



## The Two Gender Groups' (Male vs. Female) Differences in their Use of EFL Reading Strategies

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### ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the two gender groups' (Male vs. Female) differences in their use of EFL reading strategies. The study sample consisted of 200 male and female university and high school students, who were selected conveniently from 4 high schools and 2 universities in the city of Kerman in south east Iran. An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the reading strategy use between male and female students on the whole. As a result, both gender groups in the present study used the same amount of reading strategies and both were moderately strategic. Both gender groups at high school level in the present study used similar amounts of strategies and both were moderately strategic. According to the results, the mean of the strategy use by the two gender groups are 3.04 for male students and 3.41 for female students which belong to medium strategy use range (2.41-3.49). As a result, both gender group interviewees in the present study use the same amount of strategies and both are moderately strategic. The average strategy use of the female participants was higher than the male participants. The qualitative data analysis results were in the same path with the quantitative results and supported them.

**Keywords:** EFL Reading Strategies, Male, Female

### INTRODUCTION

According to [Zare and Davoudi Mobarakrh \(2011\)](#), in spite of the fact that the major focus of all high school English syllabus in Iran is on the reading skill, the performance of learners on reading section, both in final exams and Iran university entrance examination, is disappointing. Also, [Bastanfar and Hashemi \(2010\)](#) assert that, even though the target in English courses in Iran is to give students of different majors, practice in reading English with the end result of enabling them to read and comprehend source materials, English reading comprehension has turned into a really difficult task for Iranian students; furthermore, [Marzban \(2008\)](#) suggests that although the English courses in Iran's educational system are mostly reading oriented, with little or no attention to other skills, many EFL learners in Iran have major difficulties with reading comprehension.

This is in condition that [Kamran and Maftoon \(2012\)](#) refer to EFL reading comprehension ability as the main facilitator of EFL learning at all language learning stages due to the large amount of input –in the form of reading texts- to which EFL learners are exposed. Although, extensive review of the related literature indicates that substantial and mindful reading strategy use, can result in considerable success in EFL reading comprehension ([Yin & Agnes, 2001](#); [Zhang, 2001](#)); also, despite the great emphasis on usefulness and teachability of reading strategies and the positive outcomes of the studies in this field ([Aghaei & Pillaie, 2011](#); [Aghaei & Zhang, 2011](#);

[Zhang, 2008](#)), instruction of reading strategies is still being neglected by the Iranian educational system ([Fotovatian & Shokrpour, 2007](#)); consequently, the focus of the present study is on the use of reading strategies as a fundamental enhancer of reading comprehension by the Iranian students.

The main focus of EFL instruction in Iranian schools is on reading, Iranian students have got basic problems in EFL reading comprehension ([Bastanfar & Hashemi, 2010](#); [Marzban, 2008](#); [Zare & Davoudi Mobarakrh, 2011](#)); second, a very useful enhancer of EFL reading comprehension is the use of reading strategies which are easily teachable ([Aghaei & Pillaie, 2011](#); [Aghaei & Zhang, 2011](#); [Kamran & Maftoon, 2012](#)); third, reading strategy instruction is greatly disregarded in the Iranian educational system ([Fotovatian & Shokrpour, 2007](#)); fourth, there exist both facilitating (strategies used by successful EFL readers while reading EFL texts) and debilitating (strategies used by unsuccessful EFL readers while reading EFL texts) strategies, which have to be extracted to be reinforced or rejected by the students and instructors ([Fotovatian & Shokrpour, 2007](#)); fifth, strategy use is affected by the users' geographical, cultural, ethnic, social and even religious background ([Candlin, 1983](#); [Liyanae et al., 2010](#); [Oxford, 1996b](#); [1988](#)); and sixth, the best strategies to be taught in a country's schools are the ones extracted from the students of the same country who share similar backgrounds ([Oxford, 1990](#)).

Based on these points, the present researcher aimed to profile the two gender groups' (Male vs. Female) differences in their use of EFL reading strategies.

### Materials and Methods

The steps in the pilot study were repeated with the main sample (200 subjects). The sample which consisted of 120 high school students (60 boys, 60 girls) and 80 university students (40 boys, 40 girls) sat for 2 of the study tests each session (EFL proficiency & SORS one session and EFL reading comprehension ability & Persian reading comprehension ability the next session). Consulting the more experienced researchers in addition to her supervisor, the present researcher was informed that not all the participants fill the questionnaires perfectly; as a result, she copied and spread about 400 questionnaires, out of which she made use of 200 most properly filled questionnaires for data analysis. After collecting all the data and correcting all the questionnaires, she entered the data into SPSS program to be ready for analysis. Data analysis was conducted with the help of a specialist data analyst in Kerman. Later on, new analyses were necessary to be conducted. As a result, the whole data were analysed by the researcher herself and the previous analyses were repeated too. The results of these tests are presented in the fourth and discussed in the fifth chapters. Based on the tests results in the quantitative phase of the study 20 students were randomly selected to participate in the qualitative phase (interview and think aloud). Out of the 20 selected participants only 16 (8 boys, 8 girls (4 high school, 4 university students (2 high and 2 low reading comprehension ability))) agreed to cooperate. Both think aloud and interviews were conducted in one 30-45 minutes' session, depending on the participant's explanations and reading ability. The procedure was, after getting the participants' agreement, tape recorded for later transcription and analysis. At the beginning of every session, the subject was assured that the data was kept anonymous and used only for the researcher's mere thesis use without any reference to the participant's name. Then the



participant received a passage (similar to the ones in the EFL reading comprehension ability test, in accordance with its length and difficulty) and was asked to read it as if s/he is reading a reading comprehension text related to her English course at home. She was provided with a dictionary, was allowed to use his/her mobile dictionary and had the opportunity to consult the researcher in unknown matters in the text. S/he was also asked to explain to the researcher whatever happened in his/her mind while trying to read and understand the text. After reading the text s/he was to answer the 5 comprehension questions related to the read text. After finishing this phase, a one to one, face to face semi structured interview, consisting of about 19 questions followed. The next step was to ask the interviewee to fill SORS, but orally. While choosing from among the 5 points in SORS' likert scales, the interviewee and the researcher had the chance to chat about the SORS statements. They were asked about the ambiguous strategies or the most useful strategies in SORS from their point of view. This phase also provided the chance for the researcher to compare the participants' replies along the quantitative phase of the study and the qualitative phase answers.

As a matter of the study being a survey and not following an experimental procedure also the fact that the study was only checking the possible relationships among the dependent and independent variables, the data were processed through SPSS.

## Results

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the reading strategy use between male and female students on the whole. The results of the test are presented in the following tables.

**Table 1.** The descriptive statistics related to the comparison between the two gender groups (at high school and university levels together) in their use of the SORS strategies in general.

High school and University students together	Male=1, Female=2	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading Strategy	1	100	3.19	.53
Use	2	100	3.21	.53

**Table 2.** The results of the independent samples t-test to compare the two gender groups (at high school and university levels together) in their use of the SORS strategies in general.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Reading strategy use	Equal variances assumed	.11	.73	-.28	198	.78
	Equal variances not assumed			-.29	197.1	.78



As seen in Table 2, there existed no significant difference in reading strategy use between male ( $M=3.19$ ,  $SD=0.53$ ) and female ( $M=3.21$ ,  $SD=0.53$ ;  $t(198)=-0.285$ ,  $p=0.78>0.05$ ) students. Also, as seen, the mean of the strategy use by the two gender groups were 3.19 for male students and 3.21 for female students which belonged to medium strategy use range (2.41-3.49). As a result, both gender groups in the present study used the same amount of reading strategies and both were moderately strategic.

***Was there any significant difference between the two gender groups (male vs. female) at high school level in their use of the EFL reading strategies?***

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the general SORS EFL reading strategy use between male and female high school students. The results of the test are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 3.** The descriptive statistics related to the comparison between the two gender groups (high school level students alone) in their use of the SORS strategies in general.

High school students only	Male=1, Female=2	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading Strategy Use	1	60	3.2300	.48
	2	60	3.1839	.53

**Table 4.** The results of the independent samples t-test to compare the two gender groups (the high school level students alone) in their use of the SORS strategies in general.

High school		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Reading strategy use	Equal variances assumed	0.05	0.82	0.50	118	0.62
	Equal variances not assumed			0.50	117.104	0.62

As seen in Tables 3 and 4, there existed no significant difference in general SORS EFL reading strategy use between male ( $M=3.23$ ,  $SD=0.48$ ) and female, ( $M=3.18$ ,  $SD=0.53$ ;  $t(118) = 0.50$ ,  $p=0.62>0.05$ ) high school students. Also, the mean of the strategy use by the two gender groups at high school level were 3.23 for male high school students and 3.18 for female high school students which belong to medium strategy use range (2.41-3.49). As a result, both gender groups at high school level in the present study used similar amounts of strategies and both were moderately strategic.

***Was there any significant difference between the two gender groups (male vs. female) at university level in their use of the EFL reading strategies?***

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the general SORS EFL reading strategy use between male and female university students. The results of the test are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

**Table 5.** The descriptive statistics related to the comparison between the two gender groups (the university level students alone) in their use of the SORS strategies in general.

University students	Male=1, Female=2	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading Strategy	1	40	3.1350	.59
Use	2	40	3.2575	.54

**Table 6.** The results of the independent samples t-test to compare the two gender groups (university level students alone) in their use of the SORS EFL reading strategies in general.

University		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Reading strategy use	Equal variances assumed	0.03	0.87	-0.96	78	<b>0.34</b>
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.96	77.305	0.34



As seen in Tables 5 and 6, there existed no significant difference in the use of the EFL reading strategies on SORS between male ( $M=3.13$ ,  $SD=0.59$ ) and female ( $M=3.26$ ,  $SD=0.54$ ;  $t(78)=-0.96$ ,  $p=0.34>0.05$ ) university students. Also, the mean of the strategy use by the two gender groups were 3.13 for male university students and 3.26 for female university students which belong to medium strategy use range (2.41-3.49). As a result, both gender groups at university level in the present study used similar amounts of SORS EFL reading strategies and both were moderately strategic.

In addition to the mentioned analyses, the two gender groups were also compared in their use of any of the subscales of SORS reading strategies (GLOB, PROB, SUP). The T-test results are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

**Table 7.** The descriptive statistics related to the comparison between the two gender groups (at high school and university levels together) in their use of the SORS subscales.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
GLOB	Male	100	3.19	0.57

	Female	100	3.18	0.61
PROB	Male	100	3.4	0.65
	Female	100	3.39	0.63
SUP	Male	100	3.01	0.68
	Female	100	3.11	0.62

**Table 8.** The results of the independent samples t-test to compare the two gender groups (at high school and university levels together) in their use of the SORS subscales.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
GLOB	Equal variances assumed	0.034	0.85	0.10	198	0.92
	Equal variances not assumed			0.10	196.99	0.92
PROB	Equal variances assumed	0.16	0.69	0.17	198	0.87
	Equal variances not assumed			0.17	197.79	0.87
SUP	Equal variances assumed	1.19	0.28	-1.05	198	0.29
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.05	196.44	0.29

As it is clear from Tables 7 and 8, there existed no significant difference between the two gender groups in their use of any of the SORS EFL reading strategy subscales. In the following section the analyses related to the third research question (EFL reading comprehension ability and reading strategy use) are presented.

***Was there any significant difference between the participants of the two genders (male vs. female) in their use of the EFL reading strategies?***

Twelve out of the sixteen interviewees couldn't think of any role for a learner's gender in his/her use of EFL reading strategies.

"I do not think a person's gender can play any role in his/her use of EFL reading strategies while there are more effective factors such as EFL reading comprehension ability or language proficiency." an interviewee believed.

However, the other four participants believed that female language learners might be more active users of strategies just because in the Iranian culture women are thought to be more careful and sensitive, so they might learn such delicate and sensitive matters more easily and better than the male learners.

"I think, as a matter of women's being more careful, in addition to being better and faster language learners, they might learn and use strategies better than men." another interviewee said.

Moreover, based on the latter group statements, women are more flexible and consequently might change their older habits of reading and use the later taught EFL reading strategies more easily, in addition to the fact that Iranian women because of being famous for talkativeness are taught to be better language learners, and reading is part of language. But on the whole the interviewees mostly linked the use of strategies to one's proficiency in the target language in addition to being instructed in using the strategies and not the other marginal factors such as gender.

"We have all seen that baby girls start speaking a lot earlier than baby boys. I think this is a good support for women's being better and more successful in all language skills." another interviewee commented.

The independent samples T-test results, checking the difference between the two gender group interviewees' report of SORS EFL reading strategies use, showed no significant difference between the two gender group interviewees in their use of SORS EFL reading strategies. The t-test results are presented in the Tables 9 and 10.



**Table 9.** The descriptive statistics related to the comparison between the two gender group interviewees' report of their use of the SORS strategies in the interview.

Two genders	Male=1, Female=2	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading Strategy	1	8	3.04	.69
Use	2	8	3.41	.53

**Table 10.** The results of the independent samples t-test to compare the two gender group interviewees' report of their use of the SORS strategies in the interview.

		Levene's Test for Equality-t-test for Equality of Means of Variances				
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Reading strategy use	Equal variances assumed	.033	.858	-1.231	14	.239
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.231	13.21	.240

According to Tables 9 and 10, the mean of the strategy use by the two gender groups are 3.04 for male students and 3.41 for female students which belong to medium strategy use range (2.41-3.49). As a result, both gender group interviewees in the present study use the same amount of strategies and both are moderately strategic. Both in the quantitative phase results and in this section the average strategy use of the female participants was higher than the male participants.

As it could be seen, the qualitative data analysis results were in the same path with the quantitative results and supported them.

### **Discussion**

The independent samples T-test revealed that there existed no significant difference between the two gender groups (male vs. female) studied in the present study in their use of SORS EFL reading strategies in general. Also, both gender groups were moderate strategy users (2.41-3.49 on the scale of 0-5) based on Oxford's (1986) classification of average strategy use scores.

The interview results supported these findings to a great extent. 12 out of the sixteen interviewees thought that gender (male vs. female) did not affect the use of EFL reading strategies. However, the other four participants believed that female language learners might be more active users of strategies just because in the Iranian culture women are thought to be more careful and sensitive, so they might learn such delicate and sensitive matters more easily and better than the male learners. Moreover, based on the latter group statements, women were more flexible and consequently might change their older habits of reading and use the newly taught strategies more easily, in addition to the fact that Iranian women because of being famous for talkativeness are taught to be better language learners and reading is part of language. But, on the whole, the interviewees mostly linked the use of strategies to one's proficiency in the target language in addition to being instructed in using the strategies and not the other marginal factors such as gender, which were contradictory to the present findings in research questions three and five.

The T-test ran over the interviewees' oral report of SORS use also showed that there did not exist any significant difference ( $P=.239>.05$ ) between the interviewees of the two genders in their use of strategies. Comparing these results to the quantitative data analysis results in which there existed no significant difference between the two genders in their use of strategies, it was clarified that the qualitative data was in the same path with the quantitative results.

The findings of this section of the study were not consistent with some studies conducted by different researchers in the field, e.g., Li (2010), Nourzadeh (2005), Noroozi and Birjandi (1998), who pointed out that there existed significant differences between male and female target language learners in their use of different reading strategies, and these differences were usually in favour of female participants in their studies. On the other hand, the results from this section of the present study were consistent with the findings of some other studies in the field, e.g., Temur and Bahar (2011), Zare-ee (2007), Naseri and Zaferanieh (2012) and Alavi and Ganjabi (2008) who reported no significant differences between the two gender participants in their studies.



One of the other analyses conducted under the second research question, was comparing the two gender groups in their use of any of the SORS subscales, which showed no significant difference between the two group participants in their use of any of the subscales.

What could be concluded from these results was that there is no necessity to differentiate between the Iranian male and female EFL learners in their instruction of EFL reading strategies and the same strategies can possibly be taught to both learners via similar instructional methods regardless of their gender. However, further studies can highlight this field more deeply.

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