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Investigations on College EFL Readers' Awareness, Preferences, and Learning Strategies*

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The primary goal of this study was to explore college EFL readers' perceptions about reading in English and to investigate the learning strategies they employed during text processing. The participants were 107 college students aged 19-28 years from mixed majors; more than half were freshmen. According to scores attained from the reading comprehension test, they were labeled into two groups (proficient and less-proficient readers) and responded to an in-class questionnaire. All the quantitative items on the questionnaire were tallied and summed. The findings disclosed that: (1) a majority of the proficient and less-proficient readers believe that L2 reading proficiency correlates with L1 reading proficiency; (2) L2 reading performance varies depending on the nature of text; (3) many in both groups manifest a lack of perception of progress, low confidence, and anxiety toward EFL reading; (4) both groups of readers implement a variety of learning strategies, but the proficient readers are better able to recognize and repair miscomprehension than their counterparts; and (5) the less-proficient readers' obsession with vocabulary coexists with a meaning-centered view of reading. Pedagogical implications for EFL classroom teachers are suggested.

[EFL readers/language proficiency/learning strategies]

I. INTRODUCTION

The term "L2 readers" is generally defined as cognitively mature individuals already literate in their own L1s learning to read a L2. L2 readers are expected to make use of their prior literacy experience which may facilitate reading process considerably. By means of oral communication, beginning L1 readers have already built a basic linguistic foundation

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by the time they are exposed to formal literacy training. L2 reading instruction, however, often starts prior to the acquisition of sufficient L2 linguistic knowledge. Accordingly, literacy training focuses on different aspects. That is, L1 instruction concentrates on decoding to allow children to connect print with oral vocabulary, whereas L2 instruction emphasizes the development of linguistic features. In addition, L2 reading requires dual-language involvement, whereas L1 reading presumes that information processing takes place in a single language. Thus, it is crucial that L2 reading research should pay special attention to these three constituents - prior literacy experience, limited linguistic sophistication, and dual-language involvement - which collectively provide a base from which to explore L2 reading issues (Koda, 2005).

Acknowledging that reading is plausibly the most significant skill for L2 learners in academic contexts, research on L2 reading and efforts to upgrade L2 reading instruction have flourished remarkably over the last two decades. Researchers have claimed that fluent reading is "rapid, purposeful, interactive, comprehending, flexible, and gradually developing" (Grabe, 1991, p. 378). The main purpose toward L2 reading theory and instruction is to understand fluent L1 readers' behaviors and to lead L2 learners to that developmental direction. L2 research, therefore, commonly deals with the same issues addressed in the L1 studies. The topics, methods, procedures, and data analysis are basically the same. Differences, however, exist. For instance, unlike L1 research, L2 research often investigates cultural factors, the roles of language proficiency, and transfer issues of L1 linguistic, strategic and content knowledge that might influence reading performance. It is of importance to note that little thought has been given to metacognitive factors and affective variables in L2 reading. Furthermore, empirical studies on reading strategies employed by successful and unsuccessful L2 learners have been relatively rare. In order to create more effective L2 reading instruction, subsequent L2 research must follow with additional studies of L2 readers' awareness of reading tasks and the correlation between language proficiency and reading ability (Barnett, 1988; Carrell, 1989; Ely, 1989; Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

Hence, the primary goal of the present study is to examine college EFL readers' perceptions about reading in English and to explore what they do as they read (i.e., learning strategies). The secondary goal is to investigate the correlation between language proficiency and reading ability and to pursue what characterizes individuals either proficient or less-proficient EFL readers. The specific research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

(1) What are the perceptions of EFL readers about reading in English?
(2) What kinds of learning strategies do EFL readers utilize while interacting with texts?

(3) What are the differences between the proficient and the less-proficient readers in regard to their perceptions and learning strategies?

(4) Does EFL readers' language proficiency correlate to their reading ability?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Unlike L1 readers, L2 readers typically may not have acquired a wide range of oral language vocabulary, nor do they have an intuitive sense of the grammar of the language. In other words, they start the L2 reading process with a quite different knowledge background from L1 readers, but they also have some benefits. Academically oriented L2 readers are mostly older than L1 readers, so that they already have substantially more conceptual sense of the world, which enables them to draw logical inferences from the text. From that perspective, vocabulary learning may be mainly a matter of understanding a second label for a well-known concept. In addition, older L2 readers are more likely to utilize a set of comprehension strategies, helping them become better language learners. Comprehension strategies reveal how readers perceive a task, what textual cues they pay attention to, what they do to make sense of what they read, how to deal with what they do not understand. Researchers have conducted empirical studies to investigate the influence of reading strategy use on L2 reading (Carrell, 1989; Grabe, 1991).

Using a think-aloud procedure, Block (1986) explored and compared the comprehension strategies of college ESL and native English speakers indicated as non-proficient readers. She reported that patterns of ESL readers' strategies were not different from those of native speakers of English. Notably, her study supported Hudson's contention (1982) that the application of cognitive strategies does not vary with the reader's English language proficiency. The conclusion drawn from this research was that the growth of strategy use is not determined by language-specific features, a finding consistent with the previous studies (Cummins, 1980; Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Some reading ability elements are easily transferred from L1 to L2; readers should be capable of transferring their successful L1 reading strategies to the process of L2 reading.

Hauptman's (1979) study indicated that there was no strong relationship between reading ability and L2 proficiency and that readers lacking strong L1 reading strategies rarely applied them to L2 reading. Using questionnaires, Barnett (1988) estimated the relationships among reading comprehension, strategy use, and perceived strategy use and concluded that there was a significant correlation between the reader perception of strategy use and L2 reading comprehension. Students who read through context well were more likely to sense that they employed effective strategies, and they could also understand better. As readers' strategy use enhanced, their perception of strategy use enhanced as well.

Likewise, Schoonen, Hulstijn, and Bossers' (1998) study, which examined Dutch students' reading abilities in both L1 and L2, supported the threshold hypothesis in that transfer of L1 reading ability is short-circuited by limited L2 proficiency, a finding which echoes that of Clarke's study (1980).

In a similar vein, Anderson (1991) investigated L2 readers' individual differences in strategy use while they were involved in two different tasks: taking a reading comprehension test and reading academic materials. While doing each reading task, the participants were directed to provide think-aloud comments. The results showed that there was no single set of strategies that were significantly conducive to reading success; both weaker and stronger readers used the same kinds of strategies across reading tasks. It is striking that the differences that separated stronger readers from weaker readers were not different types of strategies or the number of different strategy uses, but total numbers of successful strategy uses. This study suggested that strategic reading requires readers to figure out how to use a strategy successfully and to arrange its use with other strategies. It is not enough to be knowledgeable about strategies; a reader should also be able to implement them strategically.

Jiménez, García, and Pearson (1996)'s study also analyzed bilingual Latina/o readers' strategies based on think-alouds and interviews, but the result differed from the finding of Anderson (1991). That is, there were a set of reading strategies that were unique to the successful Latina/o English readers: (a) they actively transferred information across languages, (b) they translated from one language to another but most often from Spanish to English, and (c) they openly accessed cognate vocabulary when they read, especially in their less dominant language (p. 91). On the other hand, the less successful Latina/o readers employed fewer strategies and were less able to solve comprehension difficulties in either language. They were not aware of how to utilize Spanish knowledge to intensify their comprehension of English text and vice versa. Also when unknown vocabulary was encountered, they suffered substantially more in making plausible interpretations of text. It should be noted, however, that Spanish and English are related languages. The findings of this study, therefore, might not be generalizable to other linguistic populations or different textual content.

Although reading strategies are considered important subcomponents in L2 reading, there are two other variables that should take into account: higher-level conceptual abilities and background knowledge. For instance, without intellectual capacity, readers might not achieve the required reading competence. In other words, they would suffer from a reading problem, not a language problem. According to schema theory, a text itself does not provide meaning. Rather, it just guides readers in retrieving or creating meaning based on their own prior knowledge which is called the reader's background knowledge. Reading comprehension involves an interactive process between the reader's background

knowledge and the text. In order to maximize comprehension, it is crucial that L2 reading teachers should present background information and preview content, especially for the less proficient readers (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Silberstein, 1987; Woytak, 1984).

Previous experimental studies showed that background knowledge is a strong variable that determines reading ability. Chamot and El-Dinary (1999) discovered that during reading in L2, high level students concentrated more on activating background knowledge and inferencing to make sense of a text, while low level students focused more on phonetic decoding than on any other strategy. Johnson (1982) also explored the effects on L2 reading comprehension of building background knowledge and reported that L2 readers recalled a text better on a familiar topic than on an unfamiliar topic. In brief, familiarity with a culture-specific topic, knowledge gained through real exposure to the target culture, enhanced reading L2 comprehension of a text on that topic.

Chen and Graves (1995) implemented the effects of providing background knowledge and previewing on L2 readers' comprehension of texts. The findings revealed that previewing is as effective as the combination of previewing and providing background knowledge. Furthermore, previewing was significantly more effective than providing background knowledge; the results made very limited support for providing background knowledge. For pedagogical implications, this study recommended previewing as an effective pre-reading activity for L2 reading instruction. This, however, does not indicate that previewing could be applicable to all classroom settings. Teaching methods should be tailored to fit given situations. L2 teachers need to decide whether to employ previewing, provide background knowledge, or prepare some other types of prereading assistance based on reading selections, target students, and their reading goals.

Metacognition, knowing what it is that one knows, refers to knowledge that directs the reader in selecting and implementing reading strategies, and that controls the reader's thinking and behavior. In L1 contexts, poor readers were found to have more misconceptions about the reading process than good readers. For example, they considered reading to be a decoding process rather than a meaning construction task and perceived that reading word for word was easier than reading for general ideas. They also claimed that reading aloud was more effective than silent reading. They were apparently not as tactful to how and when to utilize certain reading strategies and seemed to rely on external sources (e.g., asking someone), rather than processing internally generated strategies (e.g., using context) (Gambrell & Heathington, 1981).

Other research clearly explored the relationships between readers' metacognitive awareness of different types of reading strategies and their reading ability in both L1 and L2 contexts. While reading in L1, local reading strategies (e.g., focusing on word-meaning) appeared to negatively correlate with reading performance. Vocabulary knowledge, however, was an important factor that contributed to L1 and L2 reading. The proficient L2

readers followed a global or top-down, meaning-based approach. They did not have to know all the words or structures to comprehend what they read; they were able to figure out what problems they could ignore and what they had to resolve. Also they could use appropriate strategies to solve particular problems. In contrast, the less-proficient L2 readers favored a local or bottom-up, word-based one. They were less aware of a problem, lacked the ability to deal with it, and regarded local strategies as effective (Block, 1992; Carrell, 1989; Devine, 1984; Schoonen et al., 1998; Son, 2007).

III. METHOD

1. Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 107 students who were enrolled in one of two class sections of a required English course, which focused on reading comprehension and grammar, at a university located in south Gyeongsang province. They were from mixed majors (e.g., bio-technology, law, economics, etc.) and aged 19-28 years; more than half were freshmen. In order to analyze the participants' English language proficiency levels, the researcher administered a pretest during the first week of the spring semester of 2008. The participants took a 60 item multiple-choice standardized test that focused on vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. The test was an adapted version of a TOEIC practice test from *Longman Preparation Series for the New TOEIC Test: More Practice Tests* (Lougheed, 2007). The data pool revealed that the participants' English language proficiency levels varied from 14 to 49 correct items.

2. Data Collection

1) Reading Comprehension Test

In order to examine the participants' English reading ability, they were directed to take another multiple-choice standardized test that covered reading comprehension portion during the seventh week of the spring semester in 2008. The test was a shortened version of a TOEIC practice test from *Longman Preparation Series for the New TOEIC Test: More Practice Tests* (Lougheed, 2007), which consisted of 12 reading passages and 50 comprehension question items. The results revealed that all the participants achieved total scores ranging from 12 to 48 correct items. Scores gained from the reading comprehension test were used to divide the participants into two groups. The participants who achieved a score of 30 correct items and above were placed into a group of "proficient readers," while

those who achieved below 30 correct items were placed into a group of "less-proficient readers." The results showed that there were 47 proficient readers (mean = 35.9) and 60 less-proficient readers (mean = 21.8).

2) Questionnaire

During the last week of the spring semester in 2008, all the participants were surveyed in class, using the questionnaire which is composed of two parts. Part I was designed to explore the participants' perceptions about reading in English, whereas part II was to examine their beliefs and preferences regarding EFL learning strategies. The items on the questionnaire were basically derived from the findings of the previous studies (Barnett, 1988; Carrell, 1989; Chin, 2007; Schmitt, 2000). With regard to the procedure, the participants were instructed to carefully read each item and respond by marking the number that mostly corresponded to their own ideas and thoughts. Responses of the items 1-20 were presented on a five-point Likert Scale: Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral/Undecided (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly disagree (1). On the other hand, responses of the items 21-30 were offered on a five-point Likert Scale: Always (5), Usually (4), Sometimes (3), Rarely (2), and Never (1). The participants remained anonymous, but they were asked to write their major, reading comprehension test score, year, and age.

3. Data Analysis

In order to measure the correlation between language proficiency and reading ability, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between scores on the participants' English language proficiency tests and reading comprehension tests. All the quantitative items on the questionnaire were tallied and summed. It is of importance to note that for the sake of easy data interpretation, participants' responses to items 1-20 were collapsed into three types: P (Positive: Strongly agree (5) & Agree (4)), U (Undecided/Neutral (3)), and N (Negative: Disagree (2) & Strongly disagree (1)). Likewise, participants' responses to items 21-30 were combined into another three types: A/U (Always (5) & Usually (4)), S (Sometimes (3)), and R/N (Rarely (2) & Never (1)). In addition, responses on all items between the proficient and less-proficient readers were separately tabulated and drew comparisons in order to investigate similarities and differences. T-tests were run afterwards to determine the statistical significance.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Proficient and Less-Proficient EFL Readers' Perceptions about Reading in English

As shown in Table 1 and Table 2 (see the Appendix), at least half of the students believe that a good reader in Korean can also become a good reader in English (proficient 55.32% vs. less-proficient 50%) (item 1). Therefore we can assume that those who feel comfortable with reading in Korean are often better able to interact with English texts. The vast majority of both groups of readers also figure that the more they read in English, the more they improve their reading skills (proficient 93.62% vs. less-proficient 95%) (item 2). In other words, regardless of L2 reading proficiency, the students are aware that they cannot become good readers unless they read a lot (Grabe & Stoller, 2001). In responses to items 3-5, both of the proficient and less-proficient readers point out that vocabulary strength has the most impact on English reading proficiency (95.74% vs. 98.33%), followed by background knowledge (89.36% vs. 75%) and grammatical competence (65.96 vs. 65%). Regarding items 6 and 7, a large number of the students perceive that genres (76.6% vs. 58.33%) and topics (70.21% vs. 48.33%) are factors that affect their English reading performance. This result is compatible with Clarke's (1994) claim that "when one is confronted with difficult reading (whether because of complex language or unfamiliar content) one is likely to revert to poor reading behaviors" (p. 120). This suggests that it may be inappropriate to divide learners into good readers and poor readers. Rather there simply exist good and poor reading behaviors which label most learners at different times.

Items 8-11 examined the students' awareness about their own English reading process. More than a third of the students reported that they are able to recognize the difference between main points and supporting details (38.3% vs. 33.33%). Yet 55.32% of the proficient readers remain undecided, whereas 35% of the less-proficient readers gave a negative answer to that statement. Thus it can be conjectured that most of the students still suffer figuring out the sentences that convey the main ideas of the text. Half of the proficient readers (51.06%) are able to relate information which comes next in the text to previous information in the text, whereas just a third of the less-proficient readers (31.67%) are able to do so. It is of importance to note that a large number of the proficient readers (68.09%) can utilize their background knowledge to understand the content of the text, while less than half of the less-proficient readers (40%) claim to do so. This finding shows that fluent reading requires learners to activate appropriate background knowledge during text processing, which supports the result of earlier studies (Carrell, 1984; Chamot & El-

Dinary, 1999). In addition, the proficient readers (72.34%) are better able to recognize and repair miscomprehension than the less-proficient readers (48.33%).

Items 12-15 explored the students' perceptions and evaluations about themselves as EFL readers. Only a small number of the proficient students (10.64%) indicate that they enjoy reading in English, while none of the less-proficient readers indicate so. Surprisingly, 48.94% of the proficient readers and 91.67% of the less-proficient readers marked a negative answer to that statement. In brief, the majority of the students express reluctance or hostility toward English reading tasks. Likewise, less than a third of the proficient readers feel that they are skilled EFL readers, compared to their classmates. An overwhelming majority of the less-proficient readers (76.67%) do not perceive that they are as skilled as their classmates. Meanwhile, a substantial number of the proficient readers (42.55%) believe that they are making progress toward English reading skills, whereas only 10% of the less-proficient readers appear to believe so. A small number of the proficient readers (19.15%) reported that when it comes to reading in English, they feel secure; another 44.68% still remain undecided. In contrast, the majority of the less-proficient readers (81.67%) fail to feel secure when reading in English. Thus we can infer that many of the students do not feel confident of their reading abilities as yet.

Items 16-20 were to investigate the students' criteria for judging the level of difficulty of English reading materials as displayed in Tables 3 and 4 (see the Appendix). The proficient readers reveal that they consider interest (80.85%) the most, followed by background knowledge (74.47%), vocabulary (59.57%), sentence structure (46.81%), and length (19.15%). In contrast, the less-proficient readers rank background knowledge (70%) the first, followed by interest (63%), vocabulary (51.67%), length (40%), and sentence structure (35%). All in all, the students were aware that they are better able to interact with texts that deal with interesting or familiar areas in that vocabulary does not seem to be a fatal barrier.

By the same token, items 21-27 assessed the students' criteria for choosing English reading materials (see the Tables 5 and 6 in the Appendix). The proficient readers always or usually take interest into account the most (82.98%), followed by difficulty (59.57%), background knowledge (48.94%), popularity (36.17%), length (29.79%), illustrations (17.02%), and size of letters (4.26%). Similarly, the less-proficient readers always or usually consider interest the most (80%), followed by popularity (53.33%), background knowledge (48.33%), difficulty (43.33%), length (31.67%), illustrations (21.67%), and size of letters (11.67%). It is striking that the less-proficient readers do not attend to "difficulty" as much as their counterparts. A possible explanation for this outcome might be that they have willingness to risk reading as long as the materials arouse their interest.

2. Proficient and Less-Proficient EFL Readers' Learning Strategies

As presented in Tables 7 and 8, the data analysis of this study demonstrate that the proficient and less-proficient readers are actively engaged in a wide variety of strategies (see the Appendix). Item 28 asked the students to report what they do if they don't understand something while reading in English. As a fix-up strategy, many of the proficient and less-proficient readers respond that they always or usually keep on reading and hope for clarification further on (80.85% vs. 75%), reread the problematic part (57.45% vs. 61.67%), go back to a point before the problematic part and reread from there (53.19% vs. 58.33%), and look up unknown words in a dictionary (70.21% vs. 61.67%). A large number of the students, however, report rarely or never asking teacher for help (70.21% vs. 63.33%). A possible explanation for this outcome might be that they still consider their reading teacher as an authority figure or an evaluator rather than a source of help so that they are reluctant to seek assistance from him/her. On the other hand, many of the less-proficient readers (61.67%) mention that they always or usually ask classmates for help, whereas only a small number of the proficient readers (19.15%) attempt to do so. It is a relief that the majority of the students claim to rarely or never give up and stop reading (80.85% vs. 71.67%).

Item 29 was to find out what the students do to read effectively (see the Tables 9 and 10 in the Appendix). A large number of both groups disclose that they always or usually focus on getting the overall meaning of the text (89.36% vs. 76.67%), and relating the text to what they already know about the topic (59.57% vs. 51.67%). Moreover, 56.67% of the less-proficient readers report always or usually looking up words in the dictionary, whereas only 25.53% of the proficient readers appear to do so. A possible interpretation for this is that for the less-proficient readers, word meanings could pave the way toward comprehension. In short, unknown vocabulary is a major obstacle to their reading comprehension, which concurs with Jiménez and García's finding (1995). Reading every word correctly, however, is not needed to comprehend a text. Focusing on words interferes with getting the gist (Smith, 1973). A considerable number of the students indicate that they always or usually concentrate on the organization of the text (42.55% vs. 45%). Regarding uncommon strategies, both groups claim that they focus on understanding the meaning of each word (12.77% vs. 25%), the details of the content (17.02 vs. 31.67%), and the grammatical structures (6.38% vs. 13.33%) more often than sometimes.

Item 30 was to examine the students' strategies to unlock the meaning of an unknown word. A summary of their responses is provided in Tables 11 and 12 of the Appendix. Guessing the meaning from the given context appears to be the most popular among the proficient and less-proficient readers (89.36% vs. 90%). Furthermore, both groups claim to always or usually analyze any available pictures or illustrations (42.55% vs. 43.33%) and

use a dictionary (57.45% vs. 70%). Notably, the majority of the less-proficient readers (70%) report asking classmates for help more often than sometimes; however, only 21.28% of the proficient readers choose to do so. In short, when in trouble, the less-proficient readers are more likely to depend on outside sources rather than solve it on their own, compared to their counterparts. More than 30% of the proficient and less-proficient readers indicate that they always or usually analyze part of speech, while they rarely or never analyze affixes and roots (44.68% vs. 45%) or ask teacher for help (74.47% vs. 51.67%).

Finally, *t*-test results between the proficient and less-proficient readers in terms of perceptions and learning strategies disclose that significant differences were found in responses to items 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 21, 28.6, 29.1, 29.6, 30.6, and 30.7 ($t = 2.07, p < .05$; $t = 2.09, p < .05$; $t = 2.5, p < .05$; $t = 3.34, p < .01$; $t = 3.71, p < .01$; $t = 3.0, p < .01$; $t = 6.35, p < .01$; $t = 5.41, p < .01$; $t = 4.63, p < .01$; $t = 6.31, p < .01$; $t = 2.13, p < .05$; $t = 2.55, p < .05$; $t = -4.88, p < .01$; $t = -2.14, p < .05$; $t = -2.57, p < .05$; $t = -2.79, p < .01$; and $t = -5.72, p < .01$) (see Tables 13-18 in the Appendix).

In other words, the proficient readers perceive that background knowledge has an impact on a learner's English reading proficiency; their English reading performance varies depending on the genres that they read; while reading in English, they are able to recognize the difference between main points and supporting details, relate information which comes next in the text to previous information in the text, use their background knowledge to understand the content of the text, and recognize and repair miscomprehension; they enjoy reading in English, are skilled EFL readers compared to their classmates, are making progress toward English reading skills, feel secure when it comes to reading in English; and they judge the level of difficulty of English reading materials based on background knowledge and always or usually choose English reading materials based on degree of difficulty more than their counterparts.

To the contrary, a significantly larger number of the less-proficient readers claim that if they don't understand something while reading in English, they always or usually ask classmates for help; in order to read effectively, they always or usually focus on understanding the meaning of each word and looking up words in the dictionary; and as a strategy for the discovery of a new word's meaning, they always or usually ask either teacher or classmates for help, in comparison with the proficient readers. A possible explanation for this outcome is that the less-proficient readers still have more misconception that reading word for word makes reading easy, a result consistent with the finding of Gambrell and Heathington (1981).

3. Correlation between EFL Readers' Language Proficiency and Reading Ability

With respect to the correlation between language proficiency and reading ability, the Pearson correlation coefficient (r = .71) demonstrates that the subjects' English language proficiency test scores and reading comprehension test scores correlated positively at a significant level of $p < .01$. Hence, it is concluded that EFL learners' linguistic knowledge (i.e., grammatical competence and vocabulary strength) could be an important factor that determines their reading proficiency. In other words, EFL readers' limited linguistic proficiency could be an impediment to interacting with texts. This result contrasts with Hauptman's (1979) contention that no strong relationship existed between reading ability and L2 proficiency.

V. CONCLUSION

The primary question of this study was to see how EFL students would perceive reading in English. A majority of the proficient and less-proficient readers believe that L2 reading proficiency correlates with L1 reading proficiency; reading practice promotes their reading skills; vocabulary strength, background knowledge, and grammatical competence have a strong impact on their English reading proficiency; their reading performance varies depending on the nature of text (i.e., writing style or content). They seem to have difficulty differentiating main points from supporting details, but feel that relating the text material to their background knowledge contributes to successful reading. Background knowledge is also regarded as one of the main factors that determines the level of difficulty of text. Moreover, the responses of the survey show that the proficient readers are better able to integrate text information with their background knowledge, and identify and fix miscomprehension than the less-proficient readers. It is unfortunate that regardless of reading proficiency, many of the students do not find EFL reading enjoyable. Rather they manifest a lack of perception of progress, low confidence, and anxiety toward it, which could lead to becoming reluctant readers.

Another question to be answered was what kinds of learning strategies EFL students would employ during text processing. The result reveals that both groups of readers implement a multistrategic approach to interacting with text. In order to repair miscomprehension or figure out meanings of unknown vocabulary, the proficient readers seem to seek solutions by themselves, whereas the less-proficient readers show a great deal of dependence on outside sources (teacher, classmates, or dictionaries). Furthermore, the less-proficient readers' obsession with vocabulary coexisted with a meaning-centered

orientation to reading. In short, they appear to hold a bottom-up view of reading which is detrimental to comprehending a text. Finally, this study confirmed that EFL students' language proficiency significantly influenced their overall reading ability. Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that utilizing a set of learning strategies is not enough to make sense of texts. Efficient reading requires EFL learners to strengthen linguistic knowledge as a prerequisite.

All in all, the value of this study may be assessed by informing classroom teachers of a glimpse of students' attitudes and behaviors toward EFL reading tasks. Nevertheless, limitations should be acknowledged for future explorations. First, the findings of this study were drawn simply from the students' subjective perceptions. In order to allow them to fully demonstrate their own learning strategies, it would be necessary to conduct think-aloud protocols while students are actually engaged in reading English texts. Students might employ multiple strategies to construct meaning and clarify miscomprehension. Differences could also surface according to the types of texts. Besides, the researcher might observe his/her participants' reading class over a period of time. While observing, additional learning strategies, which may not be displayed in participants' think-aloud protocols, might be discovered. Second, the questionnaire was organized less effectively since it failed to ask the participants to discuss their needs and goals as EFL readers. An updated questionnaire might be devised in an open-ended format to address those issues. Third, it might be useful to have brief follow-up interviews with students to gather information about assessment expectations, favorite classroom activities, and interesting topics and materials to read. Findings of such replications might provide EFL teachers with more detailed insights that can be used to designing a reading curriculum.

VI. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this research suggest the following pedagogical implications for EFL reading teachers. In order to help students overcome anxiety and reluctance to read, teachers should create a supportive and meaningful classroom atmosphere and give them opportunities to work in small groups or pairs. Instructional activities need to be pertinent to real-world reading purposes and students' intellectual levels. When students are encouraged to relate content to their own experiences, they would feel comfortable taking risks. In doing so, text materials should be interesting but challenging enough to motivate them. Additionally, it is essential that extensive reading ought to be a central element of any reading course with the purpose of developing academic reading abilities. By taking a survey and/or having an open discussion with students, teachers can collect useful information (e.g., students' goals and needs, prior learning experiences, and relevance of

materials) which could be guidelines to planning a reading class (Grabe & Stoller, 2001; Nunan, 1999).

A summary, not translation, could be used as a strategy to recognize supporting details. When students put the original paragraph aside and write the summary in their own words on a limited length, they would learn to identify the topic and main idea but exclude less important details. Likewise, they can organize a graphic organizer which is to put the main ideas and details in different boxes. Particular strategies, however, should not be overused. Teachers would do well to introduce a range of strategies; variation is conducive to the positive attitudes to students. While implementing classroom activities, teachers should primarily focus on teaching rather than testing. In other words, they allow students to build up and apply skills and strategies rather than demonstrate command of such skills. After completion of each activity, they should make sure to provide students with appropriate feedback on their performance. That way, students can keep track of their own progress (Hartmann & Kirn, 2007; Nunan, 1999).

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1

Proficient Readers' Perceptions about Reading in English

Item	Content	frequency/ % of responses (N=47)			
		Mean	P	U	N
		SD	%	%	%
1.	A good reader in Korean can also become a good reader in English.	3.47	26	12	9
		1	55.32	25.53	19.15
2.	The more I read in English, the more I improve my reading skills	4.43	44	3	0
		0.62	93.62	6.38	0.00
3.	Grammatical competence has an impact on a learner's English reading proficiency.	3.64	31	10	6
		0.92	65.96	21.28	12.77
4.	Vocabulary strength has an impact on a learner's English reading proficiency.	4.47	45	2	0
		0.58	95.74	4.26	0.00
5.	Background knowledge has an impact on a learner's English reading proficiency.	4.13	42	5	0
		0.58	89.36	10.64	0.00
6.	My English reading performance varies depending on the genres that I read.	3.83	36	9	2
		0.67	76.6	19.15	4.26
7.	My English reading performance varies depending on the topics that I read.	3.7	33	11	3
		0.78	70.21	23.4	6.38
8.	When reading in English, I am able to recognize the difference between main points and supporting details.	3.32	18	26	3
		0.59	38.3	55.32	6.38
9.	When reading in English, I am able to relate information which comes next in the text to previous information in the text.	3.51	24	23	0
		0.51	51.06	48.94	0.00
10.	When reading in English, I am able to use my background knowledge to understand the content of the text.	3.85	32	14	1
		0.75	68.09	29.79	2.13
11	When reading in English, I can recognize and repair miscomprehension.	3.83	34	12	1
		0.67	72.34	25.53	2.13
12.	I enjoy reading in English.	2.6	5	19	23
		0.8	10.64	40.43	48.94
13.	Compared to my classmates, I am a skilled EFL reader.	2.85	12	17	18
		0.91	25.53	36.17	38.3
14.	I am making progress toward English reading skills.	3.28	20	20	7
		0.71	42.55	42.55	14.89
15.	I feel secure when it comes to reading in English.	2.83	9	21	17
		0.73	19.15	44.68	36.17

TABLE 2

Less-Proficient Readers' Perceptions about Reading in English

Item	Content	frequency/ % of responses (N=60)			
		Mean	P	U	N
		SD	%	%	%
1.	A good reader in Korean can also become a good reader in English.	3.28	30	16	14
		1.06	50	26.67	23.33
2.	The more I read in English, the more I improve my reading skills.	4.27	57	1	2
		0.66	95	1.67	3.33
3.	Grammatical competence has an impact on a learner's English reading proficiency.	3.82	39	16	5
		0.97	65	26.67	8.33
4.	Vocabulary strength has an impact on a learner's English reading proficiency.	4.53	59	0	1
		0.6	98.33	0.00	1.67
5.	Background knowledge has an impact on a learner's English reading proficiency.	3.87	45	13	2
		0.7	75	21.67	3.33
6.	My English reading performance varies depending on the genres that I read.	3.47	35	14	11
		1.03	58.33	23.33	18.33
7.	My English reading performance varies depending on the topics that I read.	3.45	29	24	7
		0.93	48.33	40	11.67
8.	When reading in English, I am able to recognize the difference between main points and supporting details.	2.93	20	19	21
		0.92	33.33	31.67	35
9.	When reading in English, I am able to relate information which comes next in the text to previous information in the text.	3.05	19	25	16
		0.83	31.67	41.67	26.67
10.	When reading in English, I am able to use my background knowledge to understand the content of the text.	3.23	24	24	12
		0.93	40	40	20
11.	When reading in English, I can recognize and repair miscomprehension.	3.33	29	16	15
		0.97	48.33	26.67	25
12.	I enjoy reading in English.	1.73	0	5	55
		0.61	0.00	8.33	91.67
13.	Compared to my classmates, I am a skilled EFL reader.	1.95	2	12	46
		0.81	3.33	20	76.67
14.	I am making progress toward English reading skills.	2.55	6	27	27
		0.87	10	45	45
15.	I feel secure when it comes to reading in English.	1.9	2	9	49
		0.77	3.33	15	81.67

TABLE 3

Proficient Readers' Criteria of Judging the Level of Difficulty of English Reading Materials

Item	Content	frequency/ % of responses (N=47)			
		Mean	P	U	N
		SD	%	%	%
16.	I judge the level of difficulty of English reading materials based on vocabulary.	3.57	28	11	8
		0.95	59.57	23.4	17.02
17.	I judge the level of difficulty of English reading materials based on sentence structure.	3.17	22	9	16
		0.96	46.81	19.15	34.04
18.	I judge the level of difficulty of English reading materials based on background knowledge.	3.98	35	9	3
		0.94	74.47	19.15	6.38
19.	I judge the level of difficulty of English reading materials based on length.	2.49	9	13	25
		1.06	19.15	27.66	53.19
20.	I judge the level of difficulty of English reading materials based on interest.	3.96	38	6	3
		0.86	80.85	12.77	6.38

TABLE 4

Less-Proficient Readers' Criteria of Judging the Level of Difficulty of English Reading Materials

Item	Content	frequency/ % of responses (N=60)			
		Mean	P	U	N
		SD	%	%	%
16.	I judge the level of difficulty of English reading materials based on vocabulary.	3.38	31	17	12
		1.04	51.67	28.33	20
17.	I judge the level of difficulty of English reading materials based on sentence structure.	3	21	21	18
		1.01	35	35	30
18.	I judge the level of difficulty of English reading materials based on background knowledge.	3.58	42	6	12
		0.96	70	10	20
19.	I judge the level of difficulty of English reading materials based on length.	2.9	24	12	24
		1.23	40	20	40
20.	I judge the level of difficulty of English reading materials based on interest.	3.56	38	12	10
		1.15	63	20	17

TABLE 5

Proficient Readers' Criteria of Choosing English Reading Materials

Item	Content	frequency/ % of responses (N=47)			
		Mean	A/U	S	R/N
		SD	%	%	%
21.	I choose English reading materials based on degree of difficulty.	3.64	28	16	3
		0.76	59.57	34.04	6.38
22.	I choose English reading materials based on length.	2.87	14	12	21
		1.03	29.79	25.53	44.68
23.	I choose English reading materials based on interest.	4.15	39	8	0
		0.69	82.98	17.02	0.00
24.	I choose English reading materials based on background knowledge	3.45	23	17	7
		0.88	48.94	36.17	14.89
25.	I choose English reading materials based on popularity.	3.23	17	18	12
		1.05	36.17	38.3	25.53
26.	I choose English reading materials based on illustrations.	2.47	8	14	25
		1.1	17.02	29.79	53.19
27.	I choose English reading materials based on size of letters.	2.04	2	11	34
		0.91	4.26	23.4	72.34

TABLE 6

Less-Proficient Readers' Criteria of Choosing English Reading Materials

Item	Content	frequency/ % of responses (N=60)			
		Mean	A/U	S	R/N
		SD	%	%	%
21.	I choose English reading materials based on degree of difficulty.	3.18	26	18	16
		1.02	43.33	30	26.67
22.	I choose English reading materials based on length.	2.77	19	9	32
		1.21	31.67	15	53.33
23.	I choose English reading materials based on interest.	3.9	48	5	7
		1.04	80	8.33	11.67
24.	I choose English reading materials based on background knowledge.	3.28	29	17	14
		1.03	48.33	28.33	23.33
25.	I choose English reading materials based on popularity.	3.35	32	16	12
		1.09	53.33	26.67	20
26.	I choose English reading materials based on illustrations.	2.53	13	16	31
		1.11	21.67	26.67	51.67
27.	I choose English reading materials based on size of letters.	2.18	7	14	39
		1.13	11.67	23.33	65

TABLE 7

Proficient Readers' Responses to Item 28

Item 28	If you don't understand something while reading in English, what do you do?	frequency/ % of responses (N=47)			
		Mean	A/U	S	R/N
		SD	%	%	%
28.1	I keep on reading and hope for clarification further on.	4.17	38	6	3
		0.89	80.85	12.77	6.38
28.2	I reread the problematic part.	3.51	27	13	7
		0.93	57.45	27.66	14.89
28.3	I go back to a point before the problematic part and reread from there.	3.4	25	13	9
		1.08	53.19	27.66	19.15
28.4	I look up unknown words in a dictionary.	3.7	33	9	5
		0.88	70.21	19.15	10.64
28.5	I ask teacher for help.	2.23	4	10	33
		0.81	8.51	21.28	70.21
28.6	I ask classmates for help.	2.79	9	21	17
		0.81	19.15	44.68	36.17
28.7	I give up and stop reading.	1.83	1	8	38
		0.79	2.13	17.02	80.85

TABLE 8

Less-Proficient Readers' Responses to Item 28

Item 28	If you don't understand something while reading in English, what do you do?	frequency/ % of responses (N=60)			
		Mean	A/U	S	R/N
		SD	%	%	%
28.1	I keep on reading and hope for clarification further on.	3.92	45	9	6
		0.91	75	15	10
28.2	I reread the problematic part.	3.63	37	17	6
		0.88	61.67	28.33	10
28.3	I go back to a point before the problematic part and reread from there.	3.68	35	18	7
		1.05	58.33	30	11.67
28.4	I look up unknown words in a dictionary.	3.77	37	16	7
		1.03	61.67	26.67	11.67
28.5	I ask teacher for help.	2.32	6	16	38
		0.85	10	26.67	63.33
28.6	I ask classmates for help.	3.62	37	17	6
		0.92	61.67	28.33	10
28.7	I give up and stop reading.	2.1	4	13	43
		0.92	6.67	21.67	71.67

TABLE 9

Proficient Readers' Responses to Item 29

Item 29	When reading in English, what are the things you focus on to read effectively?	frequency/ % of responses (N=47)			
		Mean	A/U	S	R/N
		SD	%	%	%
29.1	understanding the meaning of each word	2.47	6	17	24
		0.97	12.77	36.17	51.06
29.2	getting the overall meaning of the text	4.15	42	5	0
		0.59	89.36	10.64	0.00
29.3	the details of the content	2.91	8	26	13
		0.72	17.02	55.32	27.66
29.4	the grammatical structures	2.32	3	15	29
		0.86	6.38	31.91	61.7
29.5	relating the text to what I already know about the topic.	3.51	28	12	7
		0.98	59.57	25.53	14.89
29.6	looking up words in the dictionary	3.09	12	25	10
		0.78	25.53	53.19	21.28
29.7	the organization of the text	3.23	20	16	11
		0.87	42.55	34.04	23.4

TABLE 10

Less-Proficient Readers' Responses to Item 29

Item 29	When reading in English, what are the things you focus on to read effectively?	frequency/ % of responses (N=60)			
		Mean	A/U	S	R/N
		SD	%	%	%
29.1	understanding the meaning of each word	2.88	15	23	22
		1.01	25	38.33	36.67
29.2	getting the overall meaning of the text	3.95	46	12	2
		0.75	76.67	20	3.33
29.3	the details of the content	2.97	19	23	18
		0.94	31.67	38.33	30
29.4	the grammatical structures	2.57	8	23	29
		1	13.33	38.33	48.33
29.5	relating the text to what I already know about the topic	3.4	31	17	12
		1.01	51.67	28.33	20
29.6	looking up words in the dictionary	3.55	34	15	11
		1.03	56.67	25	18.33
29.7	the organization of the text	3.31	27	18	15
		1.09	45	30	25

TABLE 11

Proficient Readers' Strategies for the Discovery of a New Word's Meaning

Item 30	Content	frequency/ % of responses (N=47)			
		Mean	A/U	S	R/N
		SD	%	%	%
30.1	I analyze part of speech.	3.11	16	21	10
		0.87	34.04	44.68	21.28
30.2	I analyze affixes and roots.	2.79	11	15	21
		0.95	23.4	31.91	44.68
30.3	I analyze any available pictures or illustrations.	3.23	20	16	11
		0.94	42.55	34.04	23.4
30.4	I try to guess the meaning from the given context.	4.21	42	5	0
		0.62	89.36	10.64	0.00
30.5	I use a dictionary.	3.57	27	15	5
		0.83	57.45	31.91	10.64
30.6	I ask teacher for help.	2.11	2	10	35
		0.76	4.26	21.28	74.47
30.7	I ask classmates for help.	2.85	10	21	16
		0.86	21.28	44.68	34.04

TABLE 12

Less-Proficient Readers' Strategies for the Discovery of a New Word's Meaning

Item 30	Content	frequency/ % of responses (N=60)			
		Mean	A/U	S	R/N
		SD	%	%	%
30.1	I analyze part of speech.	2.93	19	17	24
		1.09	31.67	28.33	40
30.2	I analyze affixes and roots.	2.65	9	24	27
		0.8	15	40	45
30.3	I analyze any available pictures or illustrations.	3.27	26	22	12
		0.99	43.33	36.67	20
30.4	I try to guess the meaning for the given context.	4.07	54	6	0
		0.52	90	10	0.00
30.5	I use a dictionary.	3.83	42	9	9
		1.06	70	15	15
30.6	I ask teacher for help.	2.62	11	18	31
		1.06	18.33	30	51.67
30.7	I ask classmates for help.	3.82	42	14	4
		0.87	70	23.33	6.67

TABLE 13

T-test Results for Proficient and Less-Proficient Readers' Perceptions

Item	Group	N	Mean	Std Dev	t-value	p-value
1	Proficient	47	3.47	1.00	0.92	0.3603
	Less-proficient	60	3.28	1.06		
2	Proficient	47	4.43	0.62	1.27	0.2065
	Less-proficient	60	4.27	0.66		
3	Proficient	47	3.64	0.92	-0.97	0.3349
	Less-proficient	60	3.82	0.97		
4	Proficient	47	4.47	0.58	-0.57	0.5719
	Less-proficient	60	4.53	0.60		
5	Proficient	47	4.13	0.58	2.07	0.0413**
	Less-proficient	60	3.87	0.70		
6	Proficient	47	3.83	0.67	2.09	0.0391**
	Less-proficient	60	3.47	1.03		
7	Proficient	47	3.70	0.78	1.50	0.1378
	Less-proficient	60	3.45	0.93		
8	Proficient	47	3.32	0.59	2.50	0.0140**
	Less-proficient	60	2.93	0.92		
9	Proficient	47	3.51	0.51	3.34	0.0012*
	Less-proficient	60	3.05	0.83		
10	Proficient	47	3.85	0.75	3.71	0.0003*
	Less-proficient	60	3.23	0.93		
11	Proficient	47	3.83	0.67	3.00	0.0034*
	Less-proficient	60	3.33	0.97		
12	Proficient	47	2.60	0.80	6.35	0.0001*
	Less-proficient	60	1.73	0.61		
13	Proficient	47	2.85	0.91	5.41	0.0001*
	Less-proficient	60	1.95	0.81		
14	Proficient	47	3.28	0.71	4.63	0.0001*
	Less-proficient	60	2.55	0.87		
15	Proficient	47	2.83	0.73	6.31	0.0001*
	Less-proficient	60	1.90	0.77		

*$p < .01$
**$p < .05$

TABLE 14

T-test Results for Proficient and Less-Proficient Readers' Criteria of Judging the Level of Difficulty of English Reading Materials

Item	Group	N	Mean	Std Dev	t-value	p-value
16	Proficient	47	3.57	0.95	0.98	0.3303
	Less-proficient	60	3.38	1.04		
17	Proficient	47	3.17	0.96	0.88	0.3788
	Less-proficient	60	3.00	1.01		
18	Proficient	47	3.98	0.94	2.13	0.0357**
	Less-proficient	60	3.58	0.96		
19	Proficient	47	2.49	1.06	-1.82	0.0719
	Less-proficient	60	2.90	1.23		
20	Proficient	47	3.96	0.86	1.98	0.0508
	Less-proficient	60	3.56	1.15		

**$p < .05$

TABLE 15

T-test Results for Proficient and Less-Proficient Readers' Criteria of Choosing English Reading Materials

Item	Group	N	Mean	Std Dev	t-value	p-value
21	Proficient	47	3.64	0.76	2.55	0.0121**
	Less-proficient	60	3.18	1.02		
22	Proficient	47	2.87	1.03	0.48	0.6345
	Less-proficient	60	2.77	1.21		
23	Proficient	47	4.15	0.69	1.42	0.1593
	Less-proficient	60	3.90	1.04		
24	Proficient	47	3.45	0.88	0.87	0.3865
	Less-proficient	60	3.28	1.03		
25	Proficient	47	3.23	1.05	-0.56	0.5789
	Less-proficient	60	3.35	1.09		
26	Proficient	47	2.47	1.10	-0.3	0.7628
	Less-proficient	60	2.53	1.11		
27	Proficient	47	2.04	0.91	-0.7	0.4874
	Less-proficient	60	2.18	1.13		

**$p < .05$

TABLE 16

T-test Results for Proficient and Less-Proficient Readers' Responses to Item 28

Item 28	Group	N	Mean	Std Dev	t-value	p-value
28.1	Proficient	47	4.17	0.89	1.44	0.1515
	Less-proficient	60	3.92	0.91		
28.2	Proficient	47	3.51	0.93	-0.7	0.4872
	Less-proficient	60	3.63	0.88		
28.3	Proficient	47	3.40	1.08	-1.35	0.1800
	Less-proficient	60	3.68	1.05		
28.4	Proficient	47	3.70	0.88	-0.34	0.7331
	Less-proficient	60	3.77	1.03		
28.5	Proficient	47	2.23	0.81	-0.51	0.6130
	Less-proficient	60	2.32	0.85		
28.6	Proficient	47	2.79	0.81	-4.88	0.0001*
	Less-proficient	60	3.62	0.92		
28.7	Proficient	47	1.83	0.79	-1.61	0.1106
	Less-proficient	60	2.10	0.92		

*$p < .01$

TABLE 17

T-test Results for Proficient and Less-Proficient Readers' Responses to Item 29

Item 29	Group	N	Mean	Std Dev	t-value	p-value
29.1	Proficient	47	2.47	0.97	-2.14	0.0344**
	Less-proficient	60	2.88	1.01		
29.2	Proficient	47	4.15	0.59	1.50	0.1371
	Less-proficient	60	3.95	0.75		
29.3	Proficient	47	2.91	0.72	-0.31	0.7547
	Less-proficient	60	2.97	0.94		
29.4	Proficient	47	2.32	0.86	-1.35	0.1797
	Less-proficient	60	2.57	1.00		
29.5	Proficient	47	3.51	0.98	0.57	0.5697
	Less-proficient	60	3.40	1.01		
29.6	Proficient	47	3.09	0.78	-2.57	0.0116**
	Less-proficient	60	3.55	1.03		
29.7	Proficient	47	3.23	0.87	-0.37	0.7157
	Less-proficient	60	3.31	1.09		

**$p < .05$

TABLE 18

T-test Results for Proficient and Less-Proficient Readers' Strategies for the Discovery of a New Word's Meaning

Item 30	Group	N	Mean	Std Dev	t-value	p-value
30.1	Proficient	47	3.11	0.86	0.89	0.3745
	Less-proficient	60	2.93	1.09		
30.2	Proficient	47	2.79	0.95	0.81	0.4200
	Less-proficient	60	2.65	0.80		
30.3	Proficient	47	3.23	0.94	-0.17	0.8628
	Less-proficient	60	3.27	0.99		
30.4	Proficient	47	4.21	0.62	1.33	0.1878
	Less-proficient	60	4.07	0.52		
30.5	Proficient	47	3.57	0.83	-1.38	0.1715
	Less-proficient	60	3.83	1.06		
30.6	Proficient	47	2.11	0.76	-2.79	0.0063*
	Less-proficient	60	2.62	1.06		
30.7	Proficient	47	2.85	0.86	-5.72	0.0001*
	Less-proficient	60	3.82	0.87		

*$p < .01$

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: College

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