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A Study of Reading Strategies Using Task-Based Strategy Assessment*

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Abstract

In the present study, an exploratory approach (Oxford, Cho, Leung & Kim, 2004) to language learning is adopted which holds that the number and type of strategies used by Iranian learners might vary with respect to the difficulty of task and their L2 proficiency. In this regard, the term task is defined, its leading dimensions and characteristics are put forward, and the nature of learning strategies is touched upon. In consequence, a new direction of strategy assessment; namely, task-based strategy assessment is focused on to investigate the relationship between task presence and difficulty and the use of reading strategies. The employment of reading strategies was perused via a strategy-frequency questionnaire in which the subjects themselves reported their strategy use after completing some language tasks. The results revealed that neither task difficulty or proficiency level alone, nor their interaction had a statistically significant effect on the reported frequency of reading strategy use.

Key words: Task difficulty, Task-based strategy assessment, Strategy-frequency questionnaire.

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1. Introduction

The development of task as a newly introduced cornerstone in language classrooms is rooted in changes against the Audiolingual method and its decline in 1960s, and also in the emphasis put on meaningful communication by researchers and curriculum designers. Numerous factors such as an ever-increasing need to communicate and students' failure in putting their acquired knowledge into use in real life situations culminated in the establishment of CLT approach in which the major trend was towards communication. In this regard, focus on task can be viewed as a logical development of CLT or according to some commentators within CLT because task as a unit of presentation and practice gives learners a stimulation opportunity to learn and practice in real contexts. This has been considered as one of the most promising reasons of task's undeniable importance.

At the present time, the issue of integrating skills has come under the spotlight of many researchers involved in the field of second language learning. In traditional approaches to language teaching, however, a single skill along with its different aspects has been the center of attention. In other words, language skills have been considered as discrete items in such a way that some researchers preferred to use the term synthetic or process syllabus in classroom (Wilkins, 1976; Bruton, 2002).

Conversely, task-based approaches and their different contexts of uses as pre-tasks and post-tasks (Skehan, 2007) have the capability to integrate different language skills based on an analytic procedure as opposed to the synthetic one, and in this way they immerse students in real life communication. In actual facts, in an analytic procedure we are working through language not on language.

On the other hand, task can be of invaluable importance to those researchers interested in the cognitive processes the learners go through and the strategies they employ. The reason is that, compared with the traditional approaches which are mostly form-focused, task can better boost learning processes. Further, the significance of task can be psychologically perused. Proceeding through the effects of motivation on performing an activity, however, is beyond the scope of the present study; hence it seems to be enough to mention that the motivation of completing a task and reaching the desired outcome

undoubtedly play a crucial role in getting students involved in classroom activities and also in the effectiveness of the task per se.

2. Task components

The points discussed so far are just some important issues to consider in a comprehensive account of the characteristics of task, while many others as arousing motivation, intensive verbal interaction, encouraging collaboration, etc. are left open for future research. Whereas the significance of task is unanimously approbated, there are discrepancies mainly about its various aspects and components, its optimal implementation, and consequently a clear, widely accepted definition of the term.

Various components of task, for example, have been regarded differently by many commentators. Wright in 1987 attributes two main elements to task; namely, input data and instructional questions; "...instructional questions which ask, demand or even invite learners (or teachers) to perform operations in input data. The data itself may be provided by teaching material or teachers or learners. I shall term this limited set of tasks instructional tasks" (p. 48). Nunan (1989) distinguishes task components as input, activities and goals. Particular attention has also been given to what Ellis (2003) believes to be the actual components of task which are goal, input, condition, procedure and predicted outcome (process and product). Having covered the previous assertions about task components, Ellis presents several other aspects in his analysis worth mentioning here. Goal, in Ellis's terms, serves the purpose of the designer when the learner performs a task. It can be considered that goal hereby is different from outcome in that achieving the outcome does not guarantee the fulfillment of the task designer's goal. For instance, in a "spot-the-difference" task in which learners are supposed to verbally express the differences between two relatively similar pictures, they may complete the task yet by a non-verbal means such as coloring. Input is defined as the information or instruction required to perform a task, and can be taken into account from different viewpoints, for example in terms of genre (TV show, diary, newspaper, etc.) or modality (spoken, written, graphs, etc.). Condition, Ellis states, is the general state of task, for example its authenticity, difficulty, and so on. Task conditions have been examined by Robinson (2001, 2007) and Rahimpour & Hazar (2008)

with respect to their effects on amount of learner production, interaction and feedback. These kinds of tasks are referred as “participation variables” such as open and closed tasks, one-way and two-way tasks, and convergent and divergent tasks.

Procedure refers to the way a task is implemented, for example via pair- or group-work activities. This, however, must be distinguished from the concept of procedure introduced by Richards and Rodgers (2001) as the way of managing a task-based class. In task-based classes, task is considered as “syllabus specifier” i.e. language is analyzed in terms of tasks assuming behavioral objectives.

Two issues are dealt with in examining the predicted outcome; process and product. Process refers to the cognitive processes which the students go through. Product, on the other hand, refers to what discussed earlier as the outcome by which task is evaluated. Generally speaking, there seems to be no clear demarcation between the terms goal and process in the analysis of task components carried out by Ellis.

3. Task categorization

In order to have a more complete grasp of the various definitions of task, we had better first go through some relevant categorizations.

3.1. Real-world versus pedagogic

The simplest categorization of task defines real-world, target tasks as activities that students are likely to come across with in real life situations. Examples are answering a phone call or retelling a story. Long (1985) provides the following definition of task:

"A piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of task include painting a fence, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, weighing a patient, sorting letters, taking a hotel reservation, writing a cheque, finding a street destination and helping someone across a road. In other words, by ‘task’ is meant a hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between. Tasks are the things people will tell you they do if you ask them, and they are not applied linguists" (P. 89).

Skehan (1996) also states that “a task is taken to be an activity in which meaning is primary; there is some sort of relationship to the real

world; task completion has some priority; and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome” (p. 38).

Contrastingly, it is pedagogic tasks that form the nucleus of the classroom activities and teach the activities presented as real-world tasks. Some typical pedagogic tasks, according to Ellis (2003), are information-gap tasks, reasoning-gap tasks, personal tasks, and role-play tasks. In a relevant sense, Nunan (1989) defines task as “the smallest unit of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language. Minimally, tasks will contain some form of data or input (this might be verbal, e.g. a dialogue or reading passage, or nonverbal, e.g. a picture sequence). The task will also have (implicitly or explicitly) a goal and roles for teachers and learners” (p. 5). Furthermore, if teachers are going to implement a task, they need to consider its conditions including the use of interactional feedback thorough form-focused or meaning-focused approaches (Fotos & Nassaji, 2007; Rahimpour & Hazar, 2008).

3.2. High stakes versus low stakes

An important aspect of external pressure concerns whether the task is perceived as a low- or high-stakes task. In a high-stakes task, such as taking an English competency examination for graduation, there is more anxiety as compared with the low-stakes, relaxed one in which much less stress is expected during the task. Those learners who tend to be anxious anyway may become particularly tense while doing a high-stakes task (Oxford et al., 2004).

3.3. Form-focused versus meaning-focused

Getting the ideas across to the cost of the accurate form of the message has been widely prevalent in many language classrooms. Skehan (1996) and Skehan & Foster (2007) in criticizing this approach, assert that teachers having a more focus on the flow of conversation and preferring it to correctness, and learners being equipped with communication, comprehension and compensation strategies will underestimate the leading role that form plays in enhancing the linguistic competence resulting in the interlanguage fossilization, and hence the insufficiency of sheer focus on meaning to achieve full native-like competence. However, we may find some

tasks with the sole focus on form. Nassaji and Fotos (2004), for example, state that:

There are three types of structure-based tasks to promote learner awareness and practice of target forms; 1) structure-based production tasks in which the form is required to complete early communication activities, 2) comprehension tasks in which learners must attend to and comprehend target forms in carefully structured input, and 3) conscious-raising tasks in which learners communicate with each other about target grammar structures” (p. 135).

3.4. Focused versus unfocused

Students, in completing an unfocused task, are allowed to choose among some different forms to produce the desired message, i.e. the production of a specific form is not intended by task designers. On the contrary, in focused tasks, some particular linguistic feature must be produced.

Tasks have also been categorized into divergent (multiple-task-goal) and convergent (single-task-goal) by Duff (1980) who believes that convergent tasks engage acquisition process more efficiently. It is worth mentioning that the categories discussed so far should be viewed as a continuum along which various degrees of focus are put by students.

4. Task definition

As it was mentioned earlier, to utilize the notion of task, we need to describe what we mean by the term. Almost anything can be used as the basis of a task such as dialogues, public announcements, newspaper headlines, telephone directions, and so forth (Nunan, 1989). However, a sound definition of task, according to many commentators, must be compatible with the area in which language is approached; task is defined differently in SLA and pedagogy. Carroll (1993) in discussing cognitive abilities defines task as “any activity in which a person engages, given an appropriate setting, in order to achieve a specifiable class of objectives” (p. 8), emphasizing on two aspects of tasks; namely, the achieved result and the assessment criterion. Willis (1996) in defining task emphasizes on the use of target language for a communicative purpose to achieve the desired outcome.

Bachman and Palmer (2000) define a language use task as “an activity that involves individuals in using language for the purpose of achieving a particular goal or objective in a particular situation”. This definition includes “both the specific activity and the situation in which it takes place” (p. 44). Due to the important role of communication in task-based language teaching, Littlewood (2004) believes that “defining a task ranges along a continuum based on the emphasis it puts on communication” (p. 2). Here, three kinds of tasks are presented:

- 1) For some writers tasks are activities in which communication is not an essential criterion.
- 2) For some writers tasks are activities in which communication is an important element.
- 3) And for some others tasks are activities that involve communication.

To sum up so far, task can be viewed as an activity which requires learners to use language to accomplish an objective. Counterintuitively, however, there are some reasons that have convinced some commentators to disapprove using the term “task-based approach”. These include its various and sometimes controversial definitions, its development within CLT, its confinement in the teaching circle, just to name a few. Nonetheless, taking the present experiential evidence as well as the diverse definitions, we can enumerate some common features for task which will assist us in presenting a comprehensive account of the term. According to Ellis (2003), tasks are work plans and goal directed; the primary focus is on meaning, there is a real world process of language use, and they engage a cognitive process and lead to communication outcome.

Skehan (1998) puts forward five key characteristics of task:

- Meaning is primary
- Learners are not given other people’s meaning to regurgitate
- There is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities
- Task completion has some priority
- The assessment of the task is in terms of outcome

5. Learning strategies

So far the task and its components have been defined regarding the perspectives offered by leading researchers in the field. Based on the

relations exist between the kinds of tasks selected and their corresponding strategies used by the learners to perform the tasks, some introductory remarks need to be made on the strategies.

"Learning strategies or instructional strategies" are the various methodologies used to involve learners in the training program. Put it simply, Learning strategies refer to methods that students use to learn. Oxford (1990) defines language learning strategies as "steps taken by students to enhance their own learning" (p. 1), and more specifically as "actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (p. 8), classifying them into cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, affective and social strategies. Strategy use may hinge upon many diverse factors such as level of proficiency, gender, academic major, learning style, and so forth.

Research into various aspects of learning strategy use started in 1960s, and since a considerable amount of work has been carried out in this area. Good surveys in this field are provided by Wenden and Rubin (1987), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990), Ellis (1994), Cohen (1998), and Chamot (2005), just to name a few.

Rubin (1987), for example, suggests that there are three major types of strategies used by learners contributing to language learning; learning strategies, communication strategies and social strategies.

Oxford (1990: 9) provides twelve features of language learning strategies which are as follow:

- They contribute to the main goal, communicative competence.
- They allow learners to become more self-directed.
- They expand the role of teachers.
- They are problem oriented.
- They are specific actions taken by the learner.
- They involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive.
- They support learning both directly and indirectly.
- They are not always observable.
- They are often conscious.
- They can be taught.
- They are flexible.
- They are influenced by a variety of factors.

Najar (1998) asserts that "Learning strategies provide the learner with a framework for independent efforts and learners can apply well-

established learning strategies across content and skill areas, for example, mathematics, science, reading, writing, and language learning. For example, a student may use mnemonic devices such as the phrase "RoY G. BIV" to remember the colors in the rainbow (i.e., Red, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, and Violet)" (p. 1).

According to some researchers, successful learners are indeed good strategy users and the appropriate use of strategies leads to superior task performance i.e. getting the maximum benefit with the minimum effort (Najar, 1998). He, for example, believes that one of the most important characteristics of a successful learner is taking charge of learning; "More importantly, successful learners are able to apply appropriate learning strategies and this leads to effective learning, for example, learners who use appropriate learning strategies such as highlighting key ideas and taking notes remember more from a study session than those who do not" (p. 1). Najar categorizes learning strategy use in reading comprehension into four subgroups of own style, full translation, vocabulary identification, and none. Own style is defined as a study technique such as underlining, highlighting, numbering points; full translation is defined as rewriting the passage into the learners' L1; vocabulary identification is defined by the definitions of words; and none, which means that no evidence of study is found (Najar, 1998: 4). Besides, Najar states that "as responsible educators, we need to concern ourselves with the "how to" of learning as well as the "what" or content materials; incorporating strategy instruction into SL classroom teaching has the benefit of promoting a way of thinking, a way of approaching a learning task or similar problematic situations in our students" (p. 9). According to Schmeck (1981), context and task influence learning styles of native speakers of English. Many individuals can change their strategies in response to the unique contextual demands of the instruction, context, and culture (Mollae & Fazilatfar, 2005). In a recent study, Ikeda and Takeuchi (2000) examined the effect of the presence or absence of an actual task on reported reading strategy use. They found that having students complete a task significantly affected the reporting of reading strategies. Besides, Task difficulty appeared to have a significant impact on the types and frequencies of reported strategy use.

6. The study

This study partially follows Oxford et. al. (2004) study. However, avoiding the confounding variables of gender, academic major, and proficiency, an attempt has been made to investigate the relationship between task presence and difficulty as one of the most important factors in task performance and the use of reading strategies. Therefore, the study is concerned with both learning strategies and task-based research. It seems there is a significant dearth of research in this area, even though, a lot of research has been done on the effects of task-based techniques on the development of different language skills (khomeijani & Khaghani Nejad, 2009; Haghighi, 2004).

In the present study, a new direction of strategy assessment is pursued which is task-based strategy assessment (Cohen 1998; Hsiao and Oxford 2002). Here, the students' strategies are investigated as they are working on a particular task because it is believed that the respondents have to consider their strategy use with reference to the type and difficulty of the task, and different tasks require the use of different strategies as learners do use different strategies when reading a novel as compared to a math textbook. Based on Cohen (1998), responding to a strategy questionnaire without actually doing an L2 task, the learners might become less accurate about their actual behavior, and over- or under-report the frequency of strategy use because of memory problems or some other issues.

Therefore, it is expected that the reported strategies by high-proficiency respondents will outnumber those by the low-proficiency ones, the presence and the difficulty of task being influential. However, it is worth mentioning that according to Cohen (1998), "the total number of strategies used and the frequency of use of each strategy are not necessarily indicators of how successful students will be on a specific language task" (p. 8-9).

In sum, the employment of reading strategies is pursued in this study via a strategy-frequency questionnaire in which the respondents themselves report their strategy use. The following questions are addressed in the study:

1. What is the relationship between students' level of proficiency and the number of strategies used?
2. What is the effect of task condition on reading strategy frequency?

6.1. Participants and instruments

36 Persian-speaking learners of English (all male) of various academic backgrounds in an institute in Yazd participated in this study; the age range was 18 to 30 with the mean age of 22. Based on their TOFEL scores participants were assigned to two levels of high- and low-proficiency groups.

Two reading passages were the main material used in this study. They were actually used to stand for two task conditions namely easy task condition and difficult task condition. The difficulty of these reading passages was determined in terms of readability based on the Flesch Reading Ease Scale applied by Oxford et al (2004). The Flesch Reading Ease Scale is given to text on a 100-point scale; the higher the score the easier it is to understand the document. The Flesch indicates for the reading passages in the study were 74.2 for the easy passage and 39.8 for the difficult passage (Oxford et al., 2004, p.19). Research data were gleaned through a modified version of self report Reading Strategy Questionnaire (RSQ). The questionnaire consisted of 35 reading strategy items developed by Oxford et al (2004). A Likert scale on 0 (almost never) to 5 (almost always) was used to record the responses.

6.2. Data collection procedure

The participants were given the questionnaire and they were encouraged to respond quickly although no time limit was set. They were asked not to carefully analyze what they thought their response should be. Responses were returned to the researchers personally. The questionnaire was administered 3 times. At first they were asked to complete the questionnaire and no reading task being accomplished. After a one-week interval, the same questionnaire was administered but this time the easy passage preceded. They were asked to complete the questionnaire considering their performance on the easy reading task in which they were required to read a 5-paragraph essay and to answer the 5 upcoming comprehension questions. The same procedure was followed a week later substituting the easy essay with a difficult 5-paragraph essay.

6.3. Data analysis procedure

In order to answer the research questions regarding the main effects or interaction effects of the two independent variables; namely, task

condition and proficiency levels, repeated measures of analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. In other words, the ANOVA was supposed to tell us whether the reported mean frequency of strategy use was significantly different across the three task conditions (i.e., the main effect for task conditions), whether the reported mean frequency of strategy use was significantly different across the two proficiency levels (i.e., the main effect for proficiency levels), and whether the high-proficiency group and the low-proficiency group reported different mean frequencies of strategy use across the three task conditions (i.e., effect of the interaction between task conditions and proficiency levels).

As such, the task conditions (no task, easy task and difficult task) served as a within-subjects factor since the overall reported frequency of strategy use was measured repeatedly for all the participants across the three different conditions, and the proficiency level (high and low) served as a between-subjects factor because the reported frequency of strategy use was also measured for the two groups, where each group had a different proficiency level.

7. Results and discussion

As for the preliminary statistical analysis, means and standard deviations of proficiency groups across the three task conditions are presented. As table 1 shows, in the low-proficiency group, the reported frequency of strategy use in the No Task condition (mean= 2.91, SD=1.53) was higher than in the Easy Task condition (mean=2.86, SD=1.49) or than in the Difficult Task condition (mean= 2.73, SD = 1.42). Thus, low proficiency learners' overall strategy use appeared to decrease across the three task conditions.

Similarly, for the high-proficiency group, the reported frequency of strategy use in the No Task condition (mean= 2.85, SD=1.73) was higher than in the Easy Task condition (mean= 2.54, SD= 1.66) or than in the Difficult Task condition (mean=2.61, SD=1.80). High-proficiency learners' overall strategy use also seemed to decline across the three task conditions, in spite of the slight increase in the mean of the reported strategies in the difficult task (2.61) as compared with the easy one (2.54).

Accordingly, all students regardless of their language proficiency levels appeared to follow more or less the same pattern of strategy use in three different tasks, i.e. they used more strategies in no task job and respectively less strategies in easy and difficult tasks.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of proficiency groups across No Task, Easy Task and Difficult Task conditions

Proficiency		No Task	Easy Task	Difficult Task
Low-proficiency group	Mean	2.91	2.86	2.73
	N	22	22	22
	Std. Deviation	1.53	1.49	1.42
High-proficiency group	Mean	2.85	2.54	2.61
	N	14	14	14
	Std. Deviation	1.73	1.66	1.80
Total	Mean	2.80	2.66	2.63
	N	36	36	36
	Std. Deviation	1.65	1.60	1.63

To find out whether these differences were statistically significant, repeated measures ANOVA was used demonstrating that despite a marginal difference, there was no significant main effects for the two independent variables; that is to say, the overall reported mean frequency of strategy use did not differ significantly across the three task conditions ($F=1.203$ $P=.305$), nor did the total reported mean frequency of strategy use differ significantly across the two proficiency levels ($F=2.886$ $P=.092$). The results of the repeated measure of ANOVA on the mean frequency of the strategy use also revealed that there was not any statistically significant interaction effect between task condition and proficiency levels ($F= .418$, $P=.660$), as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Main effects and interaction effects of task conditions (i.e., No Task, Easy Task, and Difficult Task) and proficiency levels

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	2196.376(a)	5	439.275	1.173	.328
Intercept	955714.586	1	955714.586	2552.233	.000
Task Condition	900.826	2	450.413	1.203	.305
Proficiency Level	1080.809	1	1080.809	2.886	.092
Task Condition * Proficiency Level	312.826	2	156.413	.418	.660
Error	38195.143	102	374.462		
Total	1060836.000	108			
Corrected Total	40391.519	107			

The absence of a significant interaction effect between task condition and proficiency level can also be seen in Figure 1, illustrating the fact that the two proficiency groups were not so much different in terms of the overall mean reported frequency of strategy use across the three task conditions.

It is worth mentioning here that although, in the repeated measures ANOVA, the total reported mean frequency of strategy use did not differ significantly across the two proficiency levels, we, considering $p = .092$, can claim that if we had more students participating in the study, we would probably have achieved a significant difference. That is because befitting many exploratory studies, the significance level of $p < .10$ could also be deemed appropriate. The reason we call this inquiry an exploratory study is that it is one of the few existing investigations on task-based strategy assessment, and also as a number of variables were supposed to be closely controlled; this is necessarily a small-scale study.

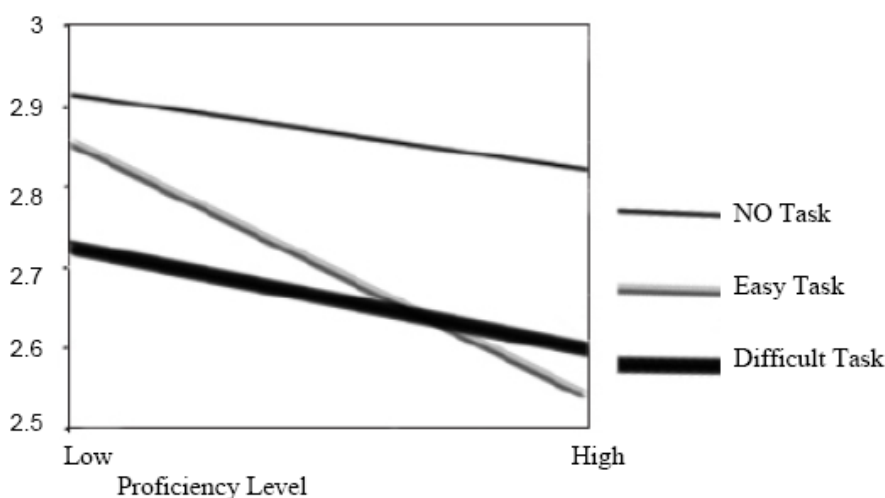


Figure 1. Graph of the interactions between task conditions (i.e., No Task, Easy Task, or Difficulty Task) and proficiency levels (high or low)

It is also worth noting that in spite of not being statistically significant, there was a slight decrease in the reported strategy use by high proficiency learners as compared to their low proficiency counterparts, lending support to Cohen's assertion, noted earlier, that the total number of strategies used is not necessarily the key indicator

of how successful students are on a specific language task; Low-proficiency learners might have used a number of strategies without taking into account how well these strategies would help accomplish the task goal. On the contrary, high proficiency learners in this study might have used only those strategies that fitted the demands of the task. In other words, facing greater difficulty comprehending the text, lower proficiency respondents used more strategies and with greater frequency. Encountering the reading passage, high proficiency learners did not find it a serious obstacle; therefore, they didn't feel the need to employ as many strategies as did low-proficiency learners.

8. Conclusion and implications

The result achieved by this study can be interpreted from multiple perspectives. Before encountering a task, students often think they would use different strategies to accomplish it, but when it comes to practice, the reverse turns out to be true. One way to interpret this result is to extend the notion of competence versus performance to the issue of using strategies by Iranian learners of English. What can be suggested is the presence of competence and performance levels in the process of using strategies by students. The first task, consisting only of strategy use report with no reading passage included can reflect the students' competence. However, contrary to the general meaning of competence it is not the same for every individual in being equipped with the capability of using strategies. In this study, when the students are asked to report their use of strategies while no task was given to be accomplished, it came out that the reported number of strategies was greater than what was actually achieved when they were presented with either easy or difficult task. This shows that potentially they have the capability of using strategies but the result of the two following tasks does not show the actual use of the strategies in practice.

But why aren't students able to use what they are endowed upon? It seems that it can be due to the lack of "strategy training". Just like learners need some exposure to language to acquire it as their first language, they need to learn strategies if they want to use them. That is why if the same study is replicated in another context (with a different educational system from Iran's) different results might be achieved. In the educational context of the subjects of the study it seems that most of the teachers do not try or are not asked to teach

students the way they can use different strategies, whereas, a great deal of research in L1 and L2 fields has shown that learning will be facilitated by making students aware of the range of strategies from which they can choose during language use, and the most effective way to enhance learner awareness in this regard is to instruct them how to appropriately apply language learning strategies in the target language context, and hence the rationale for more research into this field (Carrell, 1985; Pearson & Fielding, 1991).

A main point to mention is that, although using various learning strategies is considered very important in reading and interpreting a text, it is not necessarily the key indicator of how successful students are in interpreting the text and achieving their learning goals. There are some other factors such as students' knowledge of grammar, the amount of vocabulary they know and their learning experiences that reflect their real capability when coping with, in this case, a reading passage, this being evident when the TOFEL test was administered to classify the students into two groups of proficiency, and the reported strategies by the low proficiency group outnumbered those reported by their high proficiency counterparts.

It is also to be noted that, most of the time, the literature has separately identified task difficulty and proficiency level as possible influences on learners' strategy use. It can be claimed that that both these variables are needed to be taken into consideration simultaneously, even though, their interaction did not seem to have a significant effect on the learners' reported strategies in the present case study.

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Appendix A: Easy Task

Instructions: Please read the following passage, and circle the one best answer to each question.

Culture and Learning Styles

The way each student likes to learn is called a “learning style”. Culture makes a difference in learning styles.

For example, many Navajo children often learn first by observing and listening. Later they get help from adults. This way the children learn what they need to learn. Navajo children speak very little while learning.

Many African-American children learn best by speaking and performing. They like classroom activities that use talking. They like to speak in front of the class. They like to act in plays. They like to do skits.

Another way to learn is through reading and writing. This involves learning through sight, in other words, visual learning. Most Asian students learn best when there is lots of reading. Many Japanese students write down the spelling of words in order to see them. Koreans are probably the most visual learners. They are more visual than U.S. students.

So, culture influences learning styles, and learning styles affect learning.

1. What is the main idea of the passage?
 - A. Culture is the key to successful learning.
 - B. Culture has an influence on one’s learning style.
 - C. Navajos learn differently from African-Americans.
 - D. Learning styles are the most important thing in learning.
2. How do many Navajo children start to learn?
 - A. By reading
 - B. By speaking
 - C. By observing
 - D. By performing
3. Which one would most African-American children *not* enjoy while learning?
 - A. Skits
 - B. Plays
 - C. Dictations
 - D. Presentations

4. If a student refers to learn in a very visual way, the student really enjoys:
- A. acting
 - B. talking
 - C. reading
 - D. listening
5. Based on the passage, which statement is true?
- A. Reading is the best way to learn.
 - B. Students in the U.S. are not visual learners.
 - C. Different learning styles influence how children learn best.
 - D. African-American children learn best among all the children.

Appendix B: Difficult Task

Instructions: Please read the following passage, and circle the one best answer to each question

Learning Styles and Strategies

Learning styles, the overall patterns that give general direction to a student's learning behavior, have a tremendous influence on learning. Learning styles are important because they influence how a person learns the new material. They also help determine the strategies students use. Strategies are the specific behaviors or thoughts that learners consciously employ to improve their learning. We will show here how learning styles and learning strategies go together.

Three of the most influential components of learning styles are: global versus analytic, impulsive versus reflective, and intuitive-random versus concrete-sequential. A key dimension appears to be global versus analytic. The global learner begins with the whole picture, while the analytic learner begins with the separate parts and puts them together to make a whole. Global learners use strategies that involve larger context, such as predicting or guessing from the context, avoiding details, and basing judgments on personal relationships rather than logic. Analytic learners like strategies that are aimed at attaining precision and accuracy, searching for small details or contrasts, and using logic.

Another aspect of learning style concerns impulsiveness versus reflection. Impulsive students are fast but inaccurate. They use strategies that involve quick and uncritical acceptance of their initial impressions. Overly impulsive students can be prone to making many errors, and they do not take the time to correct them. On the other hand, reflective students are slow and accurate. They prefer strategies

that involve systematic investigation of their initial impressions. If their initial impressions are wrong, they take the time to make corrections. That is why their work shows fewer errors.

Another important dimension is intuitive-random versus concrete-sequential. An intuitive- random learner likes to have the freedom to start anywhere in a lesson and move back and forth at will. This learner enjoys using strategies that allow many possibilities or choices and prefers abstract presentations rather than concrete presentations. In contrast, a concrete-sequential student prefers step-by-step, systematic lessons. This kind of learner likes to be told one way to do things and prefers a concrete presentation of material that involves various senses (e.g., sound, movement, sight, and touch).

Both teachers and learners should understand that general learning style preferences are linked with specific learning strategies. If a student's learning style preferences cause him to use strategies that are *not* helpful for a given learning task, then he might need to learn some new strategies, even though they might not fit comfortably with his favored learning style. For instance, if a global student is expected to read a passage in order to identify the detailed arguments in a debate, then he might need to use strategies that involve a detailed, logical search for contrasts – strategies that might be more comfortable for an analytic-style student.

1. What is the main idea of the passage?
 - A. Learning styles are composed of a number of dimensions.
 - B. It is not possible for learners to discover their learning style.
 - C. Learning styles are associated with strategies, and both affect learning.
 - D. Global learners are better than analytic learners in learning new material.

2. According to this passage, what type of learners enjoys an abstract way of presentation of new material?
 - A. analytic
 - B. reflective
 - C. intuitive-random
 - D. concrete-sequential

3. Which one of the following is not mentioned as a reason why learning styles are important?
- A. They determine students' learning strategies.
 - B. They affect how students learn new material.
 - C. They are related to the individual student's culture.
 - D. They give overall direction to students' learning behavior.
4. Based on the passage, which statement can be inferred?
- A. Impulsive learners are usually fast and accurate.
 - B. Global learners would mostly likely be concrete-sequential.
 - C. Analytic learners have a lot in common with reflective learners.
 - D. Intuitive-random learners want someone to tell them what to do.
5. For the most effective learning to occur, which one is not suggested by the author?
- A. Learners should know their own learning styles.
 - B. Teachers should instruct students in learning strategies.
 - C. Learners should try new strategies if needed for a given task.
 - D. Teachers should be aware of individual differences in learning styles.

Appendix C: Reading Strategy Questionnaire

Your name:

Directions: Show how often you use the strategy when reading, by checking the appropriate box. 0 means "almost never" while 5 means "almost always". It is important to answer in terms of how well each statement describes you, NOT in terms of what you think you should do, or what other people do. THIS IS NOT A TEST. There are no right or wrong responses to these statements. The score you obtain will not affect your grade.

Depending on your language learning experience and needs, you may be using different types of strategies. The learning strategies presented here are general. Not everyone needs the same kind of strategies. A 'low' score does not mean you are a bad learner.

Before I read a text,

1. I use the title to help predict the contents.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

2. I consider what type of text it is, such as a newspaper article, a scientific paper, or a novel.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

3. I skim it first, and later I read for details.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

While I am reading a text,

4. I pay attention to parts of sentences such as phrases and clauses.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

5. I pay attention to the beginning and the end of each paragraph.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

6. I focus on the tense of a verb, such as present tense and past tense.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

7. I try to understand the meaning of every word in a text.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

8. I translate each sentence into my native language.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

9. I start reading from the first paragraph and read all the way through to the last paragraph.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

10. I pay attention to sentence structure, such as subjects and objects.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

11. I continue reading even if I have difficulty.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

12. I change reading speed depending on the difficulty of a text.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

13. I read aloud the difficult parts of a text.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

14. I skip unknown words.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

15. I link the content with what I already know.
Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always
16. I try to understand the meaning of an unknown word by dividing it into parts.
Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always
17. If I don't understand something such as a word or phrase, I guess its meaning using clues from the text.
Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always
18. If I don't understand something such as a word or phrase, I guess its meaning using information I know about the topic.
Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always
19. I check what each pronoun refers to.
Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always
20. I underline important parts.
Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always
21. I mark important parts, using colored pens or drawing stars.
Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always
22. I go over difficult parts several times.
Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always
23. I read aloud the entire text.
Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always
24. I make a picture in my mind about what the text is saying.
Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always
25. I try to understand the meaning without translating the text into my native language.
Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always
26. If I'm having trouble, I go back to previous sentences.
Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always
27. I follow the line I am reading with my finger or my pen.
Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

28. I use slashes to divide a sentence grammatically.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

29. When I cannot understand a sentence even if I know every word, I skip that sentence.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

30. I predict what will come next.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

31. I pay attention to linking words such as “however” and “besides” so that I can understand the structure.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

32. I write down key words.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

33. I try to figure out the main idea of each paragraph.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

34. I read the comprehension questions first and then read the text.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

After I read a text,

35. I summarize it in my own words.

Almost never 0 1 2 3 4 5 Almost always

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