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A Case Study on College EFL Readers: Awareness, Experiences, and Processes*

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This research primarily aimed to investigate proficient and less proficient EFL readers' awareness and experiences about learning to read and reading in English. The secondary purpose was to explore the participants' reading strategies, and to discover how the genres of English texts influence their reading processing behaviors. The participants consisted of four college students in engineering aged 21-25 years. Three data sources were employed: questionnaires, interviews, and think-alouds. The findings revealed that: (1) the proficient EFL readers judged themselves to be good readers, while the less proficient EFL readers judged themselves to be fair readers; (2) unknown vocabulary was perceived to be the major impediment to reading comprehension; the think-aloud data, however, demonstrated that unknown vocabulary did not significantly interfere with their reading comprehension; (3) regardless of the genre of the text, the participants employed similar reading strategies; (4) the participants were more likely to tolerate ambiguity and predict the content when reading the narrative text than the expository text; (5) there was no set of strategies that distinguished proficient EFL readers from less proficient EFL readers; and (6) when identifying problems, the proficient EFL readers used fix-up strategies more effectively and were better able to provide satisfactory solutions than their counterparts. Pedagogical implications for EFL reading instruction are discussed.

[EFL readers/awareness/reading processes]

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I. INTRODUCTION

In general, reading is defined as the process by which people provide meaning to the written symbols in a text, while looking at that text. Comprehension is derived from the interaction between the reader and the text. Thus, the reader might gain meaning from the text which may be different from the meaning that the author originally hoped to describe. Even when interacting with the same text, readers are expected to apply their different resources (e.g., cultural environment and background knowledge) to varying extent; therefore, reading comprehension varies among individual readers. L2 readers are cognitively mature populations who are already literate in their L1s learning to read in L2. By means of oral communication, beginning L1 readers have already acquired a basic linguistic foundation before they engage in formal literacy training. L2 readers, however, are often exposed to L2 reading instruction before they have learned much L2 linguistic knowledge. Hence, literacy training is conducted with a different initial focus. While L1 instruction concentrates on decoding, which connects print with oral vocabulary, L2 instruction emphasizes linguistic foundation development. During information processing, L1 reading presumes a single language involvement, while L2 reading takes a dual language (Aebersold & Field, 1997; Koda, 2005).

A number of studies on L2 reading have examined the roles of language proficiency and language knowledge, cultural factors, vocabulary acquisition, recalls, strategies, and transfer issues of L1 linguistic and content knowledge on L2 performance. Little research, however, has investigated the backgrounds of EFL readers such as their experiences in learning to read in English. Another area of EFL reading that has been neglected is in regard to EFL readers' perceptions of reading and their beliefs about the reading processes they undergo as they make their way through English texts. According to what and why they read, EFL readers' processing behaviors might vary. Nevertheless, EFL readers' perceptions and backgrounds are important factors that could determine their cognitive strategies and comprehension. It is crucial that classroom teachers should be knowledgeable about EFL readers' perceptions and backgrounds to help enhance their competence and confidence (Chesser, 1993; Chin, 2009; Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

Therefore, the primary purpose of the present study is to explore EFL readers' awareness and experiences about learning to read and reading in English, and to discover how they interact with English texts. The secondary purpose is to investigate how the genre of English texts (i.e., expository vs. narrative) influences EFL readers' processing behaviors, and to examine what characterizes individuals as either proficient and less-proficient EFL readers.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Goodman's (1967, 1971) psycholinguistic model of reading, which has strongly influenced L1 reading processes, has also affected the viewpoints of L2 reading (Carrell, 1988). Goodman argued that reading entails an interaction between language and thought. Fluent reading does not expect readers to identify every single element in the text but to select the minimum number of most useful cues to make appropriate guesses at the first reading. Goodman considers reading process as a cycle of sampling, predicting, testing, and confirming. Readers adhere to strategies that allow them to predict most effectively with access to the fewest number of usable cues. In a transactional view, a reader refers to a transaction with a text. A text refers to a transaction with a reader, and meaning is what results from the transaction. The meaning exists neither in the text nor in the reader. The meaning is constructed through the transaction between reader and text. Reader and text are "involved in a complex, nonlinear, recursive, self-correcting transaction" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1064). Both reader and text are transformed in the act of reading. The reader modifies his conceptual schemata and values via reading comprehension. In other words, the reader creates a new text which is parallel and closely connected to the published text; nevertheless, each reader's text is distinct. The reader's text is comprised of inferences, references, and coreferences which are drawn from schemata that the reader applies to the transaction. Based on this perspective of dual texts, what is important is the individual reader's perception and use of the characteristics of that published text. The reader focuses on meaning making, and the construction of his own, personal, text is the byproduct of it (Goodman, 1994).

Schema theory emphasizes the role of background knowledge in reading comprehension. That theory claims that no text provides meaning by itself. A text just gives readers directions in retrieving or creating meaning through their own previously acquired knowledge, which is called the reader's background knowledge (i.e., schemata). Formal schemata refers to the reader's background knowledge about rhetorical organizational structures of different text genres (e.g., fables and articles). Content schemata refers to the reader's background knowledge about the content of a text (e.g., Halloween and Thanksgiving). L2 readers' ability to apply relevant background knowledge to the text determines efficient comprehension. The difficulty of a text cannot be judged simply based on linguistic features such as syntactic complexity. It would be easier for readers to comprehend a text if the text fits their prior knowledge in regard to language, rhetorical conventions, and the world (Carrell, 1984a; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988; Silberstein, 1987).

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Previous empirical studies (Carrell, 1983, 1987; Johnson, 1981, 1982) investigated the effects of culture-specific schemata upon the comprehension and recall of English text and yielded similar findings in that L2 readers understood better and created more proper elaborations of the culturally familiar text, whereas they understood less of, and generated more distortions of the culturally unfamiliar text. On the other hand, Carrell (1984b) implemented the effects of the rhetorical organization of different types of expository text upon the recall of L2 readers. Results disclosed that L2 readers were more able to recall explicit ideas from the more strictly structured comparison, causation, and problem/solution texts than from the more loosely structured collection of descriptions. Carrell concluded that when L2 readers hold a formal schema pertinent to the discourse type of the text, they could retrieve more information.

Metacogniton, the understanding about one's own knowledge and learning, leads the reader to choose and employ reading strategies. Comprehension monitoring and explicit skills for self-regulation of learning and knowledge are regarded as a type of metacognition. Metacognition controls the reader's thoughts and behaviors. Metacognitive awareness is related to effective learning. Thus it may function as an important connection that explains the shift from a beginner to an advanced reader (Casanave, 1988; Gambrell & Heathington, 1981). Grabe and Stoller (2002) indicated that metacognitive knowledge affects L1 and L2 reading in the same way; it has more effect on readers at higher levels than it does on readers at lower levels. Knowledge of text structure and knowledge of strategies are indications of metacognitive knowledge relevant to reading. While language proficiency is a major variable that determines L2 reading abilities, metacognitive instruction in text structure and reading strategies is expected to strengthen metaconitive abilities that contribute to more advanced reading.

Carrell (1989) explored the relationship between metacognitive awareness and L2 reading proficiency. Results showed that the L2 readers who claimed that global reading strategies (i.e., those related to background knowledge, text gist, and textual organization) triggered less hindrance comprehended better than those who claimed that local strategies (i.e., those related to sound-letter, word meaning, sentence syntax, and text details) triggered less hindrance. In short, L2 readers at more advanced levels appeared to hold a top-down oriented view, whereas those at lower levels appeared to hold a bottom-up oriented view.

Chin (2008) examined EFL readers' metacognitive awareness and learning strategies. Findings demonstrated that the participants believed that L2 reading proficiency correlates with L1 reading proficiency; vocabulary strength, background knowledge, and grammatical competence had a strong impact on their English reading proficiency; their reading performance varied depending on the nature of text (e.g., writing style). Across

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reading proficiency levels, the participants expressed a lack of perception of progress, low confidence, and anxiety toward EFL reading, which could give rise to becoming reluctant readers. The less-proficient readers' obsession with vocabulary coexisted with a meaning-centered orientation to reading. The proficient readers were better able to integrate text information with their background knowledge, and identify and fix miscomprehension than the less-proficient readers. This study reported that EFL readers' language proficiency significantly influenced their overall reading ability, which supported Grabe and Stoller's (2002) contention. Chin concluded that successful reading might require EFL readers to strengthen linguistic knowledge as a prerequisite.

In a similar vein, Anderson (1991) analyzed L2 readers' individual differences in strategy use while they engaged in taking a reading comprehension test and while reading academic texts. The students were classified into three ability levels (i.e., high, intermediate, and low) and directed to produce think-aloud comments while doing each task. Results displayed that the more strategies readers used in performing each of these measures, the higher they scored overall. Furthermore, good readers tended to employ significantly more total strategies than poor readers. No significant difference, however, existed in the total number of different strategies across ability levels and across tasks; readers used similar strategies in those two reading contexts. Anderson indicated that there was no unique set of strategies that distinguished good readers from poor readers. This study showed that strategic reading required readers to have the ability to implement strategies strategically; simply knowing about strategies was not enough.

Likewise, Padron, Knight, and Waxman (1986) discovered that due to weak language proficiency, L2 readers were not able to apply as many strategies as L1 readers, which may explain why L2 readers failed to achieve comprehension scores as high as L1 readers. L1 readers employed *concentrating*, *searching for salient details*, and *self generated questions* significantly more often than L2 readers, whereas L2 readers employed *students' perception of teacher's expectations* (i.e., reading to answer questions that the teacher might ask) the most. In a subsequent study, Padron and Waxman (1988) observed that low level L2 readers used negative strategies (e.g., writing down every word) which could impede their reading comprehension and yield a counterproductive effect on reading achievement. Using think-aloud protocols, Horiba (1990) also examined the differences between L1 and L2 readers in regard to comprehension processes and reported that L2 readers appeared to be more concerned about vocabulary and grammar than L1 readers, whereas L1 readers paid more attention to the meaning construction of the text. In fact, Jiménez, García, and Pearson (1995) confirmed that unknown vocabulary was an impediment to reading comprehension for L2 readers.

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Allen, Bernhardt, Berry, and Demel (1988) probed how readers within varying levels of exposure to L2s (French, German, and Spanish) dealt with authentic texts of each language (i.e., newspapers, magazines, friendly letters, and business correspondence) and if text genre affected their performances. The subjects were directed to write recall protocols in English about the content of each text. Results revealed two significant interactions: language by level and language by text. The text type showed no difference between and among the texts, and there was no significant interaction between level and text. Regardless of text type, however, the subjects' level (i.e., years of instruction) and language (French, German, and Spanish) affected their performances to a significant degree. Allen et al. conjectured that time might be an important factor that could promote L2 readers' performance on any learning task.

III. METHOD

1. Participants

The participants for this case study were selected from the population of students enrolled in an English reading class at a university in Gyeongsang province. During the second week of March in 2010, the researcher administered a standardized reading comprehension test to all the twenty-one students enrolled in this class. 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), which comprised of 11 reading passages and 50 comprehension question items. The data pool revealed that the whole population achieved scores ranging from 19 to 48 correct items. Since the present study aimed to explore and compare different characteristics between proficient readers and less-proficient readers, the researcher interviewed seven students who scored over 40 and another six students who scored below 25 and selected four student participants: Yoo, Eun, Jeong, and Kim (all are pseudonyms). Three criteria were applied for the case selection: motivation to improve English reading skills, TOEIC scores, personality (e.g., open-minded and talkative), and English learning experiences. As shown in Table 1, all the four participants were in the field of engineering. Based on TOEIC scores, Yoo and Eun were labelled as proficient readers, and Jeong and Kim were labelled as less-proficient readers. Yoo and Eun had experiences living in an English speaking country (Canada and the U.S., respectively), but Jeong and Kim have never been abroad.

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TABLE 1

Participants' Background Information

Participant	Age	Gender	Year & Major	Overseas Period	TOEIC Score	Level
Yoo	25	Male	Senior in Pharmaceutical Engineering	2 years in Canada	900	Proficient
Eun	24	Female	Junior in Information & Communication Engineering	18 months in the U.S.	920	Proficient
Jeong	21	Female	Sophomore in Biomedical Engineering	None	560	Less-proficient
Kim	21	Female	Sophomore in Biomedical Engineering	None	500	Less-proficient

2. Data Collection

1) Questionnaires

As the first step, the participants were directed to fill out an open-ended questionnaire during the first week of April in 2010. The items on the questionnaire were adapted from the findings of the previous studies (Barnett, 1988; Carrell, 1989; Chin, 2009; Schmitt, 2000) (see the Appendix). All the items were written in English, but the participants were allowed to respond to them in Korean so that language proficiency would not impede them from stating their ideas and thoughts clearly. The purposes of the questionnaire were to collect basic information on the participants' awareness and experiences of learning to read and reading in English, and on their perceptions about themselves as EFL readers and about English text processing behaviors.

2) Interviews

The researcher implemented semistructured, in-depth interviews with the participants individually during the third week of April in 2010. A list of major interview questions adapted from the findings of previous studies (Barnett, 1988; Chin, 2009) were prepared as a starting point (see the Appendix). While interviewing each participant, the researcher tried to be flexible rather than strictly follow the exact order of the questions. In detail, she encouraged the participants to elaborate on what they wanted to share but never interrupted them while they were talking. Open-ended questions were asked; leading questions that could direct their responses in a certain way were avoided. Silence

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or a pause was tolerated in that the participants were given considerable time for giving out responses. When needed, the researcher summarized each participant's remarks to make sure that she understood him/her clearly (Merriam, 1988; Seidman, 1991). The interviews intended to investigate the participants' beliefs and attitudes about English reading tasks, reading strategies, and favorite reading classroom activities and assignments. Each interview was held at the researcher's office. They averaged over an hour and were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English.

3) Think-Alouds

Think-alouds ask readers to verbalize their thinking processes while interacting with a text silently so that their text processing behaviors can be disclosed. Think-alouds get into the cognitive reading process and demonstrate what readers do to make sense of the text and/or repair comprehension problems. Thus, researchers can gain information about readers' text interpretation and processing strategies. The participants had never engaged in a think-aloud protocol before. Thus, they were provided with an explanation of the think-aloud procedure and given a practice session before actual data collection (Bereiter & Bird, 1985; Chesser, 1993; Jiménez, García, & Pearson, 1995).

The first think-aloud on "The Selfish Giant" was performed during the first week of May in 2010, and the second think-aloud on "Guggenheim Museum U.S.A." three weeks later. With regard to the procedure, the participants were directed to stop reading when they reached the assigned stop signs in each text and state whatever came to their minds referring to the passage associated with each stop sign. A time limit was not set, so the participants could read each stop sign passage repeatedly; however, they were not allowed to consult dictionaries. Each stop sign was highlighted and its number was marked in red. There were 7 stop signs in "The Selfish Giant" and 6 stop signs in "Guggenheim Museum U.S.A." Each participant's think-aloud session ran from one to two hours and was audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English.

4) Materials

Two different text genres were used for the think-alouds. As an expository text, the participants read "Guggenheim Museum U.S.A." by Flavio Conti taken from *Mosaic I Reading* (Wegmann & Knezevic, 2007) and, as a narrative text, "The Selfish Giant" by Oscar Wilde taken from *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* by YBM Si-Sa (2007). Both texts were complete authentic passages and comprised of approximately 800-1000 words. They were selected because the lengths were reasonable, the designated level was appropriate (intermediate to high-intermediate), and the topics were intriguing enough

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for the participants to invoke cognitive strategies (Jiménez, García, & Pearson, 1995). It should be noted that "The Selfish Giant" was originally 12 pages long in that each page was provided with Korean translations. Thus, the translation pages were eliminated for this research and transformed into a six page long story.

3. Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis should be "recursive and dynamic" (Merriam, 1988, p. 123). That is, when all the data are collected, the analysis is not finished but becomes more intense. To avoid having data unfocused and repetitive, the researcher implemented ongoing analysis in that data were analyzed while being collected. In the process of capturing recurring patterns and regularities, the researcher juxtaposed, read, and reread the transcripts from the four participants' questionnaires, interviews, and think-alouds and then developed a set of coding categories. In doing so, Holsti's (1969) guidelines were taken into account for the sake of efficacy: (1) the categories were pertinent to the aims of the study; (2) the categories were comprehensive so that all the relevant items of the collected data could be assorted into a category; and (3) individual categories were heterogeneous so that no single item could belong to more than one category.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Proficient and Less-Proficient EFL Readers' Awareness and Experiences

With regard to the participants' perceptions about their reading proficiency, Yoo and Eun considered themselves good EFL readers, while Jeong and Kim claimed to be fair EFL readers. Yoo stated that he improved his reading skills a lot while he went to an English language school and did a homestay with a Canadian family in Toronto. Now he feels quite secure when he takes TOEIC tests or reads other English materials. Likewise, Eun mentioned that she was exposed to a variety of authentic reading materials while she was enrolled in an ESL class in America, so she could learn to get the gist of the text. In contrast, Jeong was concerned that she still has difficulty understanding main ideas of what she reads, and that her reading speed is slow. Kim indicated that she suffers with complicated sentence structures and has weak vocabulary. In short, Yoo and Eun's experiences of staying in an English speaking country seemed to have strengthened their self-confidence and helped them become proficient readers. On the other hand, Jeong

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and Kim appeared to feel insecure about reading in English which might have led to low self-esteem. It is ironic, however, that the less-proficient readers perceived reading in English as "enjoyable" while the proficient readers perceived it as an academic chore. For Yoo, Eun, and Kim, the primary purpose for reading in English is to improve reading proficiency, but for Jeong, it is to gain information.

None of the participants were satisfied with their English reading proficiency as yet, so they were all eager to improve their English reading skills further. Yoo said, "I still have a long way to go. I've met really fluent EFL readers. I am way behind compared to them." Regarding obstacles to reading comprehension, unknown vocabulary, including idioms and technical terminologies, was commonly chosen among the participants. Moreover, Eun and Kim added that complicated text structures could impede reading process. Only the proficient readers maintained that lack of background knowledge often gave rise to comprehension failures when they read daily materials or periodicals (e.g., *The Toronto Star* and *People*) during their overseas stay. In contrast, Jeong and Kim were not aware that background knowledge could play an important role in meaning construction. A possible explanation for this might be that the less-proficient readers were mostly exposed to English language skills books in which specific background knowledge was not presupposed.

In order to become better EFL readers, the participants believed that first they should enlarge their vocabulary store. In addition, the proficient readers emphasized extensive reading of a variety of genres and solving reading comprehension questions on TOEIC/TOEFL/TEPS practice textbooks. Yoo argued that extensive reading allows him to get the hang of catching general ideas, increase background knowledge, and infer the word's meaning and thus to learn new vocabulary in context. On the contrary, the less-proficient readers did not figure that extensive reading contributes to reading comprehension development. Rather, they asserted that they should be more knowledgeable about grammar rules, watch English channels such as BBC and CNN, and practice oral reading. For instance, Jeong reported that she enjoys watching *Gray's Anatomy* and *Fly Girls*. Although she doesn't understand them completely, Jeong gets to pick up some useful expressions. Oral reading, meanwhile, helps her read text carefully, so she can comprehend better and enhance her self-confidence. Also it speeds up her reading process.

While reading in English, Yoo, Eun, and Jeong claimed that their main concern is to grasp the general idea of a passage. Notably, Kim said that she'd rather pay attention to the grammatical structures and vocabulary usage. Moreover, the proficient readers reported that they often try to predict the content (e.g., the story line), while the less-proficient readers claimed not to do so. As effective reading processing behaviors, Yoo, Eun, and Jeong specified that first, they read on all the way through without stopping;

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they move beyond unknown vocabulary. In other words, they put problematic parts on hold to fix them afterwards. Yoo said that he identifies verbs first and then makes sure to understand the topic sentence of each paragraph because it shows the gist of it. Eun stated that she gives heed to the title, headings, and subheadings in a text to help herself predict the content and keep track of the main ideas. Dealing with complicated sentence structures, Yoo and Kim stated that they try to simplify them by analyzing them into subject, verb, and object while modifying clauses are parenthesized. For repairing miscomprehension, "rereading" and "looking up unknown vocabulary" were believed to be the most effective strategies by the participants. In looking up unknown vocabulary, they usually check out dictionaries on the Internet or on their mobile phones rather than hard copy dictionaries. In doing so, they prefer English-Korean dictionaries to English-English dictionaries.

When selecting what to read in English, all the participants take interest, difficulty, length, and illustrations into account (See Table 2). That is, they are drawn to materials that are interesting but not too challenging. If a text is too long and/or densely written, they easily become overwhelmed and often quit reading in the middle, unless it's a requirement. Jeong said, "I prefer a page turner. I'd love to get a sense of accomplishment after finishing the whole book." Materials that have fancy illustrations such as graphic images and colorful pictures were claimed to be fun to read. Except Eun, however, the participants were reluctant to risk reading materials in which complicated sentence structures are employed.

TABLE 2

Participants' Criteria for English Reading Materials Selection

Proficient Readers	
Yoo	Interest, Difficulty, Length, Illustrations, Sentence Structure,
Eun	Interest, Difficulty, Length, Illustrations, Genre,
Less-Proficient Readers	
Jeong	Interest, Difficulty, Length, Illustrations, Sentence Structure, Genre
Kim	Interest, Difficulty, Length, Illustrations, Sentence Structure

Regarding the participants' areas of interests, Yoo enjoyed reading materials that deal with travel or sports such as *World Geography of Travel and Tourism* and *Fantasy Baseball Index*. He was also interested in books that teach him presentation skills (e.g., *Barack Obama's 31 Great Speeches* and *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs*) or have to do with his major (e.g., *The Legend of Pfizer*). He stressed that he always checks out a Canadian website (i.e., ca.yahoo.com) to read headline news and gain information on shopping items such as electronics. Eun was more likely to read fashion magazines (e.g., *Must have 100* or *Instyle*) or biographies (e.g., *I, Cyborg*). She was also keen on reading

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Internet newspapers (e.g., www.koreaherald.com), novels (e.g., *Black Elk Speaks*), and self-help books (e.g., *How to Win Friends & Influence People*). Jeong said that she is into short stories and fairy tales such as *The Happy Prince* and *Berenstain Bears* and also cookbooks such as *Betty Crocker's Cooking with Kids.* She said, "I'm always searching for new cooking recipes. As long as I know the basic terms for utensils and ingredients, cookbooks are easy to understand." Since she was planning to study abroad, Jeong also liked to read pamphlets and brochures and check out websites which give information on foreign universities. Finally, Kim prefers to read novels like *The Little Prince* and magazines that are related to music, fashion, or daily routines like *Billboard, Vogue*, and *Reader's Digest USA*.

The participants added that they intend to read materials that they can easily come across in daily life such as syllabus, flyers, instruction manuals, and advertisements. All in all, regardless of reading proficiency, the participants appeared to be interested in reading "authentic" materials rather than English language skills books (e.g., TOEIC/TOEFL practice textbooks and vocabulary workbooks). None of them, however, mentioned the textbooks of their majors. It is extrapolated that although they spend a lot of time reading English language skills books and their major textbooks, they consider those materials to be an extension of an academic task, not a pleasure. While the participants were shown to read a variety of materials, the most popular appeared to be magazines, novels, and websites.

TABLE 3

Participants' Criteria for Assessing the Level of Difficulty of English Reading Materials

Proficient Readers	
Yoo	Vocabulary, Length, Sentence Structure, Background Knowledge, Interest, Writing Style
Eun	Vocabulary, Length, Sentence Structure, Background Knowledge, Interest, Writing Style, Illustrations
Less-Proficient Readers	
Jeong	Vocabulary, Length, Sentence Structure, Background Knowledge, Interest, Illustrations
Kim	Vocabulary, Length, Sentence Structure, Writing Style, Illustrations

With regard to the participants' criteria for assessing the level of difficulty of English reading materials, vocabulary, length, and sentence structure were commonly chosen by the four participants (See Table 3). Background knowledge, interest, writing style, and illustrations were the secondary factors. As difficult materials, the participants cited poems, novels, and comic books which employ metaphorical expressions and expect them to "infer" the author's implications. Eun said, "When I was in America, I couldn't

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get the humor implied in comic strips because I didn't know much about American culture and slang." Also the participants named their major textbooks (e.g., *Modern Pharmaceutical Industry* and *An Introduction to the Mechanics of Solids*) and newspapers (e.g., *Times*) which use complicated sentence structures and technical terminologies. Moreover, Eun and Kim cited *Freakonomics* and *One Up on Wall Street* which deal with unfamiliar areas (e.g., economics and stock investment) in which they don't have background knowledge.

Regarding easy materials, all the participants chose children's literature such as *The Little Red Hen* because they employ easy vocabulary, simple sentence structures, and fancy illustrations. They found that children's literature is often written in a familiar style so that they can easily predict the story line. Also, Yoo and Jeong included materials that are related to daily life or their interests such as tourist maps, travel guides, and advertisements for cosmetics or clothes. Jeong stated that since she is interested in fashion, magazines like *Vogue* and *ELLE* always seem to be easy. She is hardly interrupted by unknown vocabulary, while she becomes fascinated by all the colorful items.

The participants revealed that they have different wants and needs in an EFL reading class. Since they all felt limited in their vocabulary, they wanted to be exposed to a variety of vocabulary exercises, but their preferences seemed to vary. Yoo suggested that prior to clarifying the meanings of the new words on the list, the instructor should give him the chance to figure them out in context. That way, he would learn the skill to unlock the meaning of unknown vocabulary on his own. Yoo also claimed that in order to get a better sense of English, definitions for each word need to be provided in English rather than in Korean. Eun pointed out that for correct answers, vocabulary exercises should be designed to allow synonyms rather than to confine her to only the exact word used in the assigned text. That way, she could search for the answers by activating her prior knowledge. Otherwise, she might simply rely on rote memorization. Likewise, Jeong contended that when the instructor explains the meaning of new vocabulary items within context and presents familiar synonyms, she is better able to learn when and how to use them in a correct way and remember the meanings for a long term. Kim insisted that after the explanations of the new vocabulary within context, students should be invited to make sentences or create short stories using the newly learned items either individually or in groups to make sure that students understand the usage appropriately.

As an assignment, Yoo sensed that writing a summary in limited length is challenging but effective. He said, "Summarizing a three page passage in one page with font 11 enables me to concentrate on main ideas, ignoring supporting details." Yoo

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recommended, however, that the instructor should provide either her own summary or select the best work out of the classmates' and share it with a whole class as a well-written sample. Jeong added that as a feedback for a summary, it would be very useful when the instructor points out common misunderstandings and corrects them on the spot. Eun pointed to a whole classroom discussion as the most effective after reading-activity. While she's involved in the discussion, she can not only compare her own interpretations with others but also gain some information which enhances her own background knowledge. Kim made a point that she finds it very helpful when the instructor provides students with background information before reading a text in which unfamiliar content is embedded. She said, "I've never been abroad, so I always get excited when the instructor talks about foreign cultures and her own experiences with American college life, ethnic foods, and social manners."

Along with a textbook, the participants expected to engage in reading a variety of extra authentic materials. Yoo, who's a senior, remarked that as a job seeker, he needs to expand his "knowledge horizons," so he likes to have the opportunity to find an article on his own and do a presentation about it in class. Likewise, Eun wanted to be informed about current issues, but she preferred the instructor to bring a newspaper article and share it with a class rather than let students find it. On the other hand, Jeong and Kim argued that students should be allowed to individually read materials of their own choices at appropriate levels and submit a critique or a book report by the end of the semester. Kim underscored that when she selects what to read by herself, she feels responsible for reading it through and that reading becomes a fun task, not an ordeal any more.

2. Proficient and Less-Proficient EFL Readers' Strategies

The think-aloud data demonstrated that the proficient and less-proficient EFL readers employed a variety of strategies as they interacted with "The Selfish Giant" and "Guggenheim Museum U.S.A." Most of the strategies were used for making sense of the whole text. As shown in Table 4, skipping unknown vocabulary, monitoring, rereading, using context clues, interpreting the text, confirming/disconfirming, and predicting were commonly used by all of the participants. Except Kim, the participants also implemented paraphrasing. While Jeong and Kim used questioning, Eun employed recognizing text structure, paying attention to the title, and invoking background knowledge. Jeong employed reacting to the text content as well.

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TABLE 4
Common Strategies Participants Employed for the Selfish Giant and Guggenheim Museum U.S.A.

	Proficient Readers
Yoo	Skipping unknown vocabulary, Monitoring, Rereading, Using context clues, Interpreting the text, Confirming/Disconfirming, Predicting, Paraphrasing
Eun	Skipping unknown vocabulary, Monitoring, Rereading, Using context clues, Interpreting the text, Confirming/Disconfirming, Predicting, Paraphrasing, Recognizing text structure, Paying attention to the title, Invoking background knowledge
	Less-Proficient Readers
Jeong	Skipping unknown vocabulary, Monitoring, Rereading, Using context clues, Interpreting the text, Confirming/Disconfirming, Predicting, Paraphrasing, Reacting to the text content, Questioning,
Kim	Skipping unknown vocabulary, Monitoring, Rereading, Using context clues, Interpreting the text, Confirming/Disconfirming, Predicting, Questioning

In general, when they encountered unknown vocabulary while reading, the participants just noted it by circling or underlining and then skipped it and continued to read on. A possible explanation for this might be that unlike their beliefs, unknown vocabulary did not significantly interfere with their reading comprehension. As an example, Yoo said, "*Stole up*, *flung*, and *wicked* were unknown words, but they didn't seem to be that important so I just passed on. I mean it didn't keep me from following the story line." In other words, the participants were more likely to skip unknown vocabulary that they perceived to be unimportant. As expected, Yoo and Eun appeared to be better able to make a distinction between important and unimportant vocabulary than Jeong and Kim. When unknown vocabulary appeared to be important enough to influence the story line or the gist, however, the proficient and less-proficient readers strived to determine the meaning, implementing multiple strategies, though using context clues was the most commonly employed strategy. In doing so, again, the proficient readers were better able to construct provisional word meanings appropriate for comprehension than the less-proficient readers.

Throughout reading, the participants constantly monitored their comprehension. Once they identified comprehension problems, they almost always used the strategy of rereading either aloud or silently to repair them. In doing so, the participants reread either the whole paragraph or only the problematic portion and often provided corrections or clarifications. The following comment demonstrated use of the strategies of monitoring, questioning, rereading, and using context clues to fix miscomprehension:

> I am confused here. The giant's concern is winter and here is the boy. Does the winter refer to the boy? Or is this boy someone else? I reread the paragraph twice and noticed that the

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> kids got scared and ran away and the winter arrived in the giant's yard. Now I understand that winter and the boy are two different characters. (Kim, think-aloud 1, stop sign 4)

The participants often tried to predict what content would occur in succeeding portions of text and ended up confirming or disconfirming their predictions. Eun used paying attention to the title to help herself predict the story line. For instance, she mentioned, "Since the title is *The Selfish Giant*, I assumed that the giant would treat the naive kids badly when they visited, but he turned into a nice man and welcomed them warmly. I was wrong." It should be, however, noted that the participants made more correct predictions about the narrative text, "The Selfish Giant," than about the expository text, "Guggenheim Museum U.S.A." Furthermore, Eun demonstrated using the strategy of invoking background knowledge when coming across unknown vocabulary. That is, she integrated prior knowledge with textual information and successfully unlocked the meaning of unknown vocabulary:

> It says, "The birds were *twittering*." I am not sure what *twittering* means...is *twittering* related to the twitter that you use now? When you put some message on your twitter, it is immediately sent to all of your followers by making a twittering sound...so I guess that *twittering* is the chirping sound that the birds were making. (Eun, think-aloud 1, stop sign 4)

In order to confirm understanding or to consolidate ideas, the participants employed the strategy of paraphrasing. In other words, they rephrased content by utilizing different words that carried the same meaning (Block, 1986). While paraphrasing, they tended to use the strategy of interpreting the text. That is, they tried to make an inference, draw a conclusion, or figure out the author's intentions. By and large, the participants' inferences appeared to be proper to the given text. For example, regarding the following sentence, "They found the giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms," Yoo stated, "This story does not have a happy ending because the giant died. I can infer that the little boy is like an imaginary or spiritual figure who never gets old. The author intends to teach us how to live life. Maybe we should get along well with others rather than live isolated." On the other hand, Eun revealed that she focused on main ideas by using the strategy of recognizing text structure. That is, she differentiated between main points and supporting details, especially when she got confused, and paid more attention to the main points:

> I put this phrase in-between dashes, "-and remaining upright in apparent defiance of gravity-," in parentheses because that seemed to be nothing but supporting details. I should

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> get rid of the unnecessary part. To make reading easy, I simplified the complicated sentence and it helped me identify the main idea. (Eun, think-aloud 2, stop sign 6).

Finally, Jeong showed using the strategy of reacting to the text content in that she critiqued the text, empathized with a character, or projected herself into the character's position in the text. For instance, referring to the following sentence, "I cannot understand why the Spring is so late in coming," she commented, "It's so pathetic. How come spring hasn't arrived at the giant's garden yet? He is stubborn and mean, but I sympathize with him and I can absolutely appreciate his feelings."

TABLE 5

Distinctive Strategies Participants Employed for the Selfish Giant

Proficient Readers	
Yoo	Paying attention to grammatical structures, Visualizing, Applying intertextuality
Eun	Paying attention to grammatical structures, Visualizing, Reacting to the text content, Questioning
Less-Proficient Readers	
Jeong	Paying attention to grammatical structures, Visualizing, Changing capital letters into small letters
Kim	Paying attention to grammatical structures, Reacting to the text content

Table 5 disclosed distinctive strategies that the participants generated while reading "The Selfish Giant." It is of importance to note that paying attention to grammatical structures was the only strategy used by all the participants. For the sake of comprehension, they analyzed sentences grammatically, identified sentence connectors, and/or commented on the phrases in the text:

> It's unusual that "and" is placed in front of the sentence here...it's not supposed to. The Giant says, "You must tell him to be sure and come here tomorrow." I always get stuck when it's written in dialog. Pronouns are hard to identify. Let's see. "You" is the subject and refers to the children, and "him" is the object and refers to the boy..."The giant's heart melted" is just like the Korean expression. (Yoo, think-aloud 1, stop sign 6)

Additionally, Yoo employed the strategies of visualizing and applying intertextuality. Likewise, Eun employed the strategy of visualizing along with reacting to the text content and questioning. On the other hand, Jeong employed the strategies of visualizing and changing capital letters into small letters, while Kim employed the strategy of reacting to the text content. In short, visualizing was the second most popular among the distinctive strategies used in "The Selfish Giant." Mostly, the participants used the strategy of visualizing in order to clarify their understanding while paraphrasing what

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they read. For instance, after she read the following sentence, "It was a large lovely garden, with soft green grass," Jeong mentioned, "Wow, I can picture all the kids playing cheerfully in the huge beautiful garden. It must be flowering all over the place. What a paradise!"

It is striking that capital letters impeded Jeong's comprehension process. When she identified unknown words in the all capitalized notice-board within the text, "TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED," she got confounded and used the strategy of changing capital letters into small letters. On the other hand, in predicting the story line, Yoo used the strategy of applying intertextuality in that he connected the plot to knowledge acquired from his prior reading experiences:

> Based on the similar storybooks that I've read, I would assume that at the next stop sign, the children might come to the giant's garden and beg him to allow them to enter it. Or the real king's pageant might be passing by the giant's garden. Otherwise, it might turn out that spring has come only in his dream, not in reality. (Yoo, think-aloud 1, stop sign 3)

TABLE 6

Distinctive Strategies Participants Employed for Guggenheim Museum U.S.A.

Proficient Readers	
Yoo	Using the illustrations, Applying graphophonics, Recognizing text structure, Breaking lexical items into parts
Eun	Using the illustrations
Less-Proficient Readers	
Jeong	Using the illustrations, Applying graphophonics, Breaking lexical items into parts, Writing vocabulary definitions in Korean, Invoking background knowledge
Kim	Using the illustrations, Applying graphophonics, Recognizing text structure

Table 6 displayed distinctive strategies that the participants generated while reading "Guggenheim Museum U.S.A." Using the illustrations was the only strategy used by all the participants. While "The Selfish Giant" did not include any illustration, "Guggenheim Museum U.S.A." included pictures of the exterior and the interior layouts of the Guggenheim Museum. Since none of the participants have visited the museum in New York, the participants carefully took the illustrations into account both in exploring the theme of the text and in unlocking the meaning of unknown vocabulary. While Eun did not employ any other strategy, Yoo demonstrated the additional strategies of applying graphophonics, recognizing text structure, and breaking lexical items into parts. Likewise, Jeong employed applying graphophonics and breaking lexical items into parts along with writing vocabulary definitions in Korean and invoking background knowledge. Kim also employed applying graphophonics along with recognizing text

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structure. In short, applying graphophonics was the second most popular among the distinctive strategies used in "Guggenheim Museum U.S.A." That is, the participants applied graphophonics in attempting to determine the meaning of the following unknown words. Words from the text are in parentheses, preceded by the participants' guesses as to their meanings: district (distract), wall (well), obtain/observe (obstinacy), and invert (insert). As shown, however, the strategy of applying graphophonics gave rise to incorrect meanings.

Jeong implemented the strategy of writing vocabulary definitions in Korean when she got overwhelmed with many unknown words. She said, "I found quite a few unknown words here. So I put Korean definitions underneath English words that I know for sure. That way, I can make a distinction between known and unknown words and identify which words I have to figure out." Finally, the strategy of breaking lexical items into parts was also in the service of determining the meaning of unknown vocabulary:

> I circled "co-exhibitors." Let's see... co is a prefix that denotes the state of *being together*, and exhibit means *display* or *present*. Or is a suffix that refers to a person. S is added to make nouns plural. Then "co-exhibitors" might mean people that display or present something together. (Jeong, think-aloud 2, stop sign 1)

V. CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this case study was to investigate proficient and less-proficient EFL readers' perceptions and experiences about English reading task. The proficient EFL readers judged themselves to be good readers, while the less-proficient EFL readers judged themselves to be fair readers. The proficient EFL readers' experiences of being immersed in reading authentic materials abroad appeared to contribute to enhancing their reading proficiency. None of the participants were, however, content with their reading proficiency and felt that they still have to develop their reading skills further. All of them believed that unknown vocabulary was the major impediment to reading comprehension. Thus, a strong vocabulary store was perceived to be a prerequisite to becoming better readers. Moreover, the proficient EFL readers pointed out extensive reading and working on English language skills books, as helpful for improving their reading ability, while the less-proficient EFL readers recommended mastering grammar rules, watching English channels, and exercising oral reading. Except Kim, the participants viewed comprehension as the major concern during text

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processing. They were drawn to authentic materials that are entertaining but not too demanding or long.

Another question to be investigated was how the participants interacted with English texts. The results revealed that both the proficient and the less-proficient EFL readers employed a multistrategic approach to reading both the narrative and expository texts. The think-aloud data demonstrated that EFL reading is an active process which entails an ongoing cycle of sampling, predicting, testing, and confirming (Goodman, 1971). Unlike their perceptions, unknown vocabulary did not significantly impede their reading comprehension. The majority of their strategy use was in conjunction with comprehension, but using context clues, invoking background knowledge, and using the illustrations were also employed in the service of determining the meaning of unknown vocabulary along with changing capital letters into small letters, applying graphophonics, and breaking lexical items into parts. The participants were more likely to tolerate ambiguity and predict the content when reading the narrative text than the expository text. All in all, there was no set of strategies that distinguished proficient EFL readers from less-proficient EFL readers. Regardless of the genre of the text, the participants employed similar strategies, a result consistent with the findings of Anderson (1991). It should be noted, however, that when identifying problems, the proficient EFL readers used strategies more "effectively" than the less-proficient EFL readers. Therefore, proficient EFL readers were better able to provide satisfactory solutions.

In brief, the importance of this research may be appreciated as showing classroom teachers a glimpse of EFL readers' perceptions and reading processing behaviors toward texts of different genres. Nevertheless, limitations should be acknowledged for future investigations. First, this research consisted of two proficient EFL readers and two less-proficient EFL readers, and three of them were female, and compared only two texts (i.e., narrative and expository). Thus, the findings might not be generalizable to the EFL community at large. This research should be replicated with a balanced large subject pool of mixed levels, and a wide range of genres (e.g., articles, newspapers, or novels). Future research could also examine the interaction between the reading purpose and the reading strategies. For instance, the strategies that EFL readers employed while taking a standardized reading comprehension test might be different from the ones that they employed while reading for entertainment. Likewise, it would be worthwhile to explore if EFL readers' comprehension scores vary according to the genres of texts. Additional research concerning these perspectives would be of great interest and value in knowing the role of strategies and their effect on reading comprehension. All this information

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allows teachers to better understand what EFL readers are doing while they are involved in reading tasks (Anderson, 1991).

VI. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this case study propose the following pedagogical implications for EFL classroom teachers. Students' perceptions about EFL reading influence the way they interact with text. Thus, reading instruction should be implemented to teach students that the goal of reading centers on comprehension, not the linguistic features in which the text is conveyed. As one viable option, students should be exposed to authentic texts in addition to textbooks. As Hudson (1991) indicates, texts need to be chosen for content rather than their appropriateness for practice in a certain structure or skill; explicit reading skill instruction may be inefficient. When students read a modified or simplified text, they may construct strategies that might be appropriate for these texts but that are not applicable to unaltered texts. While reading authentic materials, students would get a chance to implement a variety of cognitive strategies such as using context clues, predicting, invoking prior knowledge, and making inferences to facilitate comprehension In other words, they could apply all the resources available to them instead of simply relying on dictionaries.

Successful EFL reading does not require students to focus on words. In order to teach students to get the gist of text rather than pay attention to vocabulary, teachers should provide them with meaning-centered activities and assignments (e.g., summary, discussion, and reading log). As an effective way of strategy use training, students can be directed to read texts which include unfamiliar cultural references, newspaper articles, or textbook chapters which presuppose content-specific information, without stumbling. Next, students can be invited to talk over what strategies they employed to deal with these problems and the concepts they constructed in regard to the unknown referent using context clues. That way, students would be able to determine successful use of a certain strategy and realize that meaning construction results from a multistrategic approach to reading (Anderson, 1991; Wurr, 1998).

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: Major & Year: Age: TOEIC Score:

Directions: Please read each question carefully and answer it in Korean. Detailed answers would be appreciated.

1. How do you judge yourself as an EFL reader? Explain why.
   excellent_____ good_____ fair_____ poor_____
2. How did you learn to read in English?
3. What are your favorite types of English reading materials?
4. What do you consider when selecting English reading materials?
5. What do you focus on the most when reading English texts?
6. Please describe your strengths and weaknesses as an EFL reader?
7. What do you think you have to do to become a better EFL reader?
8. When you get to something you don't understand while reading, what do you do to fix it up?

INTERVIEW

1. Tell me about your beliefs and preferences about reading in English?
2. Explain your experiences of learning to read in English.
3. Is there anybody who really helped you improve your English reading skills?

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4. How do you approach English texts?
5. What are the most useful reading strategies to you?
6. What will be the best way to improve your English reading skills?
7. Do you feel secure when it comes to reading in English?
8. What types of English texts are difficult for you to read?
9. What types of English texts are easy for you to read?
10. What are the criteria for you to judge reading difficulty about an English text?
11. While reading in English, what is your main concern?
12. Do you know any fluent English reader around you? How can you tell? What do you think makes him/her a fluent English reader?
13. What makes something difficult to read?
14. What kinds of activities and assignments do you expect your instructor to provide in your English reading class?
15. What is your purpose of reading English materials?

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

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