university, that suit your interests?

Yes ☐   No ☐

The aim behind this question was to inquire about the availability of books in the institutions to which the students belong to.

Question 10

➢ How much time do you spend reading at the library, on a weekly basis?

This question has been introduced to the students to get information about whether they rely on the library as a source for reading materials. In addition to that, it was intended to recognize whether the students prefer to read in a library atmosphere.

Question 11

➢ How can you describe your reading abilities?

Very good ☐   Good ☐   Average ☐   Poor ☐

Through this question, we seek to know the level of proficiency of students in the language they are studying – English-.

Question 12:

➢ Have you ever heard of "reading strategies"?   Yes ☐   No ☐

that there has been a shift from asking the students indirect questions, to directly questioning about the corner stone of this study, which is about reading strategies. This item has been included to test whether the students are familiar with the so called "Reading Strategies" or not.

Question 13

> If yes, then please mention some of them.

It was intended, through this item, to examine the current conscious knowledge concerning reading strategies, of course in case they know them. Because the students who have earlier mentioned in 'item 12' that they are familiar with the reading strategies are just 3 (12 % of the total population), the results obtained from question 13 will be discussed separately (without using graphs, and tables).

Question 14

> In case you find a difficult word – while reading- would you jump directly to the dictionary checking the meaning of that ambiguous word?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Using this item, the students have been asked to tell if they make use of the dictionary. Also, it was implicitly intended to test whether the students were in the habit of using prediction as a reading strategy, instead of the overuse or the immediate use of the dictionary.

➢ If 'yes', do you use a monolingual dictionary (English/ English), or a bilingual one
(English/ ………..)

A monolingual Dictionary ☐ A bilingual one(English/…………) ☐

question 15 aims at recognising if the students tend to exhibit a great reliance on the target language dictionary or whether they rely on the mother tongue dictionary. Here also, the students had the chance to freely mention the a "third language" dictionary as some of them may use an English/French dictionary.

Question 16

➢ How often do you use the dictionary?

Frequently ☐   Sometimes ☐   Rarely ☐   Never ☐

The purpose of the previous question is to measure the frequency of using the dictionary by the students. It was also intended to check whether the students, blindly, overuse the dictionary or not.

Question 17

➢ How do you discover the meaning of a new vocabulary items?

1. Analyse the form of a new word.   ☐

2. Try to guess from the context.   ☐

3. Use a bilingual/ monolingual dictionary.   ☐

4. Use an electronic dictionary or translator.   ☐

5. Other, Please specify

et a clear idea about the students reaction, when they attempt to discover a new vocabulary item. They have been asked to select the appropriate answer from 5 choices: (analysing the form of the word, guessing the meaning from the context, using a bilingual dictionary/using a monolingual dictionary, using an electronic dictionary or adopting something else).

Question 18

➢ When reading a passage, do you relate what you understand with what you already know (your background knowledge)?

Yes ☐   ☐

This question was intended to see whether the students relate their understanding of any passage, with their prior background knowledge.

Question 19

➢ During text reading comprehension, on what aspect do you concentrate?

Technical items   T☐host important ideas   The☐ble text   ☐

question19 has been included to show the aspect to which the students give more importance to. They were asked to mention the aspects that they feel are more important.

Question 20

➢ Do you feel afraid when reading out loud in the classroom?

Yes ☐   No ☐

...tion of the students. It was implemented for the reason that students, differ in their personality, as some of them are introverts, tending to be reticent in the classroom; whereas, others are extroverts, tending to socialize in the classroom.

Question 21

➤ Does your motivation contribute to your comprehension of a written text?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Again, this question was intended to clarify whether the students' motivation plays a crucial role in understanding written text. In short, that question, was included to test if motivation really helps students in understanding written texts or not.

Question 22

➤ What does make an English text difficult for you?

1. When it reflects a culture that is different from yours. ☐

2. When the topic is unfamiliar to you. ☐

3. When it contains difficult or unfamiliar words. ☐

4. Other, Please specify…………………………………………………………

In this question, the students have been left to freely express what is behind the difficulties they face. They were given 4 choices: (when a text reflects a cultural aspect which the students themselves are not familiar with, when the topic itself is unknown for the students, when the text is full of difficult terminology, and the fourth choice was left for the students to express what was not mentioned in the previous 3 options).

The following elements have been taken into account when analysing the data obtained from the questionnaire:

1. The nature of the items that were used to form the questions.

2. The aim/aims behind those questions.

3. The collected answers as they have been represented through tables.

4. The collected answers as they have been represented through graphs.

In order to make the analysis of the results easier for interpretation, and more practical as well, the study resorts to tables and graphs, whereby the results are best displayed.

First, It is intended to know the gender of the population we are working with. The results shows that : The whole number of the sample is 25 students, 19 girls and 6 boys

Question 01

➢ How many years have you been studying English?

The results are illustrated in the following table:

		8 years		9years	
Second Year LMD Students	Total	N	%	N	%
	25	13	52%	12	48%

Table 02 The number of years of exposure to English

Table 02 shows that 52% of the total sample of the study (N=25) have been studying English for eight (8) years, and 48% have been studying English for more than eight years (9 years).
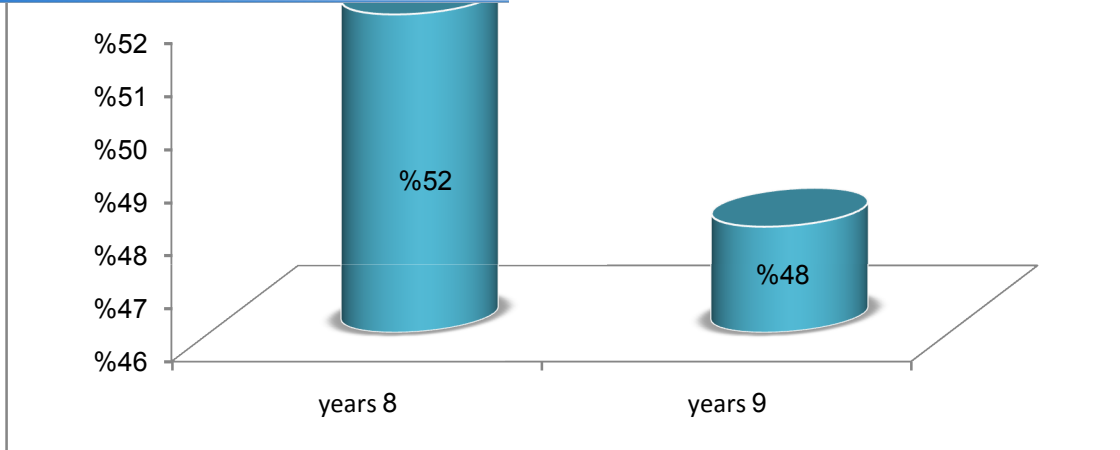
Figure 03 Rate of the Number of YearsExposure to English

Question 02

➢ Was it your choice to study English at university?

Yes ☐ No ☐

The findings are presented in table 02:

		Yes		No	
Second Year LMD Students	Total	N	%	N	%
	25	21	84%	04	16%

Table 03 Students' choice of studying English

Except for 16% who claimed that studying English was not their choice, table 02 above indicates that 84% of the total sample (N= 25) argue that it was their choices.
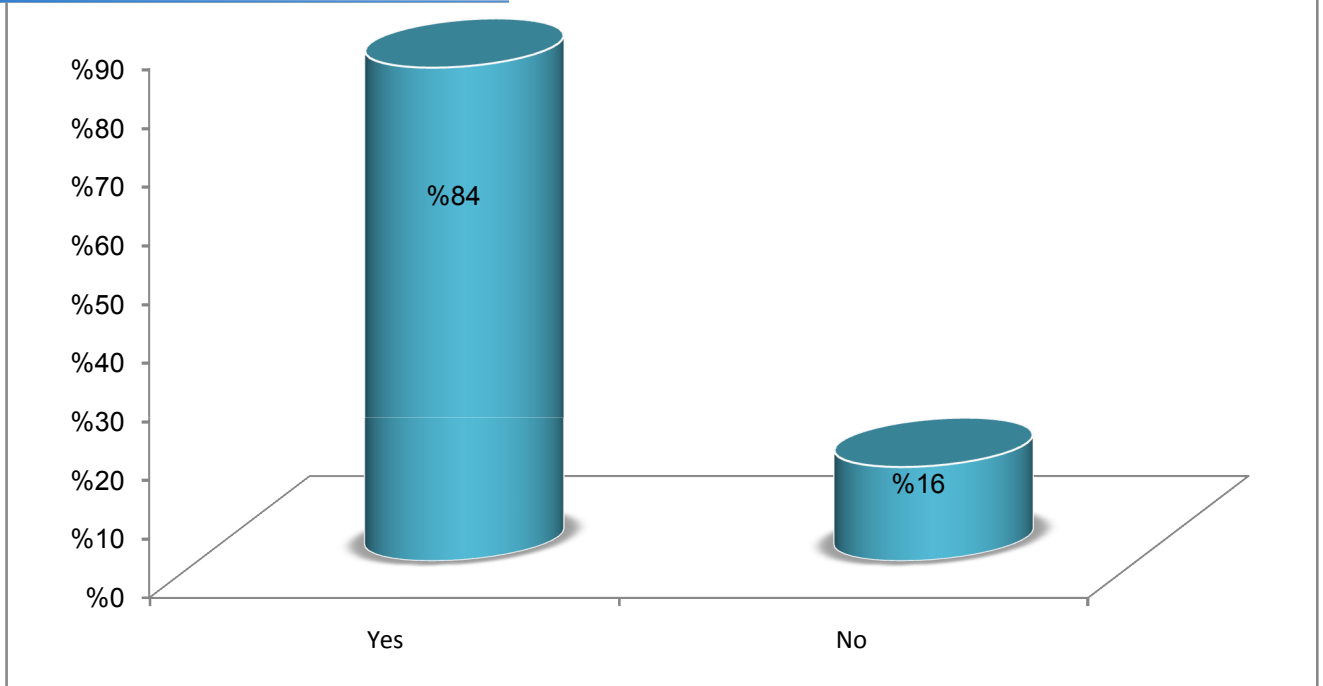
Figure 04 Rate of Students' Choice of Studying English

Question 03

➢ Do you like reading?

A lot   A little   Not at all

The results are illustrated in the coming table:

		A lot		A little		Not at all	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Second Year LMD Students	Total						
	25	05	20%	16	64%	04	16%

Table 04 Students' General Attitude towards Reading

Table 04 shows that 64% out of the whole sample of the study (N=25) have mentioned that they like reading, but just a little.. On the other hand, 20% have answered they do like

…e students have declared that they do not like reading at all.
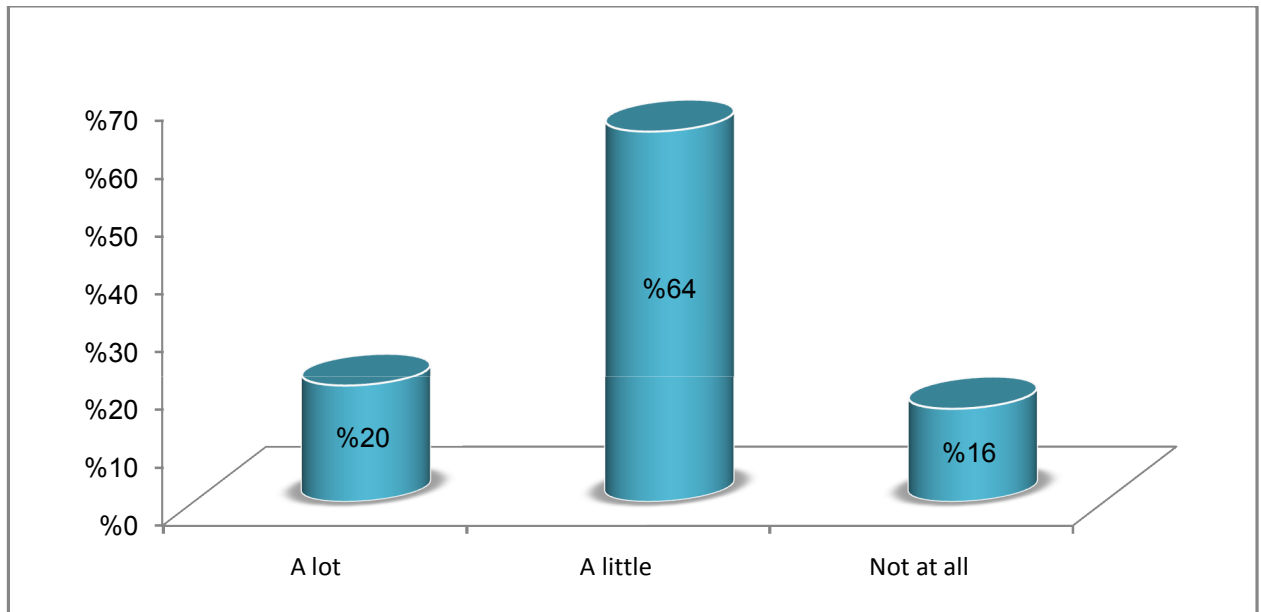
Figure 05 Rate of Students' General Attitude towards Reading

Question 04

> In case 'you like reading', what kind of materials that most attract you?

Newspapers ☐ Novels Sci☐e-fiction ☐

The nature of this question involves to analyse only the results obtained from those students who have mentioned that they like reading in "question 01". As the data collected from "question 01" shows that 64 % of students have mentioned that they like reading a little, and only 20% have claimed that they do like reading a lot. The results are summarized in the following table:

		Newspapers		Novels		Science-fiction	
Second Year LMD Students	sample	N	%	N	%	N	%
	21	06	28.57%	10	47. 61%	05	23.80%

Table05 The Students' Preferences Concerning the Materials they Like to Read

Table 05 indicates that more than 47% of the total sample prefer to read novels, about 29% tend to read newspapers, and only 23.80% read science-fiction materials.

Question 05

➢ Do you read novels?

Yes ☐ No ☐

The results are illustrated in the following table :

		Yes		No	
Second Year LMD Students	Total	N	%	N	%
	25	15	60%	10	40%

Table 06 Students' Attitude about Reading Novels

Table 06 shows that 60% of the total sample (N=25) do read novels, and 40% claim they do not read novels.

%70
%60
%50
%40
%30
%20
%10
%0

%60

%40

Yes

No
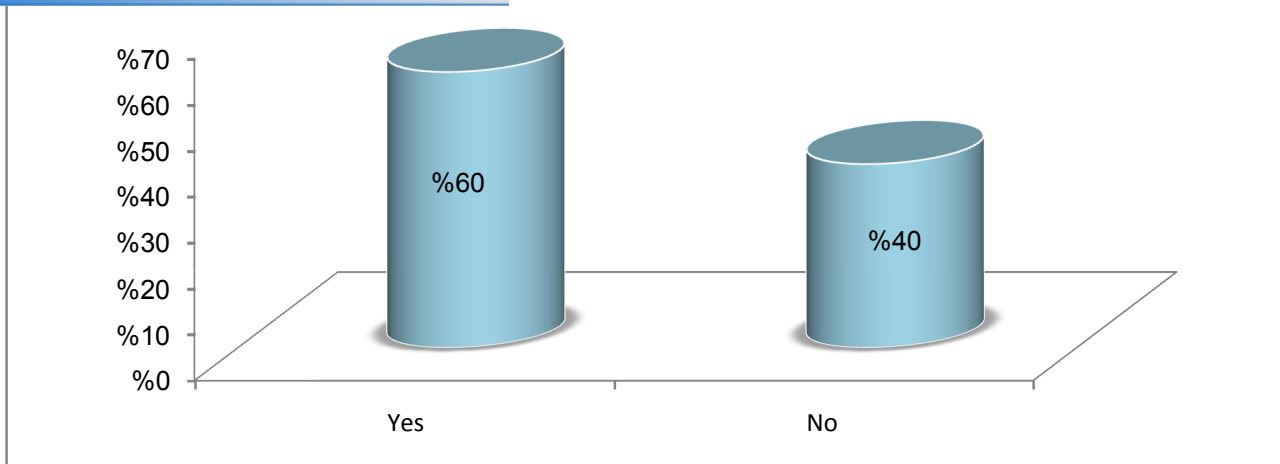
Figure 06 Rate of Students' Attitude about Reading Novels

Question 06

➢ In case 'yes', how many novels have you read till now?

The results are appeared in the table below:

		01 Novel		02 Novels		More than 02 Novels	
Second Year LMD	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%
Students	25	11	44%	07	28%	07	28%

Table 07 The Frequency of Reading Novels by the Students

Table 07 indicates that the majority (44%) of the whole sample (N= 25) have read till now, only 1 novel; however, the percentage is the same for both reading 2 novels or more 28%).
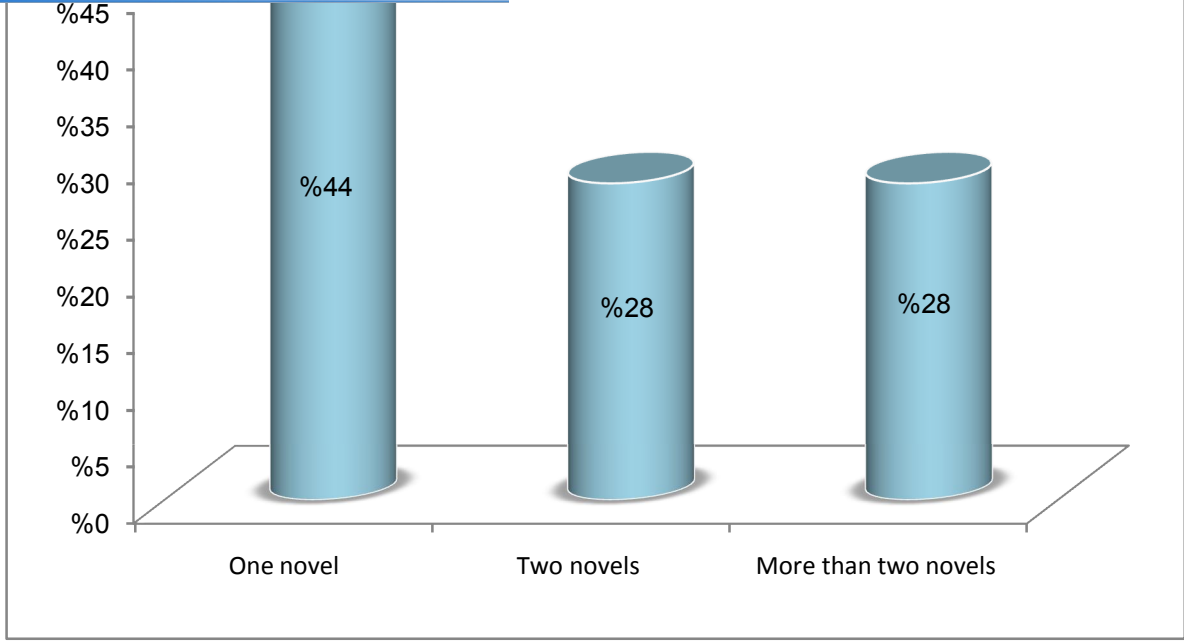
Figure 07 Rate of Novels Reading Amount by Students

Question 07

➢ When reading a novel or any book, do you start reading it from the beginning,

or you go directly to the points that interest you?

Yes (Directly to the point)   No⬚ from the beginning)   ⬚

"Table 07" provides an illustration of the obtained results:

		Yes		No	
Second Year LMD Students	Total	N	%	N	%
	25	20	80%	05	20%

Table 08 The Intentional Use of Scanning as a Reading Strategy

From the above mentioned table, it can be clearly observed that 80 % of the students

use scanning as a reading strategy. This is represented through their behaviour of jumping

80

importance for them. But, 20% of the sample have claimed that they spend a considerable time in reading almost everything.
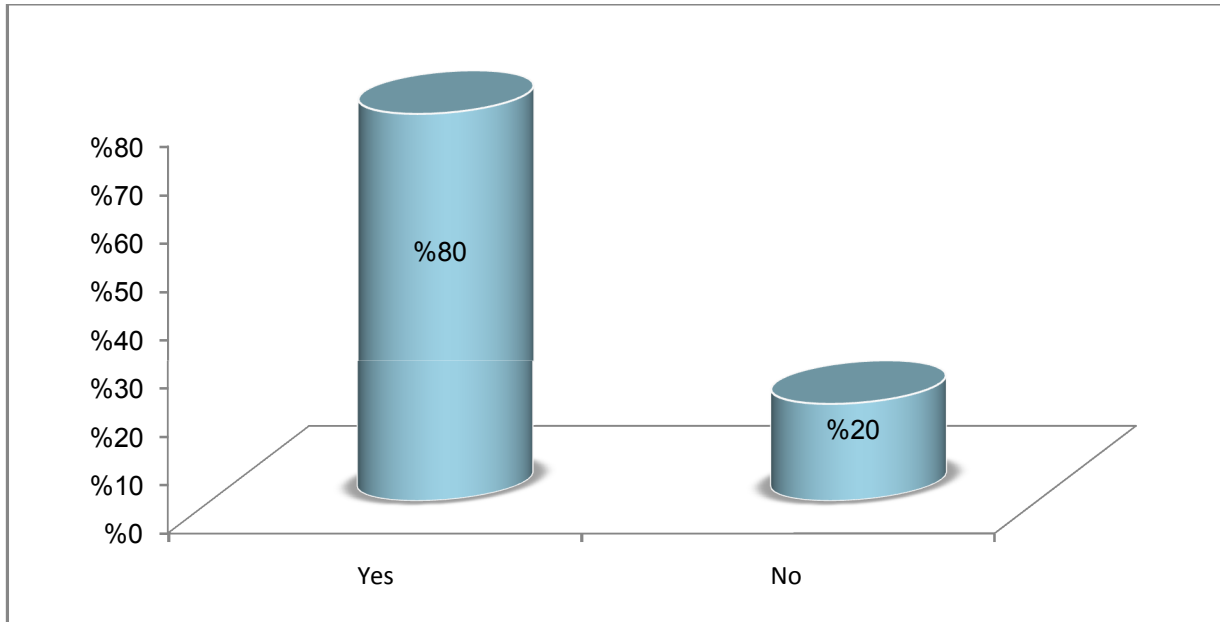
Figure 08 Rate of the Intentional Use of Scanning as a Reading Strategy

Question 08

➢ Why do you read in English?

1. For pleasure ☐

2. To increase your knowledge about the target language ☐

3. Others, please specify……………………………………………………

ults:

		For pleasure		To increase Knowledge about the target language		Others	
Second Year	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%
LMD Students	25	05	20%	16	64%	04	16%

Table 09 TheMotivation Behind the Students Behaviour of Reading

The above table reveals that 64% of the total sample (N=25) tend to read with the motivation to increase knowledge about the target language. Only 20% claim to read in English for pleasure. Except for 16% who have claimed to usually read for the three mentioned purposes.
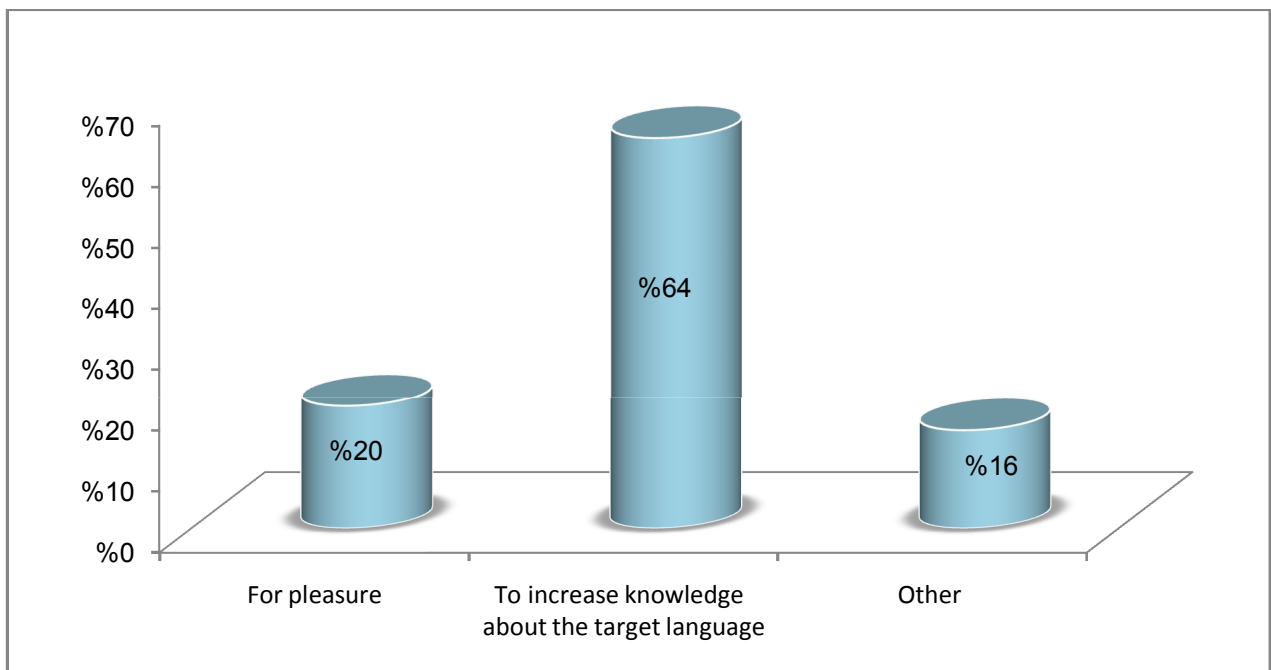
Figure 09 Rate of the Motivation Behind the Students Behaviour of Reading

Question 09

brary of your university that suit your interests?

Yes ☐ No ☐

The results of this question are mentioned in 'table 09' :

		Yes		No	
Second Year LMD students	Total	N	%	N	%
	25	08	32%	17	68%

Table 10 Books Availability at the Level of the Students' University

The results in the table 10 show that 68% of the total number of sample claim that there are no enough books in the library. On the other hand, 32% have declared that there are enough books in their libraries that fit their interests. The majority of the sample did not show satisfaction about that question because they are not trained in how to look for books. Hence they said that there are no books in the library.
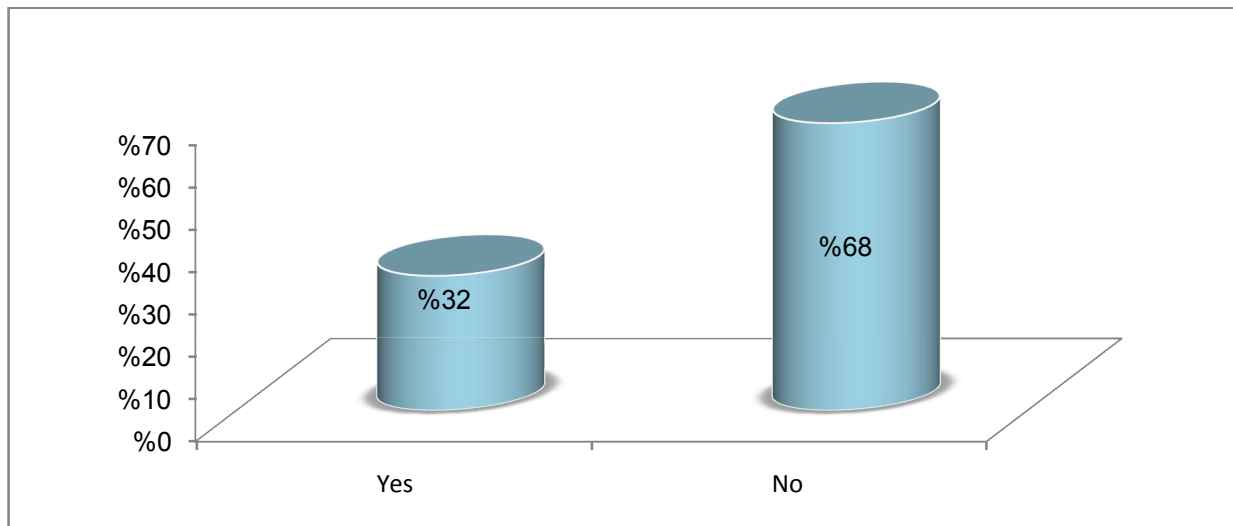
Figure 10 Rate ofBooks Availability at the Level of the Students' University

Question 10

eading at the library, on a weekly basis?

In what follows are the findings of the question 10:

		Less than 1 hour		1 hour		More than 2 hours	
Second Year LMD	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%
students	25	13	52%	08	32%	04	16%

Table 11 The Time Spent by the Students in Reading at the Level of the

Libraries in their Universities

As it appears in "Table 11", it has been reported that 52% of students spend less than

One hour in their libraries, 32% spend One hour, and only 16% spend more than 2 hours.
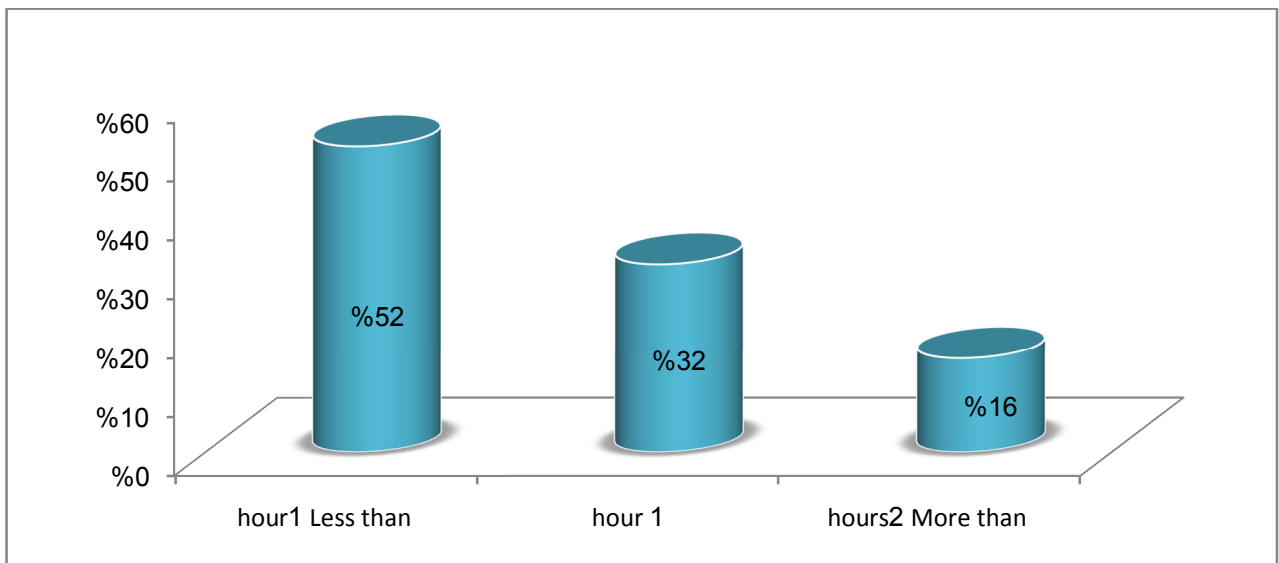
Figure 11 Rate ofTime Spent by the Students in Reading at the Level of the

Libraries in their University

Question 11

ling abilities?

Very good ☐ od ☐ verage ☐ Poor ☐

The results are presented in the table below:

		Very Good		Good		Average		Poor	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Second Year LMD Students	Total								
	25	00	00%	11	44%	10	40%	04	16%

Table 12 Students' Level in English

Table 12 indicates that 44% of the total sample (N=25) consider their level in English as 'good', 40% claim to have an 'average' level in English, 16% confess to have a 'poor' level, and there is no student who claims to have a 'very good' level.
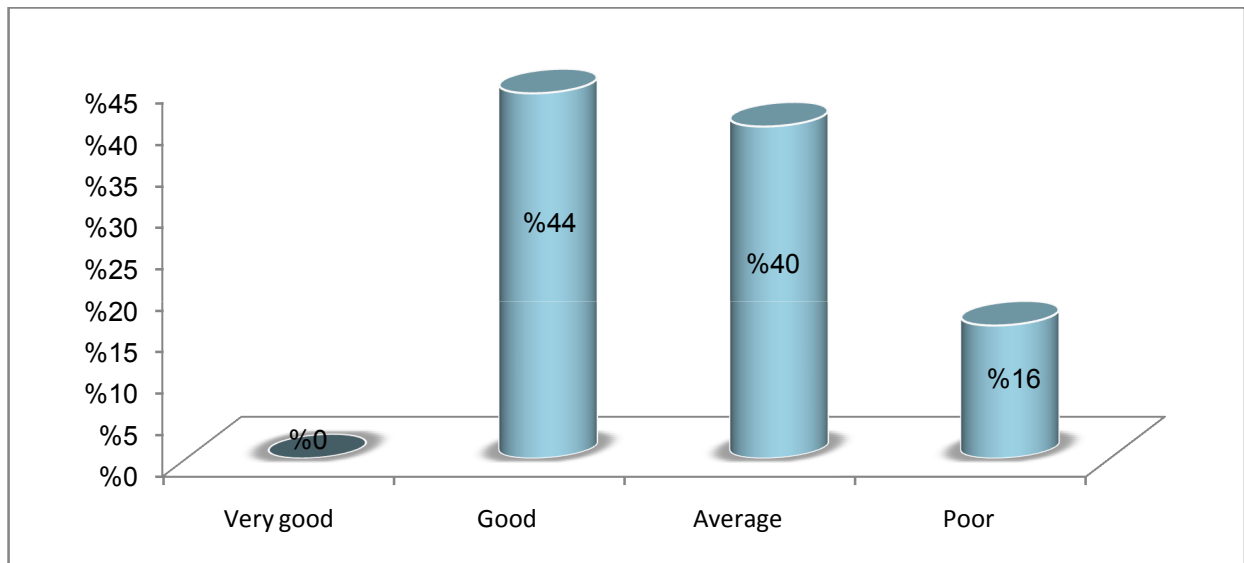
Figure 12 Rate ofStudents' Level in English

Question 12

g strategies"?   Yes ☐   No   ☐

The following table summarises the obtained results:

		Yes		No	
Second Year LMD Students	Total	N	%	N	%
	25	03	12%	22	88%

Table 13 Students' Awareness about Reading Strategies

It could be noticed in the above mentioned table that the majority of the whole sample are not familiar with reading strategies ' 88%', only 12% claim to have heard of reading strategies which does not imply that they know what these strategies these.
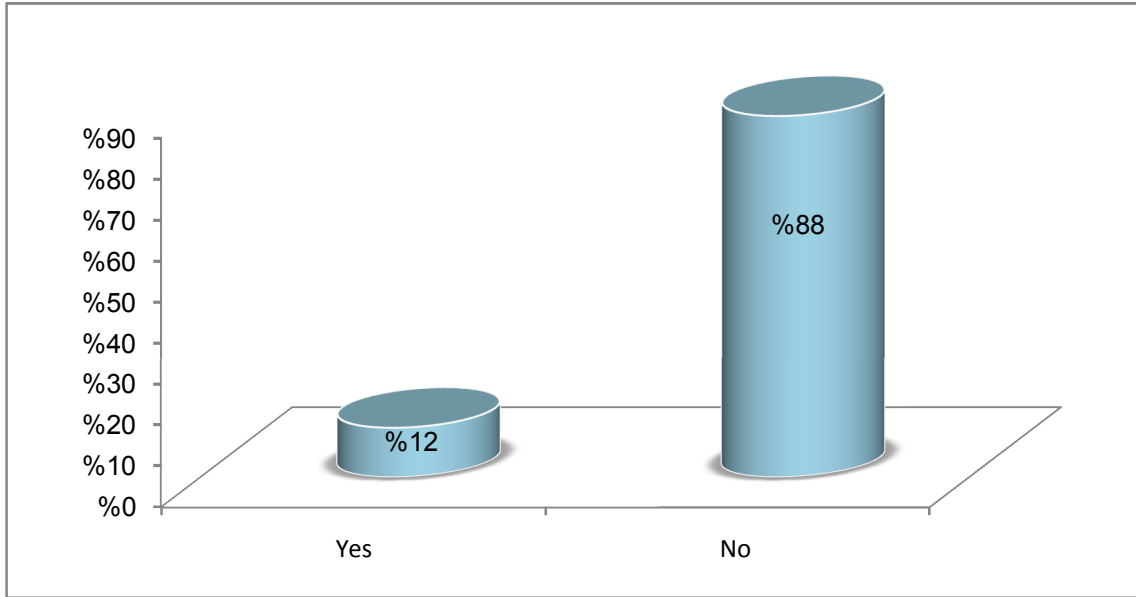
Figure 13 Rate ofStudents' Awareness about Reading Strategies

Question 13

them.

So, it was found that one (1) student (04 % of the total sample) has mentioned that the reading strategies she knows are :"co-operating with classmates, reading the topic at home before coming to the classroom, background knowledge and setting possibilities). The second student (04 % of the total sample) mentioned he knows some reading strategies. According to him, he knows:" reading together (in unison), going to the library frequently). The third student (04 % of the total sample) reported that the reading strategies she knows include (reading the text more than once, memorizing new words).Though all the pre-mentioned suggestions are not the real reading strategies.

Question 14

> In case you find a difficult word – while reading- would you jump directly to the dictionary checking the meaning of that ambiguous word?

Yes ☐   No ☐

The results can be observed in this table:

		Yes		No	
Second Year LMD	Total	N	%	N	%
Students	25	25	100%	00	00%

Table 14 the Immediate Use of the Dictionary by the Students

Through reading the above table, it can be clearly noticed that the total number of sample opt for the dictionary.
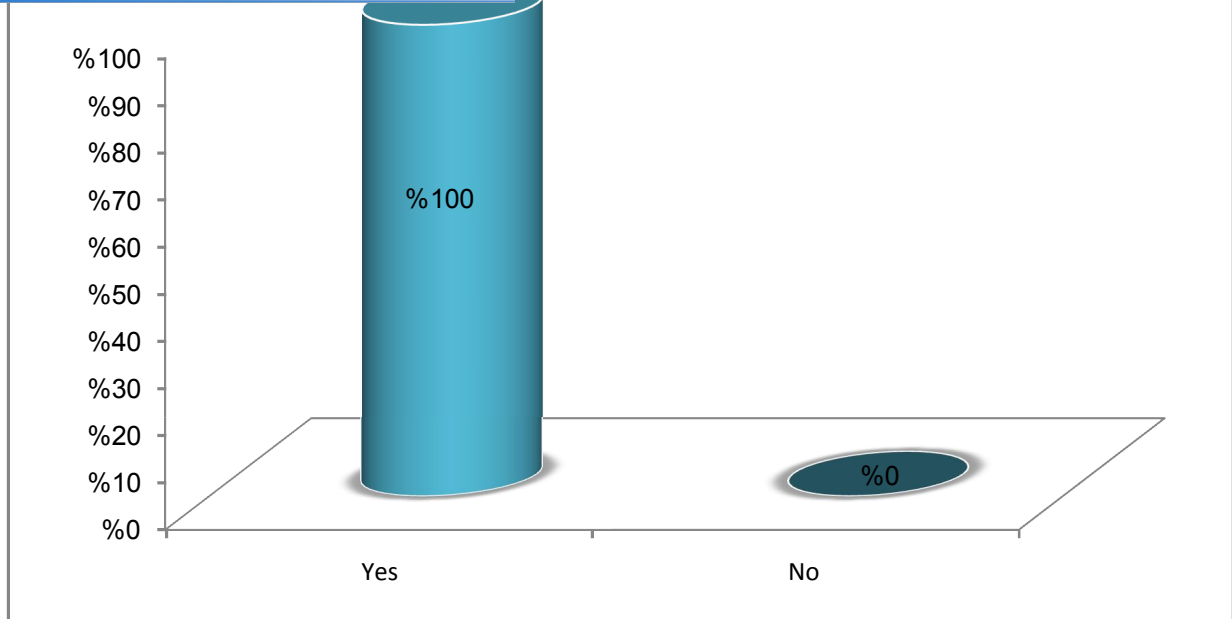
Figure 14 Rate ofthe Immediate Use of the Dictionary by the Students

Question 15

> If 'yes', do you use a monolingual dictionary (English/ English), or a bilingual one
> (English/ ………..)

The following table describes the findings obtained from ' question 14':

		English/ English		English/ Arabic		English/ French	
Second Year LMD	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%
Students	25	12	48%	13	52%	00	00%

Table 15 The Type of the Dictionary Used by the Students

The results of 'table 15' show that 52% of students use an English / Arabic dictionary,

48% use a monolingual dictionary (an English one), and there is no students who claim to use

an English/ French dictionary.

88
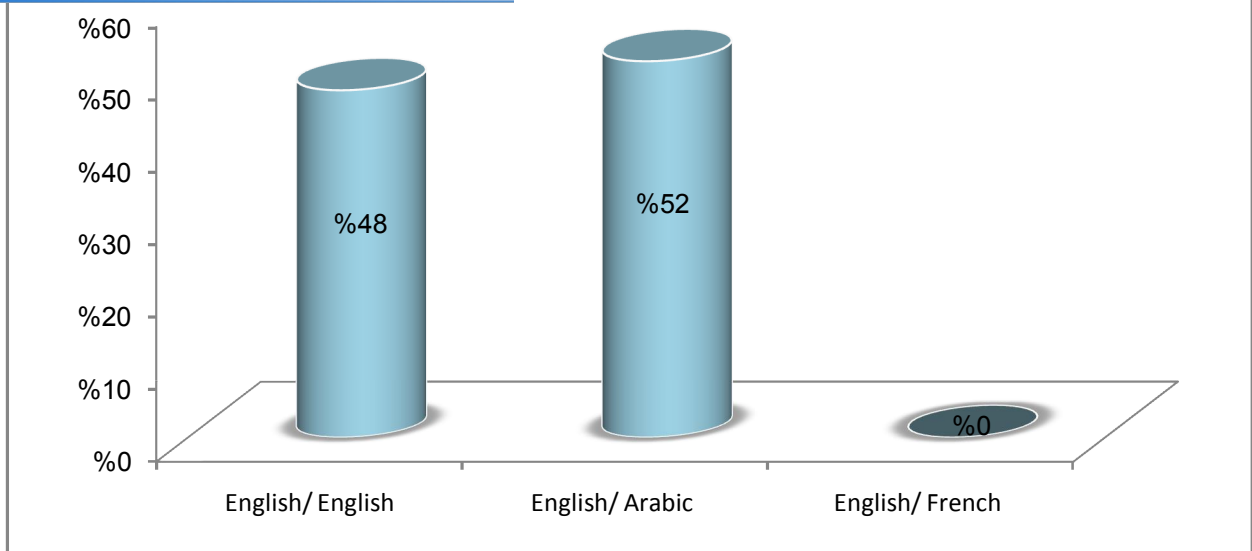
Figure 15 Rate of the Type of the Dictionary Used by the Students

Question 16

➢ How often do you use the dictionary?

Frequently ☐   Sometimes   Rarely   Never   ☐   ☐

In what follows is the table that summarises the obtained results from ' question 15':

		Frequently		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
Second Year LMD	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Students	25	07	28%	17	68%	01	04%	00	00%

Table 16 The Degree to which the Students Use the Dictionary

When analysing this table, it could be observed that 68% of the total sample have declared thattheysometimesuse the dictionary, 28% use the dictionary in a frequent manner4% rarelyuse it, and no one claims to never use the dictionary.
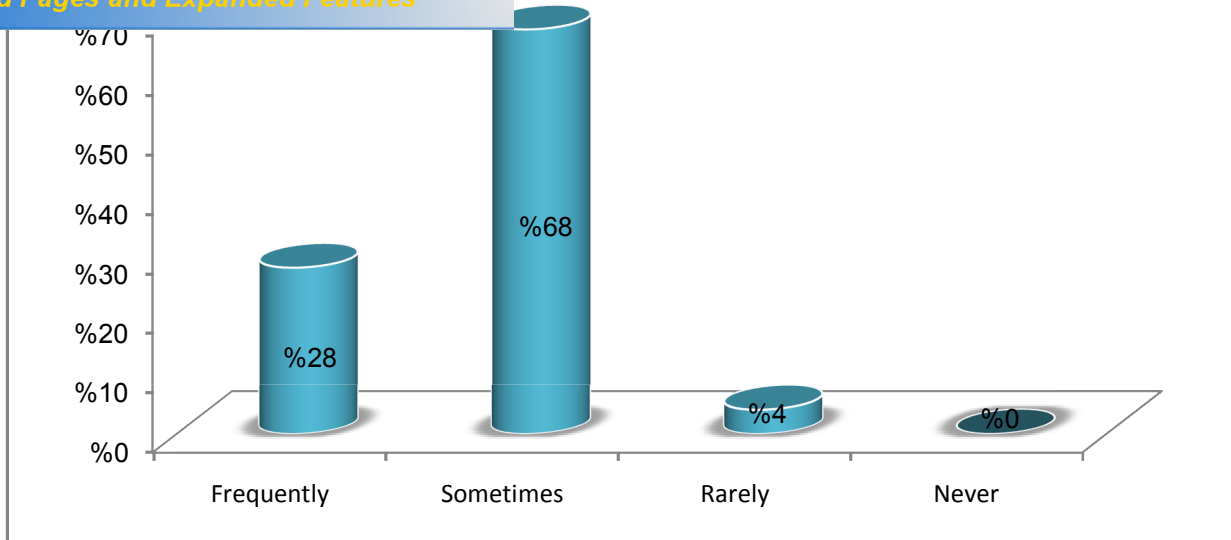
Figure 16 TheFrequency of Dictionay Use by Students

Question 17

➤ How do you discover the meaning of a new vocabulary item?

1. Analyse the form of a new word. ☐

2. Try to guess from the context. ☐

3. Use a bilingual/ monolingual dictionary. ☐

4. Use an electronic dictionary or translator. ☐

5. Other, Please specify ……………………………………………

gs of question 16:

		Analyse the Form		Guess from the Context		Use Monolingual/ Bilingual Dictionary		Use Electronic Dictionary/ Translator		Other	
Second Year LMD Students	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	25	04	16%	14	56%	5	20%	01	04%	01	04%

Table 17 The Method that is used by the Students to Discover a New

Vocabulary Item

The previous table reveals that 56% of the total sample appear to use guessing the meaning of the ambiguous words from the context, which means, they use the prediction strategy implicitly, 20% have claimed to opt for the dictionary as a source for getting new lexis, 16% mentioned that they analyse the form of the item, only 4% said they tend to use an electronic dictionary or a translator. 4% argue that, they tend to use alternative options to that mentioned above, which is to ask a classmate.
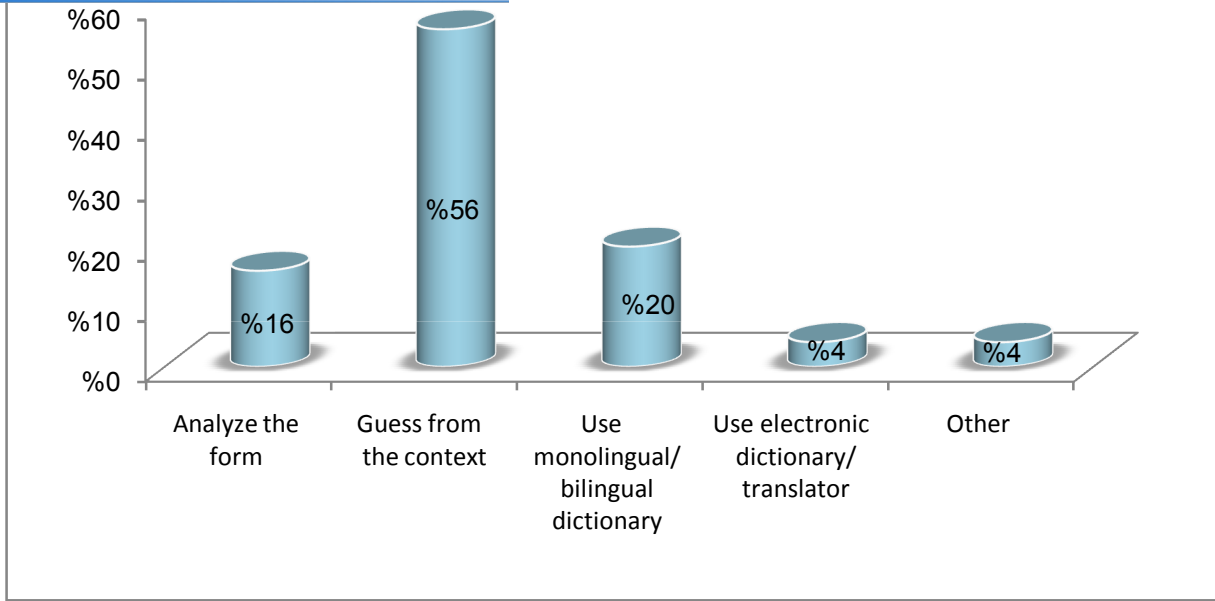
Figure 17 Rate of The Method that is Used by the Students to Discover a New

Vocabulary Item

Question 18

➢ When reading a passage, do you relate what you understand with what you already

know (your background knowledge)?

Yes   No   ☐   ☐

esults obtained:

		Yes		No	
Second Year LMD Students	Total	N	%	N	%
	25	19	76%	06	24%

Table 18 The Students' Relation between what they Understand with their

Background Knowledge

It has been found that 76% of the whole sample have claimed that they relate the existent passage with their prior knowledge. 24% have mentioned that they do rely only on the existing written passage.
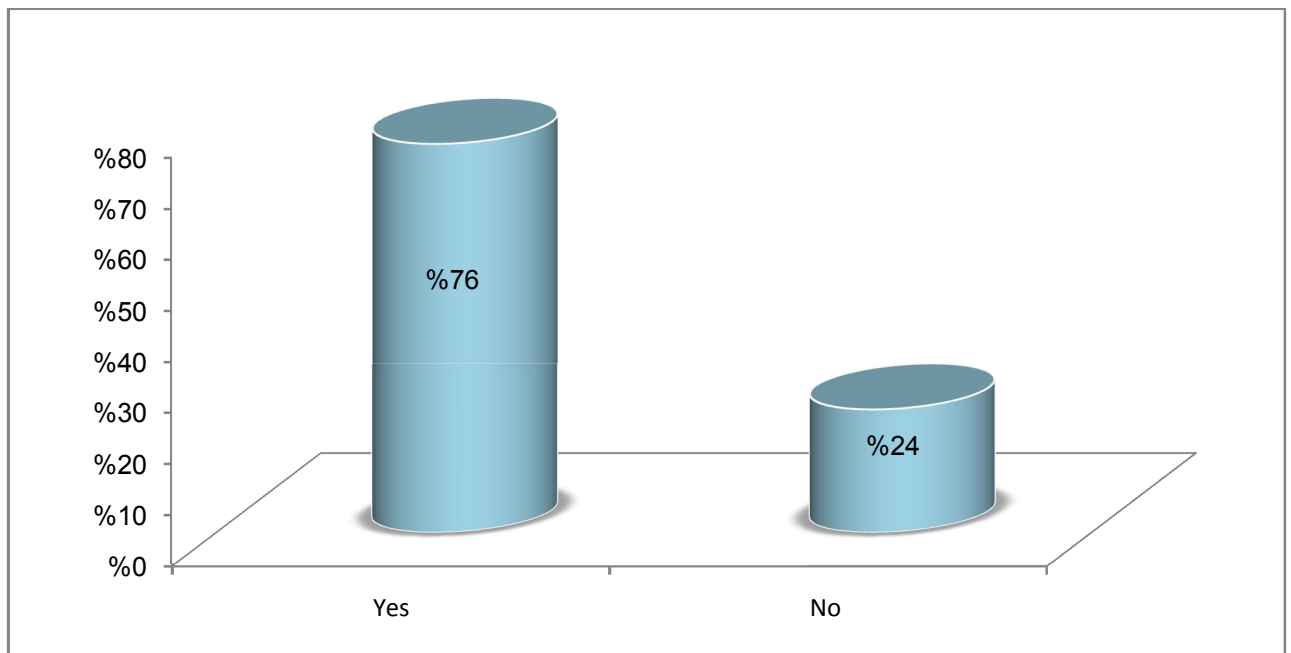
Figure 18 Rate of the Relationship between Students Understanding an Use of

Background Knowledge

➢ During text reading comprehension, on what aspect do you concentrate?

Technical items ☐ e most important ideas   The w☐e text   ☐

The table below displays the results of that item:

		Technical Items		Most Important Ideas		Whole Text	
Second Year	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%
LMD Students	25	01	04%	20	80%	04	16%

Table 19 The aspects on which the students concentrate more

The above table tells us that 80% of the sample have mentioned that they focus more on the most important ideas, during text reading comprehension. 16% have claimed to concentrate on the whole text , and only 4% have argued to give more importance the technical items.
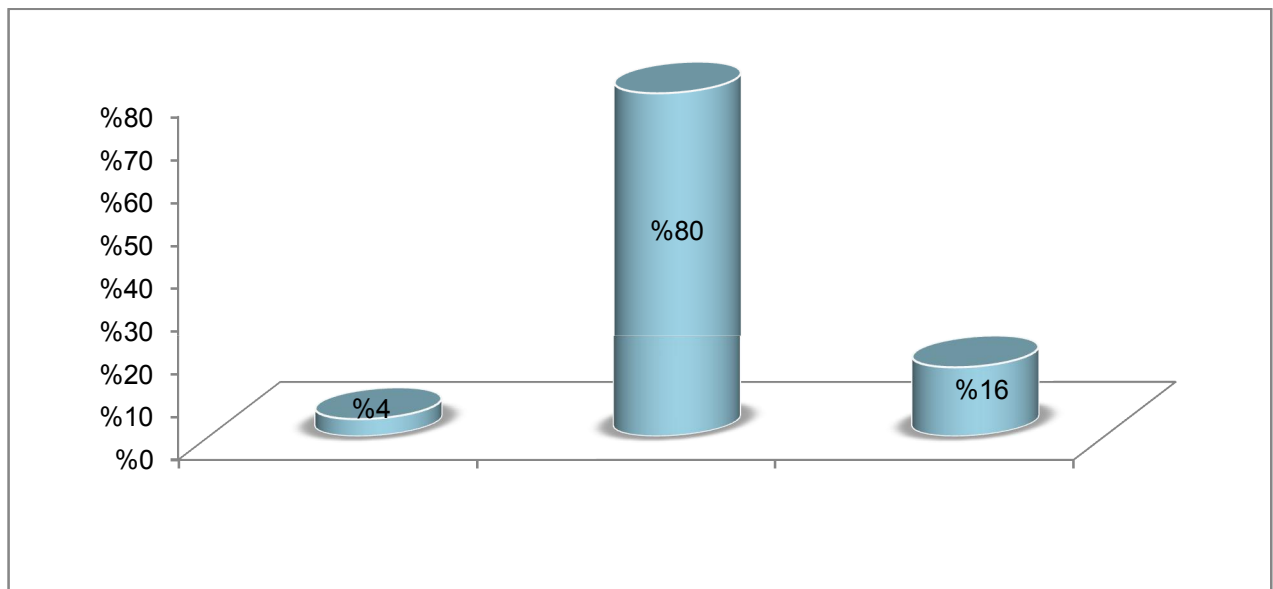
Figure 19 Rate of the Aspects on which the Students Concentrate more

➢ Do you feel afraid when reading out loud in the classroom?

Yes ☐   No ☐

In what follows are the results as they are summarized in table 19:

		Yes		No	
Second Year LMD Students	Total	N	%	N	%
	25	13	52%	12	48%

Table 20 The Students' Fear of Reading out loud in front of their teachers and

Classmates

This table shows that 52% of the sample have declared they do feel afraid when reading out loud in the classroom. 48% have mentioned that reading out loud in the classroom does not make them feel afraid. There is slight difference between the two percentages and this is due to students' personalities.
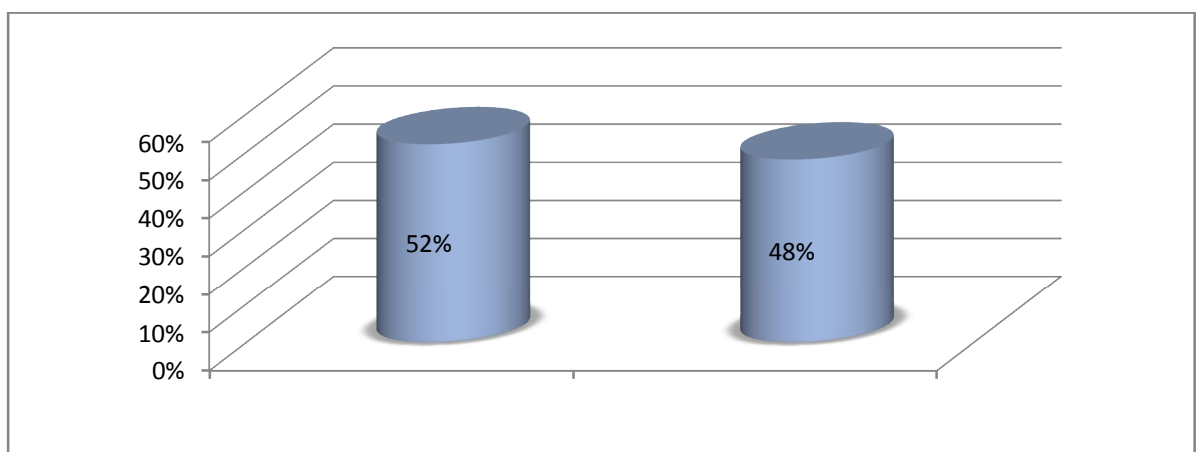
Figure 20 Rate ofStudents' Fear of Reading out loud in Front of Their

Teachers and Classmates

95

➤ Does your motivation contribute to your comprehension of a written text?

Yes ☐ No ☐

"Table 20" exposes the results of that item:

		Yes		No	
Second Year LMD Students	Total	N	%	N	%
	25	19	76%	06	24%

Table 21 The contribution of Motivation in helping the Students'

Comprehension of Written Texts

The above table displays that 76% of the sample have mentioned that motivation really helps them in comprehending texts. 24% have claimed that it is not necessary to have motivation in understanding written texts.
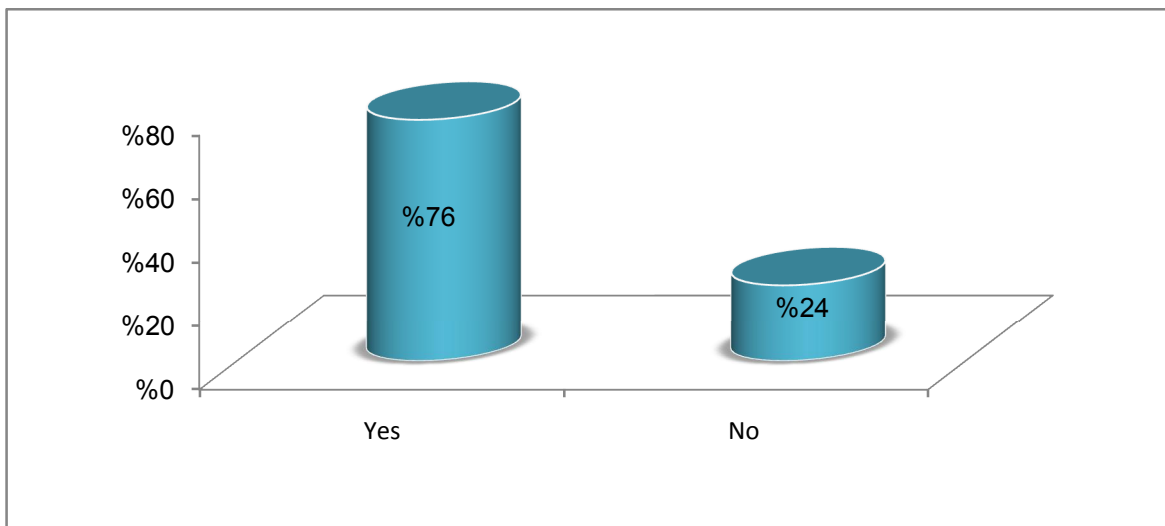
Figure 21 Rate ofthe Contribution of Motivation in Helping the Students'

Comprehension of Written Texts

➢ What does make an English text difficult for you?

1. When it reflects a culture that is different from yours. ☐

2. When the topic is unfamiliar to you. ☐

3. When it contains difficult or unfamiliar words. ☐

4. Other, Please specify…………………………………………………………

In this last table, the findings are clearly stated:

		When it reflects a different culture		When the topic is unfamiliar		When it contains difficult words		Other	
Second Year LMD Students	Total	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	25	04	16%	12	48%	09	36%	00	00%

Table 22 The Reasons of Text's Difficulty for the Students

This ultimate table reveals that 48% of the students have stated that they have problems, while reading in English, when the topic is unfamiliar to them . 36% have declared that what makes a text difficult for them, is if it contains difficult terminology, words...etc. And only 16% have mentioned to have problems while reading English texts and they relate this deficit to the cultural differences which in turn will hinder their understanding.
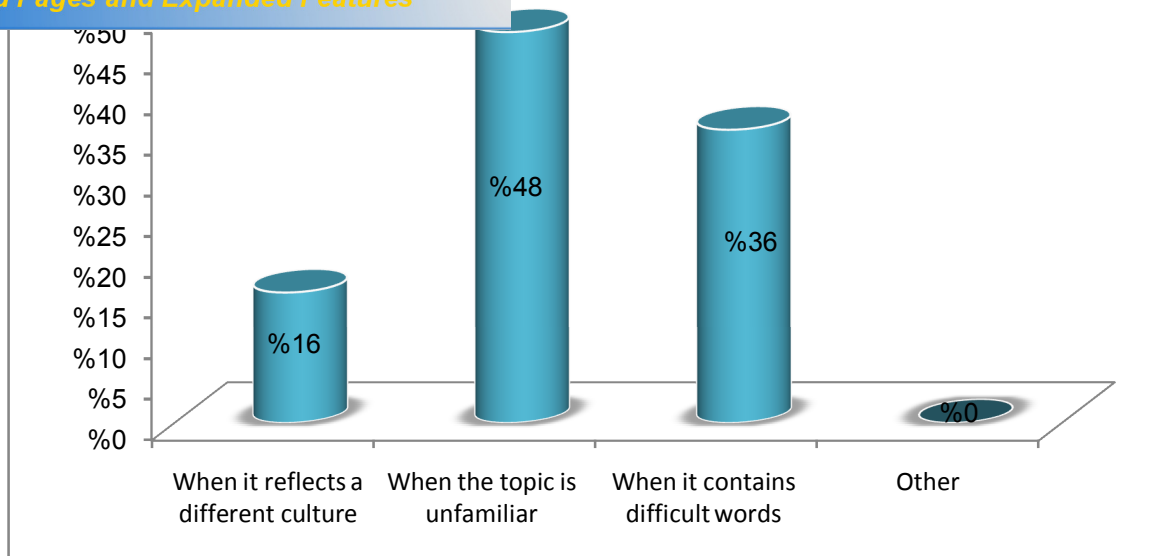
Figure 22 Rate of the Reasons of Text's Difficulty for the Students

III.5. Discussion of the results

As it was mentioned before in "table 02", the results were contrastive between one group consisting of 52 % of our sample of the study who have, in their turn, fully spent 8 years, including both the middle school and the secondary cycles of education in learning English as a foreign language, and another group of students consisting of 48 % of the total sample, who have spent 9 years studying English, because each student among the latter group has repeated one year in his/her career. This fact reveals us that normally the students, on whom this investigation has dealt upon, must be equipped at least with a basic perception or comprehension concerning the nature of reading. In addition to that, the sample of the study is also supposed to exhibit knowledge about the language as they have been studying and dealing with linguistics for 2 years at the university level. Now, and after all the above mentioned conditions have been realized, second year university students of English are supposed to overcome the language learning pitfalls, especially the ones that are related to

e such learning barriers and difficulties? This is what will be discussed and revealed next.

"Table 03" deals with the students' choice of studying English as an orientation choice, for engaging in the university life. The majority of students mentioned that they chose to study English. Only 4 % of the sample declared that English was not their preference, but they found themselves studying English. Because the majority of the sample stated that they did select English as a speciality, there will be a great chance of success for them in this discipline contrary to those who claimed that they did English out of desire.

In "table 04", which has examined the students' general attitudes towards reading, it was found that more than the half (64 % sample) like reading, but just a little. However, 20 % of them reported that they do strongly like reading i.e. a lot. On the other hand only 16% do not like reading at all. This could be explained with the fact that reading, in general, does not attract the attention or make part of the students' first priorities. It could be also stated that those students who have a "good relation" with reading, would be probably more successful than the others, and this is why they do strongly like reading. Besides, the nature of the texts, that have been introduced to the students, let an impact and reflected the way the students perceive or look at reading.

When the students have been asked to indicate which kind of reading materials are most attracted by, about half of them (47.61 %) have declared that they like reading novels. 28.57 % of them reported that they are more attracted by newspapers. The remaining 23.80 % mentioned that they are science-fiction oriented readers. Findings as such reveal that, probably, the majority of our sample of study were studying in literature streams during their secondary educational phase. Moreover, it could be deduced that the nature of story-telling that is mostly found in novels, indirectly attract the readers. It can be also expected that the

while studying literature, inside the classrooms of our sample of the study, influenced them as it is very motivating ,or enjoyable for them. So, that is what pushes them to read literature. On the other hand, having as few science-fiction readers as 23.80 %, could be justified with the absence of reading sources that are rich of science-fiction reading materials. This fact can lead to a difficulty in understanding science-fiction writings at ease.

This time, the results in "table 07", which has been put for measuring the reading tendency, comes to reinforce our deduction, as the same table indicates that more than the half (60 %) of the sample like reading novels; while, 40 % mentioned they do not like reading novels.

"Table 07" deals with the frequency of novels' reading by the students. It was found that 44 % of the whole sample (N= 25) have read till now only 1 novel. The rest of the sample has been devised equally, 7 % for each mentioning that they read 02 novels, and 03 novels respectively. It can be clearly noticed that the students are convinced to read. In other words, they have the will and the desire to read. This willing and desire to read should be invested to the maximum before they quite the university.

Unlike the previous questions, "Table 08" comes to directly explore the knowledge of the students concerning reading strategies. The sample was asked to reveal whether they use "scanning" as a reading strategy or not. For this purpose, they were indirectly asked to mention whether they, immediately, jump to the points that interest them while reading a novel or a book, or whether they spend a lot of time reading everything from the beginning. As the table indicates, 80 % of them declared they directly go to the point that is of great importance for them; whereas, only 20 % of the same sample mentioned they read everything from the beginning. This could be explained with the fact that the students are aware of the

word in some particular cases. So, the readers make use of one of the famous reading strategies that is called scanning. The students used to read in Arabic and they do the same thing unconsciously.

Knowing the purposes, and the intentions behind the students' act of reading help in selecting the appropriate reading resources for the students. "Table 08" was intended to explore the students' reading motivations. 64 % of the total sample (N=25) declared that they read for the sake of increasing their knowledge about the target language. 20 % of them reported that they read for pleasure. However, only 16 % mentioned that they read for other purposes such as: to become familiar with the English Culture. 32% of the total sample answered, with mentioning the three options altogether. In this period of their studies, the students feel worried that they are not progressing in the learning process, or they have not touched a concrete advancement, even though they are about to finish their second university year. Another explanation could be, that, second year university students are at "the crossroads", since they are supposed to take a final decision concerning their speciality, as they will choose to get oriented to one of the following three options: "Applied Languages, Language Sciences, or Language, Literature and Civilisation". This is what really pushes them to increase their knowledge about the target language.

Moving to question 09, measuring the books' availability at the level of the students university. It was detected that only 32 % have answered positively, that there are enough books in their university library. Whereas, the majority (68 % of the sample) declared that there is a serious books' shortage in the library of their university. This shows that either the library of Mila University Centre really suffers from a shortage in books, or the books available there do not satisfy the students' interests. Then, the problem of books always exists in the Algerian universities.

...e libraries can support the previous result. As the students of our sample have been asked to report how much time they spend, in reading at the libraries in their university on a weekly basis, 52 % of them declared that they spend only less than 1 hour a week in reading. Also, 32 % mentioned they spend 1 hour in reading. Whereas, only 16 % stated that they spend more than 2 hours a week in reading. This shows a serious reading problem. The students do not have enough time for reading as they have 11 modules of study in a full-time program. Also, they prefer reading at homes for the atmosphere of the library does not suit some of them, because some readers prefer to read alone at home, while others have no problem in reading in crowded places.

Now, question 11 comes to describe the students' reading abilities. Our students were asked to describe their reading abilities according to four different choices: "very good, good, average, poor". The results are as follows: 44 % of the total sample (N=25) consider their level in reading, to be good. 40 % admitted that they have an average level. The remaining 16 % mentioned that they have a poor level in reading. No one student has mentioned that he/she is very good at reading. Generally speaking, an average level reveals an intermediate level. A very good level could be referred to as upper-intermediate. Because those results were just slightly contrastive, the students still need to reinforce their reading abilities.

Question 12 is a turning point in this investigation as it directly addresses the students reading strategies. The students were asked to tell if they have ever heard of "reading strategies" before. The results were surprising, as the majority of them 88 % said that they are not familiar with the so-called "reading strategies". On the other hand, only 12 % claimed that they recognize the reading strategies. A question as such reveals the importance of teaching reading strategies. It could be understood here, that the students have no formal/explicit knowledge about those "reading strategies".

the reading strategies of those who have mentioned that they are familiar with reading strategies. Those 12 %, who mentioned earlier in table 12 they are familiar with reading strategies, were asked to reveal some of them. The findings were that they mentioned things which has nothing to do with reading strategies. The three studentsmentioned things like (reading together, going to the library frequently, looking in the net what the topics are talking about, reading the text at home before coming to the classroom, reading the text more than once). Certainly, this result support the previous deduction: the students have no familiarity with reading strategies. Probably, they have never come across such a term before. This raises up an increasing urge to immediately intervene in order to fill these gaps.

The results of "Table 15" come to illustrate the "immediate" use of the dictionary by the students, in case they are confronted with a difficult terminology". The students of the sample were asked to declare whether they jump immediately to check the meaning of ambiguous words in texts, or not. The result was that all of them (100 %) of those students rush, blindly, checking the meanings of unclear expression in the dictionary, while reading. This clearly shows that they are very far from using "prediction" as a reading strategy. The students understand the meaning of a given word, without necessarily checking it in the dictionary. For instance, if it is said: "that man has married with a virago. Now they live in Bordeaux, and They have 2 children". Clearly, the term "virago" seems unclear, but within its context, the students predict that a "virago" is a word referring to a woman. (A virago is a term used to refer to a woman who is shrewd and aggressive). So, if the students continue reading, and other descriptions of that woman are given to them, they understand that a virago is a very harsh strong woman. So, the students are recommended to avoid the blind reliance on the dictionary, in understanding ambiguous terms.

...ys harmful, as what might be understood from the previous explanation, but it depends on how one uses it. "Question 15" was concerned with the way the students use the dictionary. They were asked to report which kind of dictionaries they are using: a monolingual (i.e. English/English) or a bilingual (be it English/Arabic, or English/French) dictionary. The results are as follows: 52 % of the sample declared that they use a bilingual dictionary (English/Arabic), whereas, 48 % of them reported that they tend to use a monolingual dictionary (English/English). No one has mentioned that he/she is using third language dictionary (English/French). This can be explained that the students , even with the use of an English/English dictionary, still encounter problems in understanding difficult terminology. This is why they prefer using an English/Arabic dictionary. However, all the students are highly advised to use an English/English dictionary to "hit two birds with one stone". The more they read a meaning of an ambiguous word in the target language, the more they learn vocabulary, and the more they become independent readers.

"Table 17" describes the frequency of using the dictionary. Students of the sample were asked to demonstrate the extent to which they use dictionaries. All the students have mentioned earlier, in "table 14", that they jump immediately, to check the dictionary in case they are confronted with ambiguous words. We thought that the majority of them, if not all of them, would have answered that they use the dictionary "Frequently". However, the results obtained show 68 % of the total sample declared they –sometimes- use the dictionary, followed by 28 % of them who mentioned that they –frequently- use the dictionary. The remaining 04 % declared that they –rarely- use it. On the other hand, no one student reported that he/she never uses it. This result can be justified that the students do not know how to use a dictionary, for which they avoid it most of the time. It can also be, possible, that the students would react negatively concerning the ambiguous terminology and so they just overlook those ambiguities.

confirm whether the students tend to exhibit reading strategies usage, or not. For this concern, five different choices were given to the targeted students' sample, so that they select the appropriate ones they are using. (Analysing the form of a new word, guessing from the context, using a bilingual/monolingual dictionary, using an electronic dictionary, using another method). So, 56 % of the sample mentioned that they discover the meaning of a new vocabulary item through guessing from the context. This means that certainly they use "prediction", but unconsciously. 20 % of them tend to use either a monolingual, or a bilingual dictionary. 16 % reported that they analyse the form of the word. This also confirms the fact that students, first perceive the written symbols of words, then deciphering those symbols, and finding the relationship between those symbols, in order to have a general idea concerning the general meaning, that the ambiguous word refer to. The remaining 08 % of the sample was divided between one group (04 %), who have claimed that they use an electronic dictionary, and another group (04%) who have mentioned that they use another method. Even though using an electronic dictionary is more practical than using the classical one, the majority of the students do not prefer to use such dictionaries, because they are not familiar with the use of ICT's, or the use of such advanced technological resources is a little complicated.

"Question 18" comes to check how far the students relate what they understand from reading, with their background knowledge. It was found that 76 % of the sample answered positively (yes, they relate what they understand from the reading task, with their schemata), while the remaining 24 % denied. In here, the students seem to be aware of the benefits of relating the background knowledge with reading process, as this certainly facilitates the task of reading. It might also be, possible, that the students are using the relation between their background knowledge, and what they understand unconsciously.

display the aspects on which the students concentrate more while reading. For this purpose, it was agreed to allow them to select from aspects: "the technical items, the most important ideas, or the whole text". The results are as follows: nearly 80 % of the sample claimed that they focus more on the most important ideas. 16 % of them tend to pay great attention to the whole text. The remaining 04 % emphasized the importance of technical items. Again, concentrating on the most important ideas demonstrates a clear flexibility among the students part. This leads them to become autonomous readers. On the hand, since the majority of the students mentioned that they focus more on the most important ideas, this would be compatible with "question 07", where the students (80 % of them) have mentioned that they directly go to the points that interest them, when reading a book or a novel. Now, it became clear that the students have an impression about the beneficial usage of relating their background knowledge (schemata), with what they understand. It was also found that 16 % of them claimed that they focus more on the whole text. Those students encounter difficulties in reading, especially when they have a very short time to read. In addition to this, they begin to, gradually, detest the reading process, and losing the motives for doing such a cognitive task. Only 1 students has mentioned that he/she concentrates more on the technical items.

The students affection, or psychological status was also examined, with the introduction of "question 20". The students were chosen to select, between answering positively or negatively, concerning the fear of reading out loud inside the classroom. More than half of the sample (52 %) admitted that they do feel afraid, when reading out loud in the classroom, whereas 48 % denied this. theStudents feel scared when reading for various reasons. First, they feel frightened and threatened, in case of committing mistakes, especially the pronunciation mistakes. Second, they feel shy, in case they hesitate in reading, or reading with difficulty. Besides, some students have introverted personalities. They do not tend to

Furthermore, some of them lack self-esteem, or even self-confidence, which plays a crucial role in the learning process as a whole. A result as such, illustrated in "table 20", still signals a problem.

Another factor contributing to the learning process has been examined to see, how far, does it affect reading comprehension. It is motivation. Some students (any students) read because they have to. Others, read just for a utilitarian purpose. Other students just read, because they want to be part of a given society. Those students think that they can realize this through language, and reading is just the door of that language. Anyway, it was found, as "table 21" reveals, that 76 % of the students of our sample consider that motivation really contributes in their comprehension of written texts. This means that the students would do better in reading texts when they are motivated. Only 24 % think that motivation has nothing to do with reading comprehension.

Finally, the students were let to be free in expressing why a text is difficult for them. The students of the sample were introduced to four independent choices: "when a text reflects a different culture, when the topic is not familiar as it contains difficult words, mentioning another reason). Nearly half of them (48%) argued that a text, would be difficult, to understand when the topic is unfamiliar to those students. This means that the students lack enough background knowledge, in the English language, especially if they are just limited to study a language that deals only with a particular academic discipline. The students are hindered to understand English texts, if they learn or read only texts that deal with the university curriculum.

III.6. Pedagogical Implications

Based on the findings of this research, several pedagogical implications could be suggested to students, teachers and further research. The suggested recommendations are not

ur point of view, as we have embarked on a simple study, concerning one side of the various part of the academic life of the basic unit of the university students.

As the findings of "question 01", in our questionnaire described the attitudes of the students towards reading, as not as strong as it should be. The majority of the students have claimed that they like reading, but just a little. That relationship between the readers (students) and reading, should be boosted to the maximum. Being supported by Stephen Krashen, a very practical solution to this problem, would be, to let the students do the initiative and come closer to reading, intentionally. This could be realised through extensive reading, or free voluntary reading as Krashen suggests. Krashen (2004: 20) argues that "…reading for pleasure is the major source of our reading competence, our vocabulary, and our ability to handle complex grammatical constructions The evidence for FVR (free voluntary reading) comes from correlational studies, showing that those who read more show superior literacy development." For this reason, we urge university teachersto adopt self-selected reading in the classroom. We think that the students would build a strong link between them, and reading, if they would be to freely select types of the materials they prefer to read, inside the classrooms. This could be done through making surveys on the students' orientations, and tendencies in reading, so that the teachers become able to bring materials that satisfy the studentsneeds.

The second recommendation, that could be stated here, directly addresses the students. We urge them to read easy comprehensible materials, as this allows them to avoid difficulties in understanding the meaning of written texts. To practically apply this, "graded reading" is the cure for the problem of confronting difficult terminology. Graded reading is defined by Waring (1998) as "graded reading is also known as basal reading, or simplified reading." He mentions that the reasons behind the implementation of graded materials is to make the

, as they involve reading materials which have been, intentionally, made easy to read. Waring (*ibid*) mentions that the reading materials are graded depending on the use of high frequency vocabulary. The more the material uses high frequently words and simplified phrasing, supported through illustrations, the more the readers find the texts easy to process and comprehend. So, we urge our fellow students to read graded materials, as they are available in the libraries outside the university (especially novels).

As the students of the population exhibit no conscious knowledge concerning the reading strategies, as the findings of "question 10" indicates on one hand, and the fact that the reading skills, and strategies and are under-taught and completely neglected in the Algerian university curricula, the third implication that could be raised by this study, is to urge the Algerian universities, where English is taught, especially in L.M.D systems, to integrate at least teaching reading strategies as a course in the same linguistic module. Probably, it would be very exhausting to include a whole separate module that deals only with reading, as university students, in their first year, have 11 modules. So, we think it would be enough to just include the basics of reading strategies in the general course of linguistics, or to teach them those strategies (reading strategies) in the module of "Arabic", as the students are generally taught the same linguistics' module course, but in Arabic. It could be even worth noting that teaching the students the reading strategies, even in their native language, would be beneficial for them.

III.7. Limitation of the Study

Although the methodology followed in this study has proved to be successful in so many studies, this study contains potential limitations, that moderate the implications of the

his investigation must be considered within the limits of its design, sample, and methods.

One major limitation, is that our questionnaire may not cover all the important problems that face second year students. In other words, they may turn out to be not representative enough. Another limitation relates to the measurement of reading comprehension in this study. We have used multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions. We are aware of the fact that these different measures do not necessarily assess the same things. For example, multiple

choice questions are efficient to score, but may not do a good job of assessing higher level comprehension skills.

Conclusion

The field work carried out in this chapter has glossed up and discussed the findings and the results of the present research in order to test out what it was hypothesized in the introduction. It seeks to obtain relevant data to our research. For this purpose, it was opted for a questionnaire. The questions that were put, aimed at probing into students' views concerning their reading habits. The two hypotheses, that were put, turned out to be confirmed by the aggregated results.

eral Conclusion

In this dissertation, it has been tried to uncover some ambiguities that shape reading. In the theoreticalpart of this dissertation, we could get closure to the nature of reading. We have discovered that reading is not as simple as it may seem. There are several contributing factors that should be taken into account. Even though there are different models and theories of reading, we must study them for an optimal implementation. On the other hand, the practical chapter gave us a chance to apply the knowledge that we have gained, after a theoretical study of the concept of reading. The end results of the practical chapter mirrors the fact that the students have an "unconscious knowledge" about reading strategies. Sometimes, they implement those strategies; however, they ignore the use strategies most of the time.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 01: The Students' Questionnaire

Questionnaire for Students

Dear student,

You are kindly invited to fill the following questionnaire that aims at investigating both the ways that students rely on to deal with reading obstacles and the extent to which second year LMD students at Mila University Center are aware of the reading strategies. We would be very grateful if you could answer the questions below.

Section 1. General Information

- Gender: Male   ☐

              Female   ☐

- How many years have you been studying English?

……………………………………………………………………………………………

- Was it your choice to study English?   Yes ☐   ☐No

Section 2.Your Reading Habits

Q 01. Do you like reading?   A lot ☐   A little ☐   Not at all ☐

Q 02. In case 'you like reading', what kind of materials that most attract you?

    Newspapers ☐   Novels ☐   Sci-fiction ☐

Q 03. Do you read novels?   Yes ☐   No ☐

…ave you read till now?

………………………………………………………………………………………

Q 05. When reading a novel or any book, do you start reading it from the beginning, or you

go directly to the points that interest you?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Q 06. Why do you read in English?

……………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………..

Q 07. Are there enough books in the library of your university that suit your interests?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Q 08. How much time do you spend at the library?

………………………………………………………………………………….

Q 09. How can you describe your reading abilities?

Very good ☐   Good ☐   Average ☐   Poor ☐

Q 10. Have you ever heard about "reading strategies"?   Yes ☐   No ☐

Q 11. If 'yes', Please mention some of them

…………………….....................................……………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………

ou did not understand the meaning of a word, would you jump directly to the dictionary checking the meaning of that ambiguous word?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Q 13. If 'yes', do you use a monolingual dictionary (English/ English), or a bilingual one (English/ …………)

Q 14. How often do you use the dictionary?

Frequently ☐   Sometimes ☐   Rarely ☐   Never ☐

Q 15. How do you discover the meaning of a new vocabulary items?

1. Analyze the form of a new word.   ☐

2. Try to guess from the context.   ☐

3. Use a bilingual/ monolingual dictionary.   ☐

4. Use an electronic dictionary or translator.   ☐

5. Other, Please specify …………………………………………………….

Q 16. When reading a passage, do you relate what you understand with what you already know (your background knowledge)?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Q 17. During text reading comprehension, on what aspect do you concentrate?

Technical items ☐   The most important ideas ☐   The whole text ☐

Q 18. Do you feel afraid when reading out loud in the classroom?

Yes ☐   No ☐

Q 19. Does your motivation contributes in your comprehension of a written text?

Yes ☐   No ☐

...ult for you?

1. When it reflects a culture that is different from yours. ☐
2. When the topic is unfamiliar to you. ☐
3. When it contains difficult or unfamiliar words. ☐
4. Other, Please specify…………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………………………………………
   ……………………………………………………………………..

Thank you very much for your collaboration

Ce mémoire tourne autour un problème pédagogique qui peut apporter une contribution vis-à-vis la compréhension de la lecture parmi les étudiants de l'Anglais comme langue étrangère. Ce problème est: la mauvaise et/ou la non utilisation des stratégies de lecture. Cet recherche a été établis au niveau du Centre Universitaire de Mila. Il était décidé de travailler sur quelques (25) étudiants du 2éme année Anglais L.M.D, représentant la population total.

Une hypothèse était déclaré comme suit:

Peut-être, les étudiants de la 2éme année de l'Anglais ne perçoivent pas l'importance de l'utilisation optimale des stratégies de la lecture.

Pour vérifier la validité de cette hypothèse, un questionnaire de 21 questions était délivrés à 25 étudiants. Les données obtenues par le questionnaire montrent que la majorité des étudiants possèdent une connaissance inconsciente sur les stratégies de la lecture. Par contre, ils utilisent ces connaissances d'une manière arbitraire et asystématique.

ملخــــص الدراســـة

تتناول هذه المذكرة دراسة وصفية لبعض المشكلات التي قد تواجه طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية خلال مرحلة التعلم. تتمحور هذه المشكلات حول مدى معرفة طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية لإستراتيجيات القراءة و/أو استعمالها بالشكل الأمثل. تمت الدراسة على مستوى المركز الجامعي ميلة, حيث تم اعتماد بعض طلبة السنة الثانية لغة إنجليزية كعينة للدراسة.

فرضية هذه الدراسة مفادها أن طلبة السنة الثانية لغة إنجليزية لا يدركون أهمية الاستعمال الصحيح لإستراتيجيات القراءة. للتأكد من ثبوتية هذه الفرضية, تم توزيع استبيان متكون من 21 سؤالا مختلفا على عينة الدراسة البالغ تعدادها 25 طالبا.

بينت الدراسة و المعطيات المتحصل عليها من الاستبيان أن أغلبية الطلبة أظهروا معرفة لا شعورية حول إستراتيجيات القراءة. لكن الطلبة يهملون استعمالها في أغلب الأحيان.