Reading a literary text in EFL: an Exploration into the Literary Reading Strategies used by EFL Learners: A Think-Aloud Prtocol Study

Yamina Belal

University of Mohamed Ben Ahmed, Oran2, Algeria belal.yamina@univ-oran2.dz

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to explore the reading strategies used by EFL learners in reading literary texts to highlight the effective strategies and the less effective ones. The study involved three English major students at the university of Ahmed Ben Mohamed, Oran 2. They were selected according to their academic achievement level: a high achiever (HA), an average achiever (AA), and a low achiever (LA). Before conducting the study, the participants received a training on the think aloud protocol method with the researcher who was also their instructor. The method consisted in asking students to verbalize all their thoughts while they are reading a piece of literary text of medium difficulty. The verbal reports were followed by an interview. The data obtained suggests that these students differ in the strategies they use in reading literature. The study concludes with some recommendations and suggestions for the EFL literature teachers and course designers.

Keywords:

Read-Aloud Protocols; cognitive strategies; metacognitive strategies; literary reading; aesthetic reading.

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* ***Yamina Belal***

1. INTRODUCTION

Compared to the amount of research and the number of volumes conducted and published in the domain of reading strategies (Afflerbach et al.2008; Grabe,2009; Mokhtari, K., & Sheorey, R. (2002)), studies on the nature of literary reading strategies remain limited. There are two main reasons behind this disparity. The first is related to the fact that non-literary texts such as expository texts are the object of study of millions of students, academics and test-takers around the world whereas literary texts are reserved only to the interested minority or those students majoring in language and art. The second reason stems from the controversy around the difference between literary and non-literary reading strategies. Some researchers deny that the strategies used when reading literary texts might be different from those used when reading non-literary reading texts. They argue that literary and non-literary reading involve similar reading strategies. For example Alderson & Bachman (2000) and Brumfit (1986) claim that it is unlikely that competent readers of literature use different types of strategies from the ones they use in informative or academic texts. For example, Alderson and Bachman (2000, p. 60) argue that: "It is unlikely that separate skills for processing literary texts exist"

The argument presented in this study is that while literary and non-literary reading share some common processes, they differ in others. They share both the bottom-up strategies and the top-down strategies related to decoding and making sense of a given written text. However, literature, due to its aesthetic nature involves distinct and higher order strategies. In this sense, Rosenblatt (1978) uses the dichotomy efferent Vs aesthetic attitudes to the reading. In efferent reading, the reader is interested in the information contained in a text; the process of reading is a process of deciphering this information. In contrast, during aesthetic reading, the reader's primary concern is with the process of reading and the experience he/she is living throughout this process, i.e., his/her interaction with the text. If literary reading is an "experience" to be lived and enjoyed as Rosenblatt(1978) argued, then it should involve specific strategies that allow such an experience and enjoyment.

In fact, despite the scarcity of studies related to the cognitive, metacognitive strategies and even affective strategies involved in reading literary texts, the available ones (e.g. Zwaan,1993; Graves & Frederiksen, 1991; Davis, 1992; Corcorans & Evans, 1987; Vipond & Hunt, 1984; Goh, 1991) suggest that literary reading is a complex process that requires full engagement from the reader right from the beginning. Raising a taste or "a response to literature" (Brumfit &Carter, 1986) (the enjoyment and pleasure of literary reading) goes by this very engagement with the literary text. Unveiling the processes that favour this engagement and those that deter it can certainly enlighten educators and course designers into teaching techniques or materials that are susceptible of igniting students' interest in reading literary texts.

The significance of the present study is precisely in bringing a contribution to understanding those literary reading processes used by EFL learners and highlight what prevent their full engagement with literary texts. Particularly, the objective of the study is to mirror the process of reading a piece of literary text as it is carried out by EFL learners in order to highlight the effective and the less effective reading strategies. Since the Algerian EFL classroom is known for the disparity in students' academic achievement, this study aims to highlight the differences between high achievers (HA), average achievers (AA) and low achievers (LA) students in their use of strategies when reading a piece of literary text. Therefore, the main research questions

- How do EFL learners of different academic achievement read a literary text of medium difficulty?

- How do students with different academic ability differ from each other in the type and frequency of the strategies they use?

-How does strategy use affect comprehension and engagement with the literary text?

To answer these research questions, the researcher opted for a read-aloud protocol study which despite its challenges is considered as a "window" to the inner processes of readers. Unlike other qualitative and quantitative studies used in understanding reading comprehension (e.g. Hadj Said, 2023), the read-aloud protocol study is capable of making the

invisible cognitive processes visible, allowing the researcher to identify the real reasons for failure or success in interacting with the text.

Before delving into the details of the study methodology, procedures, and findings, the subsequent section presents an overview of the literature on reading strategies and the specific literary reading strategies

2. Literature review

Literary texts before beings literary are written texts that involves similar decoding and comprehension processes as any type of text; therefore, an understanding of literary reading should necessarily start with an understanding of the reading skill itself.

2.1 An overview of Reading processes and reading strategies

Understanding the reading skill has inspired researchers throughout the history. Starting from the behaviourists' decoding approach which viewed reading as a linear process or what is commonly known as a bottom-up process. For proponents of this view (Gough 1972; LaBerge and Samuel 1974) the process of reading whether in L1 or L2 was viewed as a passive mechanical decoding of linguistic information in which the reader begins by letters and moves to words and then sentences up to the construction of meaning.

At the other end of the spectrum, the cognitivists led by Goodman regarded the process of reading as a top-down process. In other word, they view it as reading is not a linear process, but one in which readers constantly form hypothesis, test predictions, and use their knowledge of the world. Goodman (1967) refers to this model as "a psycholinguistic guessing game". This view of reading influenced L2 reading methodologies; reading textbooks for language learners started encouraging top-down processes such as making guesses, predictions, and inferences with very little attention paid to the phonemic or the lower levels of processing.

The criticism of the bottom-up and the top-down models led in the last decades to the emergence of the interactive models of reading which perceive reading as an interactive cognitive process. Broadly speaking, the interactive model of reading assumes that the reader engages in a top-down

processing of a text by recruiting his/her background knowledge. The latter is made up of world knowledge, knowledge of the language and the written conventions. This knowledge is combined with the reader's expectations or purposes for reading and experience. All these are applied for the interpretation of the text by integrating new information from the text into pre-existing mental schemata. Good readers also make constant adjustments to the text by bringing about background knowledge relevant to the text. Simultaneously, the reader uses a bottom-up approach by applying his linguistic knowledge (orthography, vocabulary, syntax) as well as some reading strategies for the decoding of the text (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000).

To activate these processes, successful and proficient readers are able to handle several cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Research into the good language learner and the good language readers reveal that they make use of several strategies. For example, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) in their inventory of language learning strategies find that language learners are able to use techniques such as inferencing, deduction, summarising, translating frequently and appropriately. However, studies have shown that knowledge of strategies and strategy instruction do not necessarily lead to reading comprehension improvement (e.g. Grabe,2009; Zhang, 2009). In addition to cognitive strategies which are connected with the direct manipulation of the text, effective readers should have metacognitive awareness or metacognitive strategies. These are high order strategies related to planning the reading process, regulating or monitoring the reading process, and evaluating the reading, Auerbach and Paxon (1997) suggest that metacognition "entails knowledge of strategies for processing texts, the ability to monitor comprehension, and the ability to adjust strategies as needed" (pp. 240-41)

In sum, reading is a complex skill that involves bottom-up and top-down processes, in addition to a good knowledge and handling of specific reading strategies such as inferencing, checking understanding.

2.2 The Nature and Specificities of literature reading

Some researchers suggest that the specificity of literary reading lies in the complexity and ambiguity of the literary texts compared to non-

literary ones. For example, Hadj Said posits: "In the context of literary texts, which often contain complex themes, ambiguous language, and non-linear narratives…" p.115. However, not all literary critics would agree with this observation since there are many literary texts which have simpler and more straightforward language than some informational and expository texts (for example, poems by Emily Dickenson are recognised for their simple language). In fact, the particularity of literary reading lies in the purpose of literary communication, and the role of the reader and the text.

By working the language into a unique and distinctive design, the literary writer hopes to achieve a specific communication objective different from everyday communication objective. While in the latter, the language is used to convey useful and immediate messages by a restatement of a reality, the literary communication conveys "an individual awareness of reality" (Widdowson, 1975, p. 70). Put in another way, the literary writer conveys his perception of reality through the way he manipulates the language into patterns.

In contrast to informational and expository texts, reading literary texts do not involve informative, instrumental, and pragmatic purposes, but an aesthetic purpose. Furthermore, contrary to non-literary texts, literary texts could have more than one interpretation and more than one single understanding. In this sense, Fish (1980 as cited in Wiland, 2018, par.11) posits that "Meaning is not a product to be found, but an experience to be had, an event, possible only because the reading experience is slowed down. This event is personal in the sense that no reader will experience the text exactly as another reader experiences it".

Given this highly sensitive communicative purpose, the reading of literature involves far more demanding cognitive processing than non-literary texts. Research find that expert readers of literature make excessive use of the top-down processes, using their prior knowledge to interact with the text. One of the most cited studies on the cognitive strategies needed to process and interact successfully with a literary text is Zwaan (1993) who designed a subtle experimental study in which he

compared the cognitive strategies used by successful or competent readers of literature and less successful L1 readers of literature. The results of his study summarise the main cognitive strategies used by successful readers of literature as follows:

1-They are involved in elaborate inferencing right from the beginning of the processing of the literary text but the inferencing is delayed until necessary

2-They pay attention to the surface structure of the text and how meaning is being made but delay judgement of what it means

3-They put a lot of demands on their working memory

4-They read with "indeterminacy" constantly asking questions such as what it all means? What is going to happen?

5-They accept and tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty and view it as part of the process

6-They process texts which would seem inconsistent or illogical in order to arrive to a coherent interpretation

7-They are slow at reading and process in a more "bottom-up" way

8-They view literary reading as a demanding activity but value it.

Another influential study on reading literary texts strategies is Vipond and Hunt's (1986) who distinguish between point-driven story readers who are the successful or the proficient readers of literature and the story-driven readers who are the less proficient readers of short stories. While the story-driven reader is focused on the internal textual features of the story such as the plot, the character, the fall of the events, point-driven readers are looking for the writer's "point" by tracking the connection between textual references and extra-textual features of the text. Story-driven readers will call more on cognitive strategies (summarising, finding connection, asking questions such as what will happen next), point-driven readers, on the other hand, call more on metacognitive strategies such as the

use of background knowledge, the metacognitive strategies of control and evaluating reading outcomes.

Less proficient readers of literature and L2 readers of literature were found to rely on bottom-up processing at the expense of holistic inferencing. Koda (2005) finds that L2 readers of literature exhaust their working memory on word translation and the parsing of syntax (bottom-up) strategies at the expense of plot integration and aesthetic appreciation. In addition, L2 readers frequently fall into a "short-circuit" (Clarke,1980) or what Turnbull (2017) call linguistic "bottleneck". This happens due limited linguistic proficiency which at moments of reading drive L2 readers out of the text. In a study conducted with American college students who were L2 learners of French, Davis (1992) found that these students were "short-circuited" from the text *Candid* by Molière due to its linguistic difficulty.

Most of these studies were conducted in different contexts and backgrounds than the Algerian one and used with students linguistically and culturally challenging texts. The research gap remains in whether or not L2 students would be able to use high order literary reading strategies and avoid to be "short-circuited" when confronted to texts with medium linguistic difficulty.

3. Methodology

This study is a qualitative study; more precisely, it is an introspective study which is a kind of study widely used in psychology. Henry James, the father of moder psychology defined introspection as follows: "The word introspection need hardly be defined—it means, of course, the looking into our own minds and the report of what we there discover" (James,1890 as cited in Brown&Rodgers,2002, p.54). Despite controversies about the validity and reliability of introspective and verbal report studies, they have gained a great interest in research in general and in second language research due to their potential in making the invisible cognitive processes visible. Some of the significant studies that grounded the methodological

use of the think-aloud in second language research are: Hamp-Lyons (1983), Cumming (1989), Block (1986), Sasaki (2000).

Grounded on the methodological framework of TAP, the present study used the TAPs and a semi-structured interview following the verbal protocols with Algerian students in order to provide first-hand insightful data on the strategies used by these students while processing a literary text.

3.1 First Subtitle

The participants are three Algerian EFL majors at the university of Oran 2, Mohamed Ben Ahmed. They volunteered to participate in the study. The selection was based on their general academic achievement and in literature in the previous terms of study at university. One is a high academic achiever, with an average of 14 out of 10, the second is an average achiever with an average of 11, and the last is a low achiever with an average of almost 10. Their L1 is Arabic; their L2 is French and English is an FL in the Algerian context.

3.2 Procedures of Data Collection and Analysis

The collection of the data went through three main steps: First, a training **sess**ion on how to perform a think aloud; second, the actual performance of the read -aloud of the study; third, the follow-up interview to each read-aloud performance. These recordings were then transcribed and analysed to identify the patterns related the objects of investigation.

3.3 The Read Aloud Protocols

3.3.1 The Training

Following the recommendations of Ericson and Simon (1984), prior to the performance of the RAPs for the collection of this study data, the students were briefed on what is meant by RAPs and were given a training session on RAPs. In this training students were given simple tasks such as arithmetic operations (e.g. 14+56+12) and anagrams (find the word that is in the scrambled letter EILOTP) and were asked speak out how to solve these problems. Then the researcher made a demonstration by reading loud

and verbalising all what she was doing the reading in front of the participants. The participants were given a short text to exercise with the researcher supervision. Once the participants understood fully the concept of the RAPs, the data collection took place.

3.3.2 The Read Aloud Data Collection

Each student met alone with the researcher, he/ she was again briefed on what he had to do and then was given a short story to read with the instructions on it. The story is a modern fable *The Unicorn in the Garden* by James Thurber; it was chosen because it was relatively easy to read and understand (except for some culturally difficult words which were defined in a glossary, the language is simple and very straightforward). It was also chosen for it contains an entertaining trick that students should

After each three lines, the text contains a box which signals where the student should pause and start speaking. To ensure that the task is within the cognitive and linguistic capabilities of the students, it was left free to the participants to verbalize in Arabic, French or English. Sitting next to the student, the researcher started the recording as soon as the subject participant started talking; the only instruction given to the participant was to go on talking. During the exercise, the researcher was taking note of the different pauses and hesitations made by the student. Once the participant finished the reading of the story and finished his verbalization, a brief interview took place with this participant about the different pauses and hesitations made during the exercise.

3.3.3 Transcription and coding of the data

the recorded think-aloud protocols were transcribed by the researcher. The transcriptions were translated into English. The English transcriptions were then coded in relation to the strategy utilised by the students. The coding combined established reading strategies and the aesthetic or the literary reading strategies. These are cognitive and linguistic strategies, metacognitive strategies (planning, monitoring comprehension, awareness comments), aesthetic and literary reding strategies (looking for the point, empathising, emotional reacting to the story). To ensure inter-rater

reliability, another researcher was asked to code some of the read aloud transcripts; the difference between the two coding was only minor.

3-4 Findings and analysis

3.4.1 The frequency of use of cognitive and bottom-up strategies

Table 1below shows the frequency of use of cognitive reading strategies and bottom-up strategies by each of the low achiever, the average achiever and the high achiever. The figures show that the high achiever student use more strategies and more often than the average achiever (AA) and the low achiever (LA). These findings concur with previous research findings on reading strategies (e.g. Carell, 1989; Chamot& O'Malley, 1991; Oxford,) where good language learners were reported to use a wide variety of cognitive strategies.

Table1

Cognitive and bottom-up reading strategy use frequency

Type of student	Use of reference material	Pausing	Translating	Reading back and forth	Inferencing	Summaring	use context clues to clarify meaning	Asking questions	Self correcting	Tolerate vocabulary	Re-reading
HA	**2**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**6**	**3**	**6**	**6**	**3**	**2**	**1**
AA	**3**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**3**	**4**	**4**	**2**	**2**	**1**
LA	**5**	**6**	**6**	**6**	**1**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**1**

The table also shows a contrast between the HA and the low achiever (LA) in the type and frequency of use of certain bottom-up (problem solving strategies) and other cognitive strategies. Low achievers tend to use more reference materials such as the glossary and the dictionary than each of the HA and the AA. As a result, he did use much inferencing or context-clue clarification, nor was he able to tolerate ambiguity. Below are instances from the LA transcript:

> The unicorn in the garden (what is unicorn?) I need to search the meaning……. The breakfast nook, never seen this word before

cropping among the tulips, ok let's see it in the glossary, it is not there so let me google this word…. Ok

The story is about a mythical beast (literal translation to Arabic)

The LA student also uses a lot of translation much more than the two other students. Although both students verbalised their read aloud in Arabic and French and translated from time to time, it was so frequent. The reading of the LA seemed more like decoding of words and translation of long stretches from the text and in the end, he could not make a sense of the whole text.

On the other hand, the AA and the HA made more of inferencing and context clue clarification and less reference to external material. For example, in this segment, the AA student was able to understand the meaning from the context

"Cropping" I don't understand this word, but from the sentence I can see that it is eating

The word "booby" blocks me, but I can continue reading

The table also shows that there is only minor difference s between the HA student and the AA student in the frequency and use of cognitive strategies. Yet, the HA students was able to infer meaning from context more than the AA students.

The short interviews at the end of the RAPs reveal that both the HA and the AA achiever got the gist of the story whereas the LA student could not get the gist and needed to re-read the story at least two times.

3.4.2 The frequency of use of metacognitive and top-down strategies

The bottom-up strategies and the metacognitive strategies are related to the use of background knowledge. Flavell (1979) defined metacognition as the knowledge that takes as its object the regulation of cognition and he divided it into knowledge of strategies to be used in reading, and control that readers exercise on their reading (checking understanding).

Table 2 below shows the difference in use and frequency of some metacognitive strategies by the HA, the AA and the LA

Table 2

Metacognitive and top-down reading strategy use

Typeof student	Use prior knowledge	Checking understanding	Making hypothesis and gue . .	Checking hypotheses and making new; new ones	Making predicttios	Evaluating understanding
HA	3	4	3	3	1	3
AA	2	3	2	2	1	3
LA	0	2	1	0	0	2

The same pattern of the cognitive strategies appears again in the metacognitive strategies and the top-down strategies. In accordance with research on the characteristics of the good language learner, the numerical data in table 2 demonstrates that the HA student was able to handle the use and frequency of metacognitive strategies far better than the AA and the LA. Effectively, the HA student was able to activate his prior knowledge more than once during the reading. He also was able to make predictions, hypothesis and guesses more often than the two other students though there is only slight difference between the HA and the AA in the frequency and use of metacognition. Below are segments of metacognitive strategies use:

> "The unicorn in the Garden" Unicorn appears in fairy tale so it may be a fairy tale (HAS, prediction) In this segment he was able to predict about the text genre from the title.
>
> You are a booby," she said, "and I am going to have you put in a booby-hatch. There is some tension in the couple, may be they are going to divorce, the word booby blocks me, but it sounds a negative word ….. I can say this because the man never liked it (HA making a hypothesis)
>
> The wife is annoyed by the husband, he's disturbing her, she is not in the mood or may be she does not like him(AA transcript checking understanding and making hypothesis)

> The man went to sleep just after his wife threatened him (in Arabic), and the unicorn disappeared. There is something abnormal, may be the husband is really insane, let's see (making another hypothesis)

Thanks to the use of background knowledge and other top-down strategies as guessing and predicting the unfolding of events, The HA as well as the AA were able to make sense of the story with little variance in their understanding. In contrast, the LA student remained at the surface linguistic features of the text and failed almost totally to use metacognitive strategies, thinking that the challenge is much more in linguistic difficulty than other characteristics.

Nonetheless, the LA used the metacognitive strategy of evaluating reading understanding at the end of the reading and decided that he needed at least two readings of the whole story to understand it.

3.4.3 Aesthetic and Literary Reading Strategy Use Frequency

Reading a literary text effectively requires, in addition, to cognitive and metacognitive strategies, aesthetic literary strategies. Effective readers of literature were observed to be continuously engaged in meaning-making (asking the question what it is all about), or they are looking for the main point of the story as Vipond & Hunt (1984) described it. In order to construct meaning effective readers of literature may tolerate ambiguity in the plot and delay judgement till the end. Most importantly, unlike the factual transmission in expository text, literary reading is characterised by arousing in readers a "literary response" (Iser, ; Brumfit & Carter,1986), that is a reaction to literature. Some of these strategies were detected in the the read-aloud transcriptions of the participants as table 3 demonstrates.

Table 3

Aesthetic and literary reading strategy use frequency

Type of student	Looking for the point	Recognising character type	Tolerate ambiguity (events and plot)	empathising with characters	Reacting to the story (value judgement)
HA	***1***	***2***	***3***	***2***	***1***
AA	***1***	***1***	***1***	***1***	***1***
LA	***1***	***1***	***0***	***0***	***0***

Once again, the HA student demonstrates more frequency of use of different literary reading strategies than the AA and the LA students. Although the low achiever seems to be looking at the point of the story, he failed to react to the story and was not successful in empathising with the characters in the story. His over-reliance on the bottom-up processing "short-circuited" him from the text, the ambiguity he sensed in the plot of the story was assumed to be due to his lack of linguistic ability in decoding, as the following segments from the script suggests:

> There is something unclear in this story, I cannot understand why they took her, who was crazy? The man or the woman, I need to read a second time to understand (LA failing to make the point at end of reading)

The LA also failed to feel any sympathy for any of the character in the story as he could not even get the gist of the story.

Conversely, the HA and to some extent the AA could get the point thanks to allowing ambiguity and delaying judgement till the end as effective readers of literature were reported to do (Zwaan, 1993, 1999). In addition, the HA could sense the amusement effect of the story and felt relieved with the husband. The AA, on the other hand, did not seem to get the whole point and still struggled with vocabulary ambiguity. He could not decide for whom to feel sympathy. He delayed reaction or final response until the second reading.

I pity the wife; she was sleeping and then suddenly she was driven by the psychiatric. I didn't understand fully the situation (AA commenting the end of the story)

" I am sorry sir , but your wife is as crazy as a jay bird" Laugh "they took her away cursing and screaming" till "moral don't count your boobies until they are hatched". At the beginning, it seems that it is a fairy tale, but then I understood that there is a problem in this couple. The husband was not happy with his wife, so he created *a bizzar story juste pour se débarassé d'elle en faite* (French). But a second reading will make things clearer. So I am going to read again, and this time I'll use a dictionary. (AA making inferences about the main point of the story and corrcting initial hypothesis)

It is worth noting, however, that all readers are aware that reading and understanding a story is, in fact, making sense of what it all means, that is getting the point. This is reflected in their search for general meaning despite deploying different strategies. As looking for the main point is one characteristic of the competent readers of literature (Vipond &Hunt, 1984), it can be argued that Algerian EFL learners possess a level in the metacognitive knowledge of the task of reading literature. Such observation confirms previous research finding of Hamdoud (2009) that EFL students possessed the metacognitive knowledge of the task of reading literature, but they lacked the metacognitive knowledge of control.

3.5 Discussion

The analysis of the think-aloud protocols suggests that EFL students of different levels in academic achievement read and process a literary text in different ways which affect their engagement with the text and their aesthetic comprehension of the text. Each of the HA ,AA, and LA student uses bottom-up cognitive strategies, top-down metacognitive strategies, and aesthetic literary reading strategies in various frequency. This use affected directly their interaction, comprehension and appreciation of the literary text.

While the low achiever student was stuck at the surface linguistic level of the text, the HA student and to some extent the AA, could dive into the intertextual references to extract meaning. This difference was due to the type of reading strategies used by each of these students.

The word for word decoding strategies such as translating long text stretches, looking up the meaning of every single difficult word rather than inferencing from context, not tolerating ambiguity of meaning, added extra cognitive load to the low achiever and prevented him from looking at the whole meaning of the text. To put it in Clarke's (1980) term, excessive use of bottom-up strategies 'short-circuited' him from the text. Despite the fact that the text was of medium length and difficulty, the LA student resorted to decoding strategies rather than building inferences. Such finding suggests that L2 students' difficulty in processing texts can stem from ineffective strategy use rather than from the linguistic difficulty of the text as suggested by previous research (Davis, 1992; Turnbull,2017).

In fact, the HA and the AA students' protocols reveal that their linguistic proficiency was not higher that of the LA student. They equally stumble into difficult words and ambiguous structures and short dialogues. Nevertheless, they could read through the text and make a sense of it and even reach a literary response, that is appreciation of the text. They succeeded to stay within the text and avoided 'short-circuit' thanks to their deployment of some high-order cognitive, metacognitive and aesthetic strategies such as tolerating ambiguity, searching for deep meaning by inferencing, use of context clues to infer meaning, predicting and hypothesising, raising affective awareness about the characters…etc.

What is worth noting is that the three students had a "point-driven" approach to reading story. It was apparent that the students, though with various academic achievement levels, had the metacognitive knowledge that stories are read to get the main point. Their intention to read the story a second and for the LA several times to understand the point is a reflection of this aesthetic objective of literary reading even in a low achievement student. This observation confirms a previous study by Belal, 2022, that

Algerian EFL students possess a level in literary competence with various degrees.

What is more, the choice of the literary text which was intentionally accessible that is within the i+1 input exposure recommended by Krashen (1986) and the readability linguistic threshold of Alderson, which made it possible for the HA to display his repertoire of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The latter are considered as crucial not only for reading but also for learner autonomy and high performance across the curriculum. Put differently, the HA student was able to transfer his metacognitive knowledge of strategy use to reading a literary text. Lacking this strategic knowledge, the LA achiever displays a deficit in processing a literary text of medium difficulty.

3.4 Recommendations and limitations

The main suggestions and recommendations that can be drawn from these findings are the followings:

Given the mixed abilities found in the EFL classroom, educationists must be intent to what lies in the underneath surface of the learning situation, that is the learning process. What appears straightforward and easy for some learners may prove extremely challenging to others. Hence, to cater for different needs within one classroom, a literature course should include different literary texts within the linguistic threshold of different levels. Developing in students a taste for literature and the skill of reading in L2 is a long-run process that should into account various students' levels and weaknesses.

As evidenced in this study, students' failure in processing, interacting, and reacting with a literary text was not due to the text linguistic difficulty or to a lack of aesthetic taste in the student, but it was due to ineffective use of reading strategies. Therefore, the main recommendation is for syllabus designers and literature instructors is to incorporate explicit strategy instruction tailored for literature. The literature

abounds with teaching methodology and techniques where strategy-instruction is tailored to EFL literature course objectives and content such as task-based literature teaching, and the application of Iser's reader response theory.

In spite of the first-hand, in-depth insights on the strategies used by Algerian EFL learners, the study has a number of limitations. The first is related to the size of the sample, which leads to the conclusion that a bigger sample may have different results. Second, the use of the RAPs as the main investigating tool may have hidden the whole picture of strategy use as some students tend t be less verbose than others in reporting their thoughts. Third, the text choice may have favored one student over the others. All in all, the study opens other perspective of research in literary reading strategies.

Conclusion

From an awareness of the paramount importance of the reading skill in any academic context, including EFL, the present study aimed at shedding light on the processes and strategies used by EFL students when reading a literary text. Three students were selected from a group of volunteer students according to their academic achievement levels in order to be representative of the Algerian EFL classroom. These are a high achiever student (HA), an average academic achiever (AA), and a low academic achiever (LA). The analysis of their verbal protocols and post protocol interviews shows a variance in the three students' use of strategies impacted their interaction and literary comprehension of the text. While the HA and the AA students were able to interact and come up with an overall understanding of the text, the LA fell short from bringing a whole understanding of the text and reported to need more than one reading. The coding of the frequency of the strategy used show that the LA student was using mainly bottom-up reading strategies to decode the text and stayed at the linguistic surface structure of the text, whereas the HA student and to some extent the AA student used some metacognitive strategies that enabled them to appreciate the literary communication in the text. The

study recommended to underscore strategy instruction in literary courses and open other perspectives of research in literacy and literary reading cognition in EFL.

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