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Cross-gender Comparison of Metacognitive Strategies Utilized by Omani Students in Reading Comprehension Classes

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Abstract

Given the fact that English is the language of the latest technological and scientific developments, comprehending English texts has priority for students to gain the knowledge and skills they will need in the future. However, most Omani students are not efficient L2 readers and do not have sufficient competence in reading authentic English texts. There is a variety of factors that might affect Omani students' ability to read and comprehend English texts effectively. To find out what factors are involved in Omani students' reading comprehension, in the first place, it is necessary to know what strategies they employ in reading. To this end, the current study attempts to explore Omani students reported use of reading strategies using 'Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory' (MARSI) developed by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002). The self-reported survey completed by 200 students (90 female and110 male) who enrolled for Advanced Foundation program (level 4) at Salalah College of Technology (SCT). The results show that SCT students' awareness of metacognitive strategies is at medium level (3.46). Furthermore, the comparison between two gender groups (Males Vs. Females) shows that male students use metacognitive reading strategies moderately (3.28) while female students use them more frequently (3.64). The outcomes of the study contribute to the improvement of SCT students reading ability and can be used by teachers to teach students different strategies to build meaning of the reading material which is among the goals of any educational system.

Keywords: reading comprehension, metacognitive strategies, global strategies, support strategies, problem-solving strategies

1. Introduction

Education is an essential requirement not only for individual advancement but also for the future prosperity of any society. Being aware of the need to prepare students for admission into more scientifically and technologically complex world, since 1970 Oman as an Arabic-Speaking nation embraced English as an officially taught foreign language in its institutions. Oman ministry of education, in recent years, has begun to shift its attention towards bringing about qualitative improvements across the educational system by engaging in a number of major reform initiatives. Oman educational system consists of three elementary, secondary and post-secondary studies. And teaching English begins from secondary level. All Omani schools teach English as a second language. In the public sector, English is taught fore grade one with the aim that, by grade twelve, students will be able to study their specialized English courses at a university level. The Language Teaching Unit at the Ministry of Education throughout the country supplies the English textbooks. Teaching English begins from secondary school. In addition, English is taught for general and specific purposes (ESP) in higher education colleges and institutes. Students who enter university/college in Oman have to enroll for Foundation program, which includes four semesters of intensive English classes, math and IT. It gets them up to a functional English level before starting specialized courses. Omani students need to read and understand authentic English texts in their fields of study.

To address the issue of whether Omani students reading comprehension difficulties pertains to inefficient skills (for example vocabulary recognition and guessing meaning from context) or their unawareness of the metacognitive reading strategies, the current study, in the first place, is going to explore the most common reading strategies SCT students employ as they are engaged in reading English texts. Furthermore, it seeks to find out if there is a significant difference between male and female students' use of metacognitive strategies in reading classes.

2. Statement of problem

Leaning a new language not only brightens our minds, it can provide us with opportunities we never thought of. Language learning in general and English learning in particular is an integrated process comprising four reading, listening, speaking and writing skills. In recent years, researchers attempted to find out the relationship between various strategies students use as they are interacting with reading texts and their success in comprehending them (Martinez, 2008; Mokhtari and Sheorey 2002; Alsheikh and Mokhtari, 2011). Other investigators found that successful readers use more reading strategies than unsuccessful ones (Chamot and El-Dinary1999; Lau and Chan 2003). Malcolm (2009) opines that "Skilled readers are often characterized as more metacognitively aware than less skilled readers" (p. 640). Although ample number of studies conducted to investigate the metacognitive reading strategies of Arabic students (Sheorey and Mokhtari 2001, Malcolm 2009, Alsheikh and Mokhtari 2011), to the author's knowledge there is no study to date on Omani students' awareness of reading strategies as they are engaged in reading English texts. The current study might shed light on and bridge the existing gap. It aims at examining the use of metacognitive reading strategies reported by Omani students study at Salalah College of Technology. Furthermore, a comparison between two gender groups' use of metacognitive reading strategies might reveal why female students' outperform male ones reading strategies.

3. Research objectives

The current study pursues the following objectives:

- 1. To investigate the prevalent metacognitive reading strategies used by SCT students.
- 2. To scrutinize any meaningful difference between two gender groups of SCT students regarding their awareness/use of metacognitive reading strategies.

4. Literature review

Reading process is often considered as a cognitive enterprise, which requires complicated mental and cognitive activities. It is a complex process due to interactions that take place among number of elements such as the reader, text, reading process and context. In addition, there are some metacognitive elements involved in any reading process. To use Mokhtari and Reichard's (2002) taxonomy these metacognitive factors can be of three different types; global strategies, problem-solving strategies, and support strategies.

Overwhelming studies have been carried out on students with various background knowledge and proficiency levels to scrutinize their awareness and employment of different reading strategies (Ilustre, 2011, Munsakorn, 2012, Karbalaei, 2010).

The results of Shikano' (2013) study on sixty Japanese university students using 'Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory' developed by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) show that Japanese students use problem-solving strategies more often than global and support strategies. However, there was not meaningful difference between high-reading-proficiency group and low-reading-proficiency groups.

In a study Alhaqbani and Riazi (2012) investigated 122 undergraduate Arabic students' awareness of their reading strategies as they were reading Arabic texts. The students were from Africa and Asia and were asked to complete a 30-item MARSI (Mokhtari and Sheorey, 2002) survey of reading strategies. The results of their study show that students found 'problem solving' strategies more useful than 'global strategies' and 'support strategies'. In addition, it was found that students with African background used more 'global strategies' than Asian background students. Another finding of their study pertains to the relationship between the students' grade and the use of reading strategies where junior and senior students reported higher strategy use in all the three strategy categories compared to the first and second year students.

The findings of a study by Jafari and Shokrpour, (2012) on ESP Iranian students shows that the participants do not use the full range of reading strategies and are not aware of all of them as they read authentic English texts. Using Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) questionnaire, they found out that the most common strategies are support strategies followed by global strategies, and then problem solving strategies. They further reported that Iranian ESP students use different reading strategies according to their academic majors.

A study on 157 chemistry and technical Spanish students by Martinez (2008) to assess the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies reported that there is a moderate to high overall use of reading strategies. It is further revealed that students show higher reported use for problem-solving and global reading strategies.

Malcolm's comparative (2009) study of 160 students' reported reading strategies at a medical university in Bahrain with different English proficiency levels and year of study show that while all students reported high use of overall strategies, meaningful differences were found in the use of metacognitive strategies in general and specific strategies related to translating from English to Arabic. Students with low proficiency and those in their first year reported using translation strategy more, while upper year students used translating less and metacognitive strategies more.

Yüksel and Yüksel's (2012) study on Turkish students' reports of academic reading texts shows a high frequency of problem-solving strategies and low frequency of supporting strategies.

Afflerbach. al., (2008, p. 15) define reading strategies as "deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode text, understand word, and construct meanings out of text".

5. Research Method

5.1 Participants

The students who study at Salalah College of Technology comprise the population for the current study. The participants consist of 200 students (90 female and 110 male) at advanced level, Foundation program. They speak Arabic as their first language and have almost seven years of English study background. The participants were provided with sufficient information about what is the purpose of this study and how to complete the questionnaire by their respective teachers.

5.2 Research Instrument

The study was carried out during the first semester of the academic year 2015 at Salalah College of Technology, English Language Center. 200 students at Advance level, Foundation program were asked to fill out the questionnaire by reading each item carefully and circle the option. The only demographic information students were asked was gender (male مذکر /female منکر). The Arabic version of Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) developed by Mokhtari and Sheory (2002) was used to collect the data. This self-report survey uses a 5-point Likert scale where each item is given a value ranging from 1 to 5 with 1= 'I never do this', 2= 'I do this only occasionally', 3= 'I sometimes do this', 4= 'I usually do this' and 5= 'I always do this.'

MARSI is a 30-item survey, including three macro strategies: Global Strategies, Problem Solving Strategies, and Support strategies. Table 1 presents the three macro strategies and the number of related items in each category.

Table1. Summary of different reading strategies and the relevant items

Reading strategy	Items	Number of items
		(out of 30)
Global strategy	1,3,4,6,8,12,15,17,20,21,23,24,27	13
Support strategy	2,5,10,13,18,22,26,29,30	9
Problem-solving strategy	7,9,11,14,16,19,25,28	8

As mentioned above, proposed reading strategies fall into three macro categories; Global, Support and Problem-solving strategies. 'Global' strategies constitute the generalized strategies that prepare reader for reading (for example item 1: I have a purpose in mind when I read.) 'Problem-solving' strategies are repair strategies that readers employ when encounter problem in comprehending text (for example item 7: I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading). And Support strategies include technics that help reader in comprehending the text (for example item 2: I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read). The estimated reliability for MARSI questionnaire using Cronbach's Alpha measured at 0 .93 (Mokhtari and Reichard, 2002), 0.83 (Alhaqbani and Riazi, 2012) and 0.78 (Shikano, 2013) which indicates a high reliability of the instrument.

6. Findings

Total

To address the first research objective, i. e., to investigate prevalent reading strategies used by Omani students at SCT, the collected data was analyzed using SPSS (version 16). Table 2 presents the obtained average score for each macro strategy. The total average score indicates how often students use reading strategies and the average for each macro strategy shows what group of strategies students use most often as they are reading English texts.

Table2. Macro metacognitive strategies and obtained average scoreType of Macro StrategyMeanlevelGlobal3.41Medium (2.5-3.4)Support3.30Medium (2.5-3.4)Problem solving3.67Higher =/+3.5

3.46

Medium(2.5-3.4)



Figure 1. Comparison of Macro metacognitive strategies and obtained average score

IJALEL 5(4):20-28, 2016

Bearing in mind that scores averaging 3.5 - 5.0 are considered as high; 2.5 - 3.4 as medium and scores averaging 1.0 - 2.4 as low strategy utilization (Cited in Jafari and Shokrpour, 2012), the total average for the metacognitive strategies in the current study measured at 3.41 which indicates the medium use of reading strategies by SCT students. In addition, a comparison among three groups of macro strategies shows that SCT students use Global strategies (3.41) and Support strategies (3.30) moderately while Problem-solving strategies are used more frequently (3.67). In other words, SCT students prefer to use Problem -solving Strategies most often which is followed by Global strategies and Support strategies respectively. In addition, the obtained average scores shows that none of the strategies was used at a low level.

To find out any significant difference among male and female Omani students' use of reading strategies, first the boys' questionnaires were separated from the girls. Then, total average score was computed for boys and girls separately. Table 3 shows SCT male and female students' total average score for three macro strategies.

Table 5.cross-gender Comparison of inclacognitive strategies used by 5CT students					
Gender	Mean score	Level	Mean score	Level	
Strategy	(Male)		(Female)		
Global	3.29	Medium	3.54	High	
Support	3.11	Medium	3.50	High	
Problem solving	3.45	Medium	3.89	High	
Total	3.28	Medium	3.64	High	

Table 3.Cross-gender Comparison of metacognitive strategies used by SCT students

As Table 3 shows, the preference for using Problem- solving strategies followed by Global and support strategies is consistent for both gender groups. Nevertheless, the obtained Mean score for male students ranged from 3.45 to 3. 11, which is considered as moderate use of metacognitive reading strategies, whereas for female students it ranged from 3.89 to 3.50, which indicates a high use of strategies.



Figure 2. Cross-gender Comparison of three macro Metacognitive strategies used by SCT students

The comparison between male and female students' overall average score, as illustrated in Figure 2, indicates that girls' awareness of reading strategies is higher than boys. In other words, female students use reading strategies more frequent than male students. This could be the main reason for SCT female students' outperformance comparing to male students. Chi-square test was run to find out if the observed difference between the two gender groups' total average score is meaningful.

Table 4. Chi-Square test					
Test Statistics					
	GLOB	SUP	PROB		
Chi-square	.000ª	.000ª	.000 ^a		
df	1	1	1		
Asymp.	1.000	1.000	1.000		
Sig.					

In general, Chi-square test indicates the significance of observed difference at P = .05 level. In the current study, the result of the Chi-square test, as illustrated in Table 4, shows that there is a meaningful relationship between students' gender and the use of reading strategies (Chi-square with 1 degree of freedom, p = .00 < 0.05). To be more precise, the use of different reading strategies is sensitive to the gender of the students.



As illustrated in Figure 2, male students' awareness of metacognitive reading strategies is at medium level comparing to female students' high level awareness. And as aforementioned, the difference between the total Mean score for the two gender groups is statistically significant (3.28 vs. 3.64).

The cross-gender comparison of 30 items, for three subscales, was carried out. The results have been presented in Tables 5, 6 and 7.

Global strategies in	Average score	Global Strategies in	Average score
hierarchal order		hierarchal order (Female)	
(Male)			
Item 1	3.62	Item 15	4.09
Item 4	3.60	Item 4	4.07
Items 15	3.60	Item 3	3.88
Item 3	3.58	Item 20	3.74
Item 23	3.36	Item 1	3.67
Item 24	3.31	Item 23	3.59
Item 6	3.20	Item 17	3.43
Items 20	3.14	Items 24	3.43
Item 27	3.14	Item 27	3.29
Item 21	3.11	Item 12	3.27
Item 8	3.06	Item 8	3.23
Item 17	3.04	Item 6	3.22
Item 12	3.03	Item 21	3.14
Total	3.28	Total	3.54

Table 5. Cross- gender comparison of average score for Global strategies used by SCT students

As it is shown in Table 5, Global metacognitive strategies constitute 13 items which has been ranked from the highest to the lowest Mean score obtained for each gender group. A comparison between male and female students' Mean score show that item 1 (I have a purpose in my mind when I read) is the most frequently used Global strategy by boys while girls use item 15 (I use tables, figures and pictures in text to increase my understanding) most often. Another reading of Table 5 is that items 4 (I take an overall view of the text to see what it is about before reading it) and item 27 (I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong) have been ranked second and ninth for both gender groups despite discrepancy in Mean score. The less frequently reported strategies at Global level are item 12 (when reading, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore) for male students and item 21 (I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text) for female students.

IJALEL 5(4):20-28, 2016

Support strategies in	Average score	Support strategies in	Average score
hierarchal order (Male)		hierarchal order	
		(Female)	
Item 10	3.47	Item 10	3.97
Item 30	3.37	Item 30	3.66
Item 2	3.23	Item 13	3.64
Item 22	3.20	Item 29	3.55
Item 29	3.16	Item 2	3.47
Item 13	3.15	Item 18	3.46
Item 18	2.96	Item 22	3.33
Item 26	2.87	Item 26	3.25
Item 5	2.60	Item 5	3.25
Total	3.11	Total	3.50

As aforementioned, Support strategies were reported as the least used metacognitive strategy. An interesting finding presented in Table 6 is that, in spite of some discrepancies in Mean scores, item 10 and item 30 are the most frequently employed Support strategies and item 5 is the least utilized strategy reported for both gender groups.

Table 7. Cross- gender com	parison of average score for]	Problem-solving stra	tegies used by SCT students

Problem-solving strategies	0	Problem-solving strategie	28
in hierarchal order (Male)	Average score	in hierarchal order (Female)	Average score
Item 25	3.76	Item 9	4.37
Item 7	3.68	Item 14	4.31
Item 14	3.63	Item 7	4.12
Item 9	3.60	Item 25	3.90
Item 11	3.46	Item 19	3.79
Item 28	3.28	Item 28	3.71
Item 19	3.23	Item 16	3.37
Item 16	3.03	Item 11	3.59
Total	3.45	Total	3.89

As illustrated in Table 7, there is a prominent discrepancy between the two gender groups in using Problem-solving strategies. While the highest score for male students is reported as 3.76, the highest reported score for female students is 4.37. Furthermore, all reported scores for female students except one (item 16) indicate that they use Problem-solving strategies most often whereas male students employ half of the strategies frequently (items 25, 7, 14, 9) and the other half strategies moderately.

6. Discussion

The findings of the current study show that Omani students employ various metacognitive strategies to handle comprehension problems in reading English texts. In general, all 200 participants showed a preference for using various reading strategies at high or moderate level. The reason for the overall high usage of reading strategies might be that reading academic texts demands greater cognitive awareness of readers. In addition, the results show that none of the 30 reading strategies were used at low level which is compatible with Alhaqbani and Riazi's findings (2012).

The investigation of SCT students self-reports show that the high frequent strategies were Problem-solving strategies followed by Global and Support strategies. SCT students' preference for using Problem-solving strategies is consistent with studies carried out by Alhaqbani and Riazi (2012) and Alsheikh and Mokhtari (2011). Examining the reading strategies used by Arab bilingual students, Alsheikh (2014) found that Arab readers prefer problem-solving strategies such as reading slowly and re-reading when they encountered new word while reading ESL texts. In similar vein, SCT students as L2 readers usually encounter significant difficulties as they are engaged in reading English texts. Thus, using strategies such as re-reading, reading slowly and carefully might be the possible explanation for the high usage of Problem-solving strategies. As the findings indicate the most frequently used strategies, in the current study, were items 9 and 14 that fall into Problem-solving category.

Another reading of the data analysis pertains to the low usage of Support strategies by SCT students. Similarly the results of study by Alsheikh and Mokhtari (2011) show that the Support strategies are used least and sometimes used rarely when the students read passages in both Arabic and English languages. However, the results of the present study seem to be inconsistent with the results presented by Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001, p. 445) who found that "ESL students attribute high value to Support reading strategies regardless of their reading abilities". As the results of this study show the least frequently used strategy was item 5 that belong to Support category.

7. Concluding Remarks

To highlight the importance of reading skill and prepare Omani learners to become competent readers have been among the growing concerns of Higher education in Oman in the recent years. The first step to improve students' reading skill

is to identify what reading strategies Omani students are using and examine their level of metacognitive awareness of these strategies. Such an investigation could contribute to our understanding of the most frequent reading strategies that Omani students use while reading English texts and their level of metacognitive awareness of these strategies.

This study provides useful information about reading strategies Omani students utilize in reading English texts which might have contribution to teachers and curriculum designers to think upon their current teaching approach.

The implication of the present study, in the first place, could be for teachers. Given the fact that, students who are taught reading strategies and use them are more successful readers, teachers may raise students' awareness of less used strategies via explicit instructions in the reading classes. In addition, the findings significantly help in developing appropriate pedagogical and remedial training for the less successful readers in Arab academic contexts.

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Online resources

http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Oman/From-access-to-success-The-story-of-Oman-s-school-education-system-2pri retrieved on 07/10/ 2015.

Appendix I

English version of SURVEY OF READING STRATEGIES developed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) is available in the following link:

laurenyal.myefolio.com/Uploads/Survey2002Mokhtari.pdf

Appendix II

استبانة قياس إستراتجيات القراءة

الهدف من هذه الاستبانة هو جمع المعلومات عن الإستراتجيات التي تستخدمها أثناء قراءتك للنصوص الأكاديمية باللغة العربية، وخاصة ما يتعلق منها بدراستك للمقررات الجامعية مثل: القراءة في الكتب الدراسية أو المقالات العلمية المتخصصة (وليست القراءة في المجلات العامة أو الصحف اليومية).

الفقرات الواردة بالنص أدناه تعود إلى **قراءتك باللغة العربية للنصوص الأكاديمية في مختلف المواد التي تدرسها في الجامعة**، كل فقرة ستنبع بخمسة أرقام 1-2-3-4-5 وكل رقم يعني الآتي:

- أبدا لا أفعل هذا إطلاقا.
- 2- أفعل ذلك من حين لآخر.
- 3- أحيانا أفعل ذلك (بنسبة 50%).
 - 4- عادة أفعل ذلك.
 - 5- دائما أفعل ذلك.

بعد قراءة كل فقرة ضع دائرة حول الرقم الذي تراه مناسبا. مثال ذلك لو أنك تقرأ دائمًا بعد وجبة الغداء ستضع علامة على الرقم 5: أقرأ بعد وجبة الغداء1 2 3 4 5 .

أخيرًا أود أن ألفت انتباهك أنه لا يوجد إجابة صحيحة أو خاطئة للفقرات الواردة في هذه الاستبانة. أرجو أن تضع دائرة على الرقم الذي تراه مناسبا.

دائما أفعل ذلك	عادة أفعل ذلك	أحيانا أفعل ذلك 50%	أفعل ذلك من لآخر	أبدا لا أفعل هذا إطلاقا	الإستراتيجية	الرقم
5	4	3	2	1	يكون لي هدف حينما أقرأ	1
5	4	3	2	1	عندما أقرأ أكتب بعض الملحوظات لمساعدتي في الفهم	2
5	4	3	2	1	أستخدم معرفتي السابقة لتساعدني في فهم ما أقرأ	3
5	4	3	2	1	أنظر إلى النص نظرة عامة لمعرفة ماهيّته قبل قراءته	4
5	4	3	2	1	حينما يصبح النص صعبا أقرأ بصوت عالٍ لمساعدتي في فهم ما أقرأ	5
5	4	3	2	1	أفكر فيما إذا كان محتوى النص يتفق مع هدفي الرئيس من القراءة	6
5	4	3	2	1	أقرأ ببطء وتمهّل حتى أتأكد من استيعاب ما أقرأ	7
5	4	3	2	1	قبل أن أقرأ أستعرض النص لمعرفة بعض خصائصه كطول النص وتقسيمه	8

IJALEL 5(4):20-28, 2016

أفقد التركيز في القراءة، أراجع النص مرة ثانية121545	أضع لمساء أضبه عندم أستعي أورأ أستعي	9 10 11 12 13 14
عدتي في تذكرها 3 2 1 5 4 5 4 3 2 1 2 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 6 5 5 5 5 6 5 5 5 6 5 5 5 5 5 5 6 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 6 5 5 5 6 5 5 6 5 5 6 5 5 5 6 5 5 6 5 5 5 5 6 5 5 5 6 5 5 6 5 5 5 6 5 5 6 5 5 6 5 5 6 5 6 5 6 5 6 5 5 6 5 6 5 6 5 6 5 6 5 6 5 6 5 6 5 6	لمساء أضبم عندم أستعي أقرأ أستعي	11 12 13 14
ل سَرَعتَّي في القراءة تبعا لما أقرأه 1 2 3 4 5 ا أقرأ، أحدد ما سوف أقرأه بتركيز وما سوف أهمله 1 2 3 4 5 ن ببعض الأدوات (كالمعجم مثلا) لمساعدتي في فهم ما 1 2 3 4 5 يكون النص صعبا، أحاول التركيز فيما أقرأ 1 2 3 4 5	أضبم عندم أستعي أقرأ حينما أستعي	12 13 14
ن ببعض الأدوات (كالمعجم مثلا) لمساعدتي في فهم ما 1 2 3 4 5 5 4 5 يكون النص صعبا، أحاول التركيز فيما أقرأ 1 1 2 3 4 5	أستعي أقرأ حينما أستعي	13 14
5 4 5 2 1 5 4 5 2 1 5 4 3 2 1	أقر أ حينما أستعي	14
	أستعي	
ن بالأشكال والصبور في النص لأزيد من استبعابي 1 2 3 4 5		
	12 11	15
· من حين لأخر لأفكر فيما أقرأ 1 2 3 4 5	الوقف	16
ن ببعض القرائن والإشارات في محتوى النص 1 2 3 4 5 5 4 5 عدتي في الفهم	أستع <u>د</u> لمساءً	17
، بعض الأفكار بمفرداتي الخاصة لأزيد من فهمي 1 2 3 4 5 5 4 5		18
ل أن أتصور وأتخيل المعلومات لمساعدتي في تذكر ما 1 2 3 4 5 5 4 5	أحاول أقر أ	19
ن بتنسيق الكتابة كتعريض الخط والأقواس لتمييز 1 2 3 4 5 5 4 5		20
وأقيّم وأنقد المعلومات في النص الذي أقرأه 1 2 3 4 5	أحلل	21
م النص مِرَارًا لإيجاد العلاقات بين أفكاره 1 2 3 4 5 5	أراج	22
م معلوماتي حينما تعترضني معلومات جديدة	أراج	23
أقرأ، أحاول تخمين محتوى النص 1 2 3 4 5	حينما	24
ا يصبح النص صعبًا، أقرأه مرة ثانية لأفهمه فهمًا تامًا 1 2 3 3 4 5	عندم	25
ح على نفسي أسئلة أثناء القراءة أتمنى أن أجد إجاباتها 1 2 3 4 5 5 4 5	أطر - في ال	26
م لأتأكد ما إذا كانت توقعاتي حول النص المقروء 1 2 3 4 5 5 4 5		27
أقرأ، أحاول تخمين معنى الكلمة أو العبارة التي لا 1 2 3 4 5 5 4 5	حينما أعرف	28
أقرأ، أترجم من اللغة العربية إلى لغتي الأم 1 2 3 4 5	حينما	29
أقرأ، أفكر في المعلومات الواردة باللغَّة العربية وكذلك 1 2 3 4 5 5 4 5 الأم		30

28