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The ZZZ Adult Academic Reading Model

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ABSTRACT

Research on academic reading has resulted in lists of strategies employed by the proficient and the less proficient readers. Nonetheless, not much research has attempted to investigate the academic reading strategies of adult learners by considering the potential influence of their common characteristics: experience, self-concept and time perspective. This study examined in depth the academic reading strategies of four adult learners by considering the influence of these common characteristics. After providing the synopsis of the reading models, examples of academic reading strategies and theories on adult learners, this article describes the study's methodology, findings, and implications. The findings indicate that the proficient adult readers in this study were able to manipulate their characteristics to the advantage of their academic reading. Based on the findings, the ZZZ Adult Academic Reading Model was designed. It is hoped that this model will guide adult educators as well as adult learners in academic reading classes.

Introduction

In order to teach academic reading to adults effectively, educators need to be knowledgeable about reading theory and practice. Unfortunately, the teaching of adult reading is based on the pedagogy of teaching reading to children (Campbell and Malicky, 2002). There is no foundation of research-based knowledge on how adults read that could be used to guide adult academic reading classes. Such a knowledge base would assist educators in making informed rational decisions as they match their teaching activities with students' needs. Teaching academic reading

to adults could be more effective given a better understanding of how proficient adults read with special reference to the influence of their common characteristics as adult learners.

To date, not much research in Malaysia has been conducted on adults' reading behaviours, skills, and processes, despite the growing awareness and support for adult education (Faizah, 2004). Most of the reported research (Della, 1998; Teoh, 1996; Lim 1996) were narrow in scope, that is focussing on phonological and orthographic skills, and had employed assessment procedures that did not reflect authentic reading. The major purpose of the study reported in this paper was to examine the academic reading strategies of four in-service TESL students and attempts were taken to investigate the potential influence of their characteristics as adult learners on their choice and use of academic reading strategies.

Reading Theory

In the early 1970s, information processing theories in psychology were applied to reading, resulting in the development of two major reading theories; the bottom-up (skills view) and top-down (psycholinguistics view). However, in the late 1970s, criticism of these theories led to the development of interactive theories. Bottom-up theories place emphasis on the discrete skills needed to process texts through a linear hierarchy, moving from letter recognition to decoding at the phoneme level, to word recognition, and finally to syntactic and semantic relationships (Gough, 1972). Top-down theories on the other hand, postulate that readers form hypotheses about the meaning of texts and then sample the necessary print to confirm or disconfirm the hypotheses made before revising them should it be necessary (Goodman, 1970; Smith, 1971 in Nunan, 1991).

Both these theories have received much criticism which centered on their practicality. While the bottom-up theory was questioned for its underestimation of the role of prior knowledge in constructing meaning, the top-down theory was questioned for its ignorance of the importance of relevant skills in decoding meanings from print. Hence, the interactive theories which were popularized by Rumelhart (1977 in Nunan, 1991) were seen as the best to describe reading since they place the emphasis on both the text and the reader. From the text perspective, reading is seen as the application of three cueing systems (graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic) in constructing meaning. From the reader perspective,

reading is viewed as an active process of constructing meaning through interaction between the reader and the text. Specifically, the reader's affective state, language competence, and prior knowledge of content and of reading processes interact with text structure, tasks, and contexts. The study reported in this paper is based upon the interactive theory of reading.

Academic Reading

According to Caverly and Orlando (1991), academic reading in its simplest term is known as "textbook study". Their definition is supported by Shih (1992) who claims that academic reading is also commonly addressed as "study reading" or "reading to learn". Giving more meaning to the term 'academic reading', Anderson (1991) adds that when reading is done with the purpose to acquire, store and retrieve the information, it is called 'academic reading.'

To understand academic reading further, it is perhaps helpful to know the procedures that take place as someone reads academic material. According to Anderson (1991), academic reading comprises a three-stage evolution which covers the product, process and intent perspectives. As a start, from the product perspective, academic reading is seen as the transfer of information from the text into the reader's memory. It is at this stage that the 'rehearsal or repeating of the target information in order to retain it in the reader's long-term memory' is stressed.

Next, from the process perspective, the 'levels of processing theory' as proposed by Craik and Lockhart (as cited in Holley and Dansereau, 1983) and 'schema theory' which was initially researched by Bartlett (as cited in Safiah, 1990) are the core elements of academic reading. While more meaningful learning can result from various levels of processing, the interpretation of incoming information which aid comprehension is made possible from the use of schema or prior knowledge. Finally, from the intent perspective which encompasses the previous two, "the study situation, regulation of the learning process, the emotive composition of the reader and, the content and structure of the material" (as cited in Teoh, 1996) are taken into account. Clearly, the procedures enable the reader to acquire, store and retrieve the information.

Academic Reading Strategies

Cook and Mayer (1983: 90) have defined 'reading strategies' as behaviours that a reader "engages in at the time of reading and that it is related to some goals." Hence, they refer to something that the reader "does". In addition, according to Barnett (1989), reading strategies are the mental operations involved when a reader purposefully approaches a text to make sense of what he reads. Extending this notion, Cohen (1990: 83) defines reading strategies as "mental processes that a reader consciously chooses to use in accomplishing reading tasks. However, while Cohen (1990) claims that reading strategies are consciously applied, Barnett (1989) states that they could either be conscious techniques controlled by the reader or unconscious processes applied automatically.

Bialystok (1990: 12) has described the reading strategies as having at least three features. The first is, strategies "are effective in that they are related to solutions in specific ways, and they are productive in solving the problems for reasons which theorists can articulate." Second, they are systematic. Interestingly, readers do not create or come across the best strategy. Instead they are drawn from experience and employed systematically. Finally, the strategies are finite that a limited number of strategies can be identified.

The study reported in this paper refers to reading strategies as conscious behaviour that enables the readers to verbalize their thoughts and actions when faced with difficulties during reading. Previous research conducted on reading has resulted in several lists of academic reading strategies. Hosenfeld (1977 in Block, 1986) came up with "main meaning line" and "word-solving strategies." Olshavsky (1976/7) suggested word-related, clause-related and story-related categories of strategies. Block (1986) managed to categorize reading strategies as general strategies and local linguistic strategies. Sarig (1987) managed to identify four broad categories of reading strategies; technical-aid moves, clarification and simplification moves, coherence-detecting moves and, monitoring moves such as checking on the reading process as it takes place.

Unlike others, Weinstein and Mayer (1987) agree that there are three groups of strategies involved in academic reading, namely the cognitive, metacognitive and affective strategies. They proposed that cognitive strategies focus on the strategies that process the incoming information. Extending this notion, Wenden (1991: 19) describes the cognitive strategies as the "mental steps or operations that are used to process linguistic and sociolinguistic contents."

Metacognitive strategies, on the other hand, involve the things that readers do to regulate their use of reading strategies and to evaluate their reading (Teoh, 1996). Weinstein and Mayer (1987) pointed out that 'metacognitive strategies' refers to the readers' ability to control their cognitive processes by organising, monitoring and modifying them as a function of learning outcomes. In simpler terms, Cohen (1990) calls these strategies "strategies for dealing with strategies" while Sarig (1987) addressed them as "monitoring moves". Nevertheless, all of them agree that the metacognitive strategies comprise two, namely the self-monitoring strategies and the self-evaluation strategies.

Finally, affective strategies are the procedures that readers use to make the reading environment conducive (Teoh, 1996). Weinstein and Mayer (1987) on the other hand, proposed that affective strategies are strategies that readers use to focus attention, maintain concentration, manage performance anxiety, establish and maintain motivation, and mange time effectively. In her elaboration on the affective strategies, Oxford (1990: 21) states that self-reinforcement and positive self-talk are examples of such strategies. Normally, these are done before reading so as to enable the readers to "approach the reading tasks with ease and comfort".

The academic reading strategies suggested by Weinstein and Mayer (1987) were used in this study.

Common Characteristics of Adult Learners

Adult learners are believed to have distinctive characteristics making them different from other learners. Knowles (1990) has elaborated that the characteristics of adult learners can be understood by considering these three domains; self-concept, experience and time perspective. Briefly, self-concept is the image people have of themselves. Knowles adds, "as people grow, their self- concept moves from being a dependent personality to a self-directing one." This in turn makes them become "autonomous". This is why some educators believe that classes for adults should be learner-centred since the learners appreciate autonomy. Knowles (1990: 236) further claims that "…no adult learner will learn under condition incongruent with his self-concept".

However, Hanson (1996) argues that to claim adults are autonomous is inappropriate since it does not consider the differences between adults and their contexts. He further commented that there are some adults

"who re-enter education after some time away from school may want to be treated as children." In addition, it is quite interesting to notice that autonomy "is limited by what the social culture permits" (Rogers, 2002: 71). It is generally known that in many societies the local culture does not encourage the development of autonomy in some groups of people such as married women.

With regard to "experience", Knowles (1990: 237) comments that adults have more experience than children do, making them a "rich resource in the classroom". This notion has been put forward earlier by Mocker (1980: 35) who claims that "…adults enter an educational activity with a greater amount of experience from which they can relate new experience." This further explains why there are suggestions for classroom activities to be learner-oriented. In other words, most of the materials for the classes should be generated from the learners themselves. Work conferences, group discussions, seminars, student demonstrations and consultative supervisions are among the activities which are claimed to best suit the adult learners' needs. Rogers (2002: 73) further adds that while for children, experience is something that happens to them, it serves to determine who they are, and to create their sense of self-identity for the adults. Hence, when this experience is devalued or ignored, not only the experience but the person is also rejected.

However, one drawback is also inevitable due to the influence of the adult learners' experience. It is said that with their experience, adult learners can form habits which may not be suitable or helpful in the learning process (Knowles, 1990). For example, the fact that they are so used to teacher-centred classes means they may have difficulties coping in an 'adult class' which is 'learner-centred.' Other possible negative habits are "biases, presuppositions that close one's mind to new, fresh ideas" (Knowles, 1990: 59).

Finally, the characteristics of adult learners are also associated with "time perspective." Mocker (1980: 35) has mentioned that "…adults enter (an educational activity) with more specific and immediate plans for applying newly acquired knowledge." Knowles (1990: 237) further clarifies this idea by stating that due to the fact that adult learners need to be "equipped to overcome their current problems, they want to put to immediate use what they learn." In this instance, adult learners are perceived as motivated learners who are driven by intrinsic factors rather than extrinsic ones. As Knowles further elaborates, adult learners are "mostly motivated to learn because they are seeking solutions to the problems they encounter in their roles as parents, workers and so on".

Gill (2001: 1) concurs with Knowles when she claims that, "...The needs of adult learners are very simple. They do not need the basics; they need answers to particular questions...The adult learners want information that is useful immediately." What can be safely deduced from this is that teachers of adult learners should be "people-centred than subject-matter-centred" (Knowles, 1990: 238).

Nevertheless, there is an argument made on the 'time-perspective' of the adult learners. Although some consider adult learners as highly driven by intrinsic factors in their learning, there are others who believe that the learners could also be motivated by "extrinsic" factors (Brookfield, 1986; Rogers, 2002). This is particularly true amongst adult learners who are put back into education by their employers. As a consequence, going back to school is seen as a plan for them to please their employers or to be promoted. As such, instead of taking the learning experience as something which could be self-satisfying and meaningful, these learners tend to make their learning more "instrumental" (Brookfield, 1986; Rogers, 2002) or in simpler term, as a stepping stone.

Linderman's assumptions (as cited in Knowles, 1990) about adult learners perhaps best summarize the adult learners' characteristics:

1. Adults are more motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy.
2. Adults' orientation to learning is life-centred.
3. Experience is the richest resource for adults' learning.
4. Adults have a deep need to be self-directing.

Methodology

Participants

Based on purposive sampling, four female in-service TESL students at the Faculty of Education, UiTM participated in this study. Besides being trained by local teacher training colleges, all of the participants had between 5 and 10 years of English language teaching experience in Malaysian primary schools in the Klang Valley (urban and semi-urban areas).

Selection of the participants was made based on several criteria: a) their academic reading proficiency; b) their experience of doing academic reading at university; c) willingness to cooperate in the study. Based on

their previous academic reading course and recommendations from the lecturers who had taught them, two of the participants were identified as proficient readers while the other two were less proficient readers. Since the participants needed to have at least one year (2 semesters) of experience doing academic reading at tertiary level, only semester three students were relevant to the study. It was by coincidence that there were only four in-service TESL students in Semester three and that they were all female.

Instruments

To enable triangulation of data, three instruments: student diaries, participant observations and think aloud protocols were used to collect relevant data. In addition, take-home reading handouts were studied and retrospective interviews were conducted immediately after the think aloud protocols.

Since the study was conducted over 12 weeks, 12 take-home and 12 in-class reading passages were involved. All the passages were those prescribed by the TSL 450 Principles and Practices in ELT course. This course served as the venue for the conduct of the study. All the passages were expository texts and were between 450 and 1050 words in length. Based on the McLaughlin SMOG readability test, the readability of the passages ranged between 4.06 and 5.31.

Data Collection

The data collection started with the writing of the student diaries by each participant. Each week, they needed to read one take-home reading passage and reflect on their reading. They were asked to write their reports on the reading and the strategies they used while reading in the diary. Each diary entry was collected weekly along with the respective take-home reading handout. By the end of the 12th week, there were 48 student diary entries. Simultaneously, participant observations were conducted. Each week, one participant was observed and each of them was observed three times on separate sessions. Altogether there were 12 participant observations. Finally, at the end of the 12 weeks, the participants needed to conduct the think aloud protocols. However, they were first trained on how to do think aloud. The training involved a video viewing of a think aloud, a demonstration by the researcher and several think aloud practises by the participants. The think aloud was only

conducted once the participants were comfortable doing the think aloud. The think aloud was video-recorded and retrospective interviews were conducted immediately after the think aloud.

Data Analysis

A constant comparative method (Wellington, 2000) was applied in the analysis of the data. Data for the study were in the form of written self-reports from the student diaries, observation fieldnotes from the participant observations and, transcriptions of the think aloud protocols and retrospective interviews. In the middle of the analysis, Cohen Kappa's (1960) coefficient of agreement was conducted and a comfortable value of .96 was obtained allowing the researcher to proceed with the analysis. In addition, to ensure accuracy of her interpretations of the interviews, member checks were conducted once the researcher had finished transcribing the think aloud and interviews.

Findings and Discussions

Besides confirming findings from previous research and theories in the literature, this study has yielded new and interesting findings with special reference to the influence of the adult learners' common characteristics on their choice and use of academic reading strategies.

First, it was discovered that the proficient readers in the study had more choices of academic reading strategies, especially metacognitive strategies, and that the strategies were used more effectively than the less proficient readers. The table below shows the number of strategies used by the participants in the study.

Table 1: The Number of Academic Reading Strategies of Proficient and Less Proficient Readers

Academic reading strategies	Proficient adult readers	Less proficient adult readers
Cognitive strategies	31	26
Metacognitive strategies	20	15
Affective strategies	5	6

The detailed information on the specific academic reading strategies according to their category could be found in the Appendix.

Possible explanations for the participants' use of strategies were discovered from the qualitative analysis. It is discovered that there could be positive or negative influences of their common characteristics on their use of the academic reading strategies. It is an important finding however that the characteristics as adult learners (experience, self-concept and, time perspective) did not in or by themselves have positive or negative influences. Instead, it was how the participants in the study manipulated these characteristics that determined the type of the influence. Hence, it is safe to conclude that it was how the participants in this study manipulated their common characteristics as adult learners that influence their choice and use of academic reading strategies.

Firstly, while the proficient readers in this study were able to benefit from their experience as a teacher and a teaching college student the less proficient readers were ignorant of this experience. Unlike the proficient readers who were able to make useful frame of references based on their experiences as an English teacher and student of a teacher training college, the less proficient readers were ignorant of the relevance of these experiences to their academic reading. Not only that, it was also discovered that they had formed bad reading habits from their teaching of primary school students and previous learning experience. For example, they over-relied on the dictionary, translated difficult words and needed the assistance of someone who was more in 'authority' or considered more proficient than them to check their work. (see Appendix 1)

Secondly, the proficient readers in this study had portrayed their self-concept as "adult learners" (Knowles, 1990) as compared to the less proficient readers who saw themselves as "student-learners" (Rogers, 2002). The fact that they acted as adult learners enabled the proficient readers to be confident and self-directing. For example, they reported and were found to ask questions to the text/author and seek for extra information and clarification on their own. The less proficient readers, on the other hand, were unable to be as confident and self-directing as the proficient readers since they were prone to "studenthood" (Rogers, 2002) which defined them as those who constantly need guidance from others and need to be directed. For example, the less proficient readers were unable to guess the meaning of difficult words and confirm their predictions as well as over-rely on the dictionary. In addition they tend to consult others, translate and use the first language more often than the proficient readers did (refer Appendix 2).
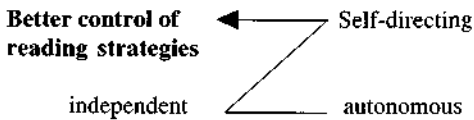
Thirdly, with reference to their time perspective the proficient readers in this study were found to be intrinsically driven and were able to see the importance of their reading inside and outside formal learning

boundaries. On the other hand, the less proficient readers were found to be extrinsically driven and were only concerned with the benefits of academic reading to their academic performance. Hence, while the proficient readers approached their academic reading with a low anxiety level, the less proficient readers approached theirs with a high anxiety level. This explains why the less proficient readers were reading at word level and were so conscious of difficulties in the linguistic aspect of the text that they over-relied on the dictionary and attempted translation to ease their comprehension. (see Appendix 3)
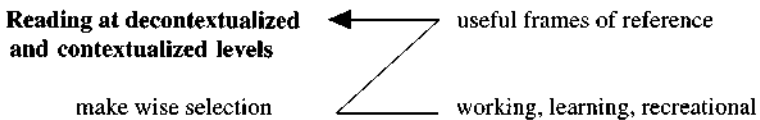
Implications: The ZZZ Adult Academic Reading Model

Based on the findings, a model has been designed to assist adult educators and adult learners alike to better understand how they could manipulate the common characteristics of adult learners to the advantage of the adult academic reading process. The following figure depicts the model.

SELF-CONCEPT

**Better control of
reading strategies** ◀———— Self-directing

independent   autonomous

EXPERIENCE

**Reading at decontextualized
and contextualized levels** ◀———— useful frames of reference

make wise selection   working, learning, recreational

TIME-PERSPECTIVE

**Transfer of knowledge
outside formal learning
boundaries** ◀———— seek to benefit
from reading

acknowledge importance
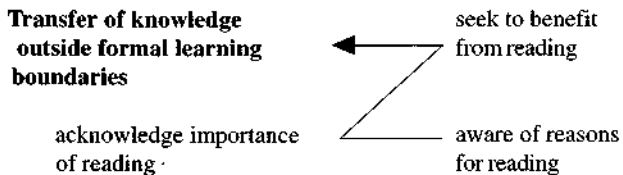of reading ·   aware of reasons
for reading

Figure 1: The ZZZ Adult Academic Reading Model: Strategies that
Manipulate the Adult Learners' Characteristics

Basically, the model suggests the effective manipulation of the adult learners' characteristics namely; their time perspective, experience and self-concept. It is recommended that in order to maximize their potential as effective ESL academic readers, adult learners should first be aware of their reasons for the academic reading. In this instance, they are encouraged to acknowledge the importance of academic materials not only for current learning purposes, but also for professional development and most importantly personal growth. It is believed that when the importance of academic materials is relevant to these three items especially to 'personal growth', the adult learners may benefit from their reading and thus leads to the transfer of meaningful knowledge outside formal learning boundaries.

Next, it is suggested that they take into consideration the 'richness' of their experience. Since they are working adult learners, it is undeniable that they have a considerable amount of experiences pooled from either their previous learning, teaching and recreational contexts. Nevertheless, they are cautioned to make wise selection of experiences so that the experiences can function as relevant 'frames of reference'. In this context, the adult learners are required to move away from being too conscious of the fact that they are "students" (Rogers, 2002). Bad habits formed due to the "poor drills" (Knowles, 1990) and negative exposure to the "planned tuition process" (Rogers, 2002) they had while in school should be discarded. At this point of the discussion the importance of 'unlearning' as suggested by Rogers (2002) is seen as relevant. Most importantly, they should be able to include the experiences they gained in their attempt to make meaningful connection between the newly learnt information and their personal experiences. Hence, besides reading at the decontextualized level, they should also be able to read at the contextualized level.

Finally, adult learners are encouraged to act as 'adults' and not 'students' while in class and while performing any academic reading tasks. It is suggested that adult learners could be 'autonomous'. Since adult learners are described as those who have roles other than that of learners, such as a spouse, parent, or worker; some degree of responsibility is shouldered by them. Indirectly, this would entail some demand to make decisions and judgements in certain situations without relying on or getting approval from others. As has been elaborated in the literature, unlike 'adults', 'students' may lack this capability due to their restricted role in and expectations from the society (Rogers, 2002; Knowles, 1980). Therefore, when this capability is applied by the adult

learners in their attempt to monitor and regulate their own reading process, it is believed that better control of the ARS could be ensured. In other words, in the context of academic reading, the adult learners are encouraged to break free from the tactics used by 'students' such as over-relying on the dictionary or others and translating too often while reading. Instead, they are recommended to depend more on their experience and expertise as trained, experienced English teachers.

The following figure shows how suggestions for manipulation of their characteristics may lead to more effective use of ARS which in turn results in more meaningful academic reading.

MEANINGFUL ACADEMIC READING

Self-concept

Experience | *better control of ARS*

reading at decontextualized & contextualized levels

Time Perspective
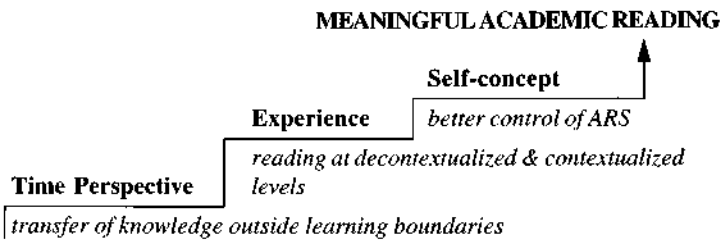
transfer of knowledge outside learning boundaries

Figure 2: Summary on the Influence of the Adult Learners' Characteristics on Their Academic Reading

Appendix 1: Cognitive Strategies of Proficient and Less Proficient Readers in the Study

Proficient readers (31)	Less proficient readers (26)
1. set purpose before reading (3)	1. skim (26)
2. skim (7)	2. re-read (27)
3. scan (3)	3. recite (62)
4. re-read (19)	4. underline (11)
5. recite (43)	5. highlight (5)
6. read slowly (1)	6. write notes (8)
7. highlight (11)	7. supply meaning of difficult words (1)
8. underline (20)	8. manipulate visual aids (3)
9. point at words being read (1)	9. skip visual aids (2)
10. label important details (1)	10. manipulate content organization (2)
11. write notes (24)	11. manipulate text presentation (3)
12. manipulate visual aids (6)	12. mental imagery (5)
13. create symbols (2)	13. draw arrows (1)
14. use prior knowledge (5)	14. connect points (1)
15. selective reading (1)	15. construct relationship (7)
16. manipulate content organization (9)	16. discuss in first language (4)
17. manipulate text presentation (4)	17. translate (16)
18. intertext (3)	18. relate content to experience (5)
19. relate content to experience (9)	19. summarize (48)
20. translate (3)	20. use prior knowledge (2)
21. draw diagram (11)	21. agree with author/text (2)
22. mental language (1)	22. give opinions (16)
23. summarize (11)	23. give comments (1)
24. construct reading strategy (2)	24. point at words being read (4)
25. verbal stringing (2)	25. move hand downwards as read (1)
26. creating analogies (3)	26. take time reading (8)
27. connect points (1)	
28. take time reading (3)	
29. give comments (2)	
29. give opinions (11)	
31. agree with author/text (6)	

Note:
1. Number in brackets indicates frequency of strategy/ies.
2. The strategies are placed in random order.

Appendix 2: Metacognitive Strategies of Proficient and Less Proficient
Readers in the Study

Proficient readers (20)	Less proficient readers (15)
1. ask questions (18)	1. predict (3)
2. infer (4)	2. ask question (4)
3. predict (1)	3. backtrack (9)
4. backtrack (14)	4. use/refer to other source of information (3)
5. use other source of information (7)	5. use dictionary (15)
6. share other source of information with friends (5)	6. guess meaning (1)
7. discuss with friends (9)	7. consult others (13)
8. pause while reading (5)	8. discuss with others (9)
9. frown while reading (5)	9. correct earlier response (2)
10. confirm (9)	10. confirm (5)
11. use dictionary (3)	11. recall important details (2)
12. vocabulary conscious (2)	12. pause while reading (1)
13. abandon difficult parts (1)	13. frown while reading (7)
14. guess meaning of words (3)	14. abandon difficult parts (3)
15. check upon completion (3)	15. vocabulary conscious (7)
16. correcting (3)	
17. judge interpretation (2)	
18. verify interpretation (3)	
19. re-read to confirm interpretation (1)	
20. curious with what to follow (3)	

Appendix 3: Affective Strategies Used by Proficient and Less
Proficient Readers in the Study

Proficient readers (5)	Less proficient readers (6)
1. positive self-talk (5)	1. acknowledge importance of content (11)
2. acknowledge importance of content (20)	2. picture image of success (1)
3. set conducive reading environment (11)	3. positive self-talk (3)
4. emotionally influenced by content (2)	4. emotionally influenced by text presentation (2)
5. emotionally influenced by text presentation (2)	5. emotionally influenced by content (1)
	6. set conducive reading environment (6)

Note:
1. Number in brackets indicates frequency of strategies.
2. The strategies are placed in random order.

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