The Reading Proficiency of L2 Learners in English Language at the Government Boys Degree Colleges in Sindh

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Abstract

This paper deals with the reading proficiency of ESL learners at the Government Boys Degree Colleges in Sindh. Reading skills happen to be one of the receptive skills in the written mode where the L2 learners try to comprehend an excerpt with the help of linguistic or non-linguistic knowledge-based competence or schemata. A representative sample of 20 the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) level teachers (n=9) and learners (n=11) individually completed a close-ended questionnaire based on 20 items; among these, the first fifteen reading strategies-based items adapted from Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002)and the remaining five statements self-produced by the present researchers. The data were analyzed through quantitative content analysis method. The findings suggested that the L2 learners should be provided proper supervision to enhance their reading proficiency; besides, the findings of the study could be applied to the same sociological conditions.

Keywords: Reading Strategies, Proficient Reader, and Linguistic Competence.

Introduction

The present world's standards have made compulsory for L2 learners to be proficient in reading skill. The proficiency in the reading skill enables L2 learners to develop their language competence. In other words, the reading habit does not scaffold to novice L2 learners in their academic career but it also helps them in their professional career. In the above citation, the reading practice has been metaphorically compared with the physical exercise. However, the present researchers depicts that the way one's physique could be well -maintained by having routine-based exercise; the way one's intellectual level could be flourished by having reading habit.

Besides, this receptive skill in the written mode enables novice L2 learners to be well-known about the current affairs along with the historical affairs. The English spelling system, contrary to popular belief, is not unsystematic; its consistencies are recognized by proficient readers. Spelling ability contributes to word recognition and, indirectly, to comprehension (Stanovich & Cunningham, 1993). Thus, a proficient reader sustains stamina to comprehend any piece of writing as who has adequate competence to decode any new word contextually. McCormick and Becker (1996) found that students with learning disabilities also benefited from indirect word study. Decoding skill also has implications for second language learners.

During the teaching and learning process of any language, language instructors have to manage proper time for four standardized language skills such as: Reading, writing, speaking, and listening. These four language skills have been bifurcated such as: productive and receptive skills. As per the nature of four macro language skills, on the one side reading and listening skills are called as receptive skills, on the other side writing and speaking skills are called as productive skills.

The present paper proposes to study about the reading proficiency at the Higher Secondary Level at the Government Boys Degree Colleges in Sindh. The reading proficiency

in any language skill has required continual attention of instructor, reader and his/her parents. Moreover, the students should be motivated, instructed and provided material about the advantages of reading practice as they could build up attitude towards L2.

The present receptive skill is not only bound with the ESL context; however, its significance cannot be denied in the context where English is employed as a native language. The present attempt seems quite important because it investigates the strategies and techniques which are useful for measuring the L2 learners' reading proficiency. Besides, there is no doubt to proclaim that reading proficiency in any language (especially in English) does not become possible within day and night. Conversely, it is made possible with continual reading habit. Reading is very sophisticated structure and includes many skills that require simultaneous coordination to successfully complete many reading tasks (Logan, 1997).

In this advanced era, there are various interesting and interactive types of reading materials (books, newspaper articles, magazines, email, and so on)which areused for arousing the interest of L2 learners in the reading. Conversely,in the context of present researchers, most of time L2 learners are bound with the academic reading where learners have no choice of free reading.

Literature Review

Readers Comprehension Styles: Aloud or Silent
Reading proficiency regarded as a compulsory aspect in both standardized tests: IELTS and TOEFL; albeit the L2 learners used to employ different reading styles such as: silent and loud reading. Anker (2010) reveals that reading well does not increase readers' caliber in their academic life but also in their professional life as well. Moreover, she pronounces good readers can get access to relevant information, or practical information about anything they are interested in: starting a business, finding a job, treating an illness, protecting themselves from unfair practices, and so on.

Reading comprehension styles are inevitable to be ignored by novice L2 learners; however, it is quite obvious that oral reading comprehension style is appropriate for beginners who are introduced to the target language in the non-native state. It may be resulted that difficulty in measuring of silent reading fluency accurately may be one explanation for lack of research about silent reading fluency compared with oral reading fluency that can be assessed easily. Another reason is that the lack of consideration given to silent reading fluency may result from the assumption that silent reading fluency may develop naturally from oral reading fluency (Fuchs et al., 2001; Hiebert, Wilson, & Trainin, 2010). Silent reading has been examined as the subsequent to oral reading, and oral reading has been recognized as preliminary to silent reading.

Griffth and Rasinski (2004) claim that the silent reading process would be disadvantageous and fake without effective scaffolding. Actually, the silent reader could not be assessed easily s/he is engaged in the reading the reading activity. As the findings of the National Reading (NRP) (NICHD, 2000) revealed that providing silent reading venues will not guarantee that student's time will be used effectively and they will become proficient readers.

As mentioned above, the essence of reading is comprehension, albeit there are some researchers who prefer silent reading over aloud reading for mature L2 learners as to save learning energies. Similarly, some research scholars claim that for the sake of comprehension loud reading would be better as in this style of reading two different sensations are active such as oral and visual. Moreover, according to some researchers, the oral mode of reading is

suitable for rectifying pronunciation at the primary level as this style of reading follows bottom up approach of reading by this view phonological pattern is primary and comprehension is secondary one.

Juel and Holmes (1981) suggest that oral reading may follow a "bottom up" process, meaning that readers may stop processing after achieving phonological recordings. If the reading process stops directly after achieving phonological recordings, then lexical access or comprehension processes may never occur.

On the other side, silent reading has been found more convenient for reading comprehension activity as learners in this style of reading seem mentally involved with the text. In short, in this format of reading, learners try to connect the verbose with the internal and external context of any excerpt. Some researchers have found evidence that individuals comprehend more information after reading silently when compared to reading loud (Jones & Lockhart, 1919; Mead, 1915, 1917; Pinter, 1913).

Reading proficiency

Reading proficiency is the expertise that makes one able to comprehend any linguistic or non-linguistic excerpt within directed time. A proficient reader needs to be well-known about these features: discrete sound system of the target language, their application, and the basic knowledge about the targeted topic of the study. Keeping that in view, it can be said that such reader has various techniques to meet with the essence of pieces of text. As Tadros (2014) opines that reading proficiency requires three sets of interrelated skills that develop over time: language and communication, mechanics of reading, and content knowledge.

Moreover, the L2 reader needs to maintain the reading rate for comprehension; otherwise, the reading activity might be futile. In other words, a successful reader requires to be moderate (neither too fast nor too slow); nevertheless, s/he requires to keep his/her reading speed constant for getting the core of the linguistic or non-linguistic knowledge. According to Hiebert (2014), if readers read too slowly, it can create problems for both comprehension and memory. Consequently, Hiebert, Wilson, and Trainin(2010) have introduced the construct of comprehension-based silent reading rate (CSR).

Reading Models and Strategies

The language expert shave proposed three models of reading, they are: bottom up, top down and interactive model. According to the foremost model (bottom-up), the L2 readers can easily comprehend a piece of text, similarly basic L2 learners can be taught in this order: morpheme to words, words to sentences level, after that sentence level to passage level. In other words, this model of reading emphasizes on the linguistic knowledge.

The bottom-up view mainly focuses on readers' linguistic knowledge of picking up information from morphemes, words, and sentences in a reading passage. Many researchers advocate the importance of a bottom up reading process in L2 reading (Ansari, 2015; Just& Carpenter, 1977). A bottom-up model of reading approach has been cited from Murtagh (1989) (see Figure 1).

Comprehension
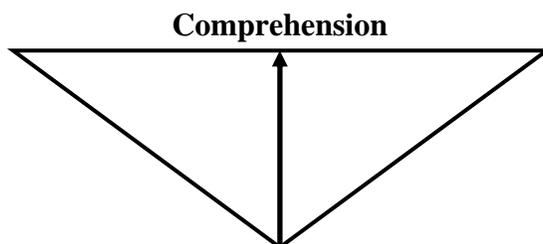
Figure 1: Bottom-up model of reading

The second model 'Top-down' of reading is also highly useful for a critical and close reader. Those readers who contextualize the piece of text according to his/her schemata (existing knowledge) such readers use to follow the top-down model of reading.Usually, proficient readers utilize top-down approach as they contextualize the piece of text according to their schema. The researchers have described the context into two folds, they are: on the one side reader decodes the sense that rests in the text, and on the other side the reader goes beyond the context where the content was compiled. Khalifa and Weir (2009, p. 54) suggest 'there are two distinct uses for context: one to enrich propositional meaning extracted from a decoded text and the other to support decoding where it is inadequate.'

The next model is the synthesis of above mentioned models i.e. an Interactive Model. Though, according to its proponents the reader needs to accompany contextual and linguistic knowledge for better comprehension. This means, comprehension of a text can take place only if both the lower and the higher level processes interact with each other (Ansari, 2015).An interactive model of reading approach has been cited from Murtagh. (1989), as follows (see Figure 2).

Reader background knowledge

Comprehension

Individual letters and sound
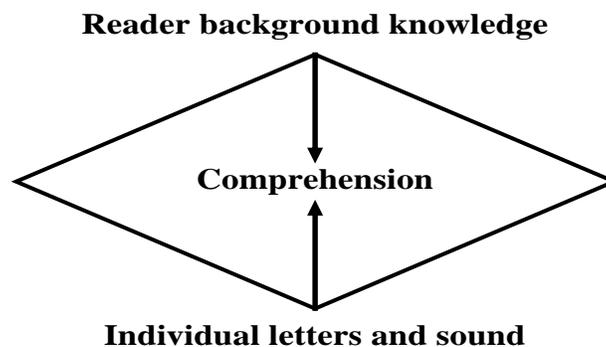
Figure 2: Interactive model of reading

Research Methodology

Research Questions
This paper addresses following research questions:

RQ1: What are the characteristics of a proficient reader?
RQ2: What are the reading strategies for identifying readers' proficiency?
RQ3: To what extent, the L2 readers are proficient in Higher Secondary level in the ESL context?

In the domain of any sort of research based study, methodology plays a global part in the whole study. Methodology is the branch of philosophy that analyses the principles and procedures of inquiry in a particular discipline (online word web). Besides, it provides the approaches (Quantitative, Qualitative, Mix method) for conducting standardized research based investigation. The present study adopts quantitative approach for analyzing and illustrating reading proficiency of college learners in the ESL context.

Participants of the study
The selection of participants in any study needs to be drawn carefully and critically for the reliability and validity of the research. In this attempt, the total number of the respondents is twenty, from two Government Boys Degree Colleges in Hyderabad and Badin. Among these participants, nine participants are instructors at the same public colleges while the rest of the participants (n=11) are students of HSC Part-II in the same college.
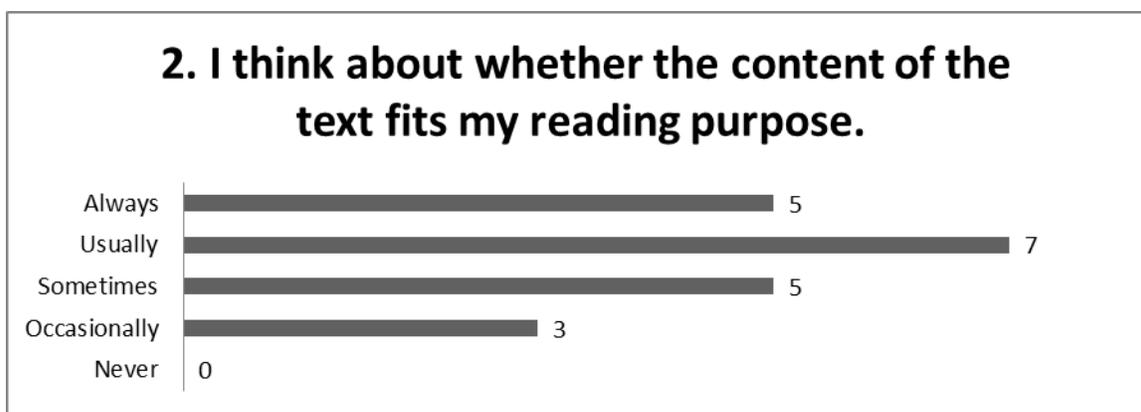
Measuring Instrument

In this attempt, a close-ended questionnaire based on 20 statements has been reproduced on the above mix sample of teachers and students. However, the present questionnaire has adapted and adopted 15 statements from the close-ended 30 statements of the survey of reading strategies of Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002).Besides, the present researchers have self-produced the remaining five statements.

Results and Discussion

Further, description of the study along with the graphical representation of the responses as follows in Plot 1 that shows that the proficient reader needs to have certain purpose in his/her mind before reading any excerpt for better comprehension. Therefore, the highest number of the participants agreed upon the strategy that they have a purpose in mind when they read any excerpt. Conversely, only one participant attempted that he occasionally had a purpose in mind while reading.

1. I have a purpose in mind when I read

|	
Always	13
Usually	4
Sometimes	2
Occasionally	1
Never	0
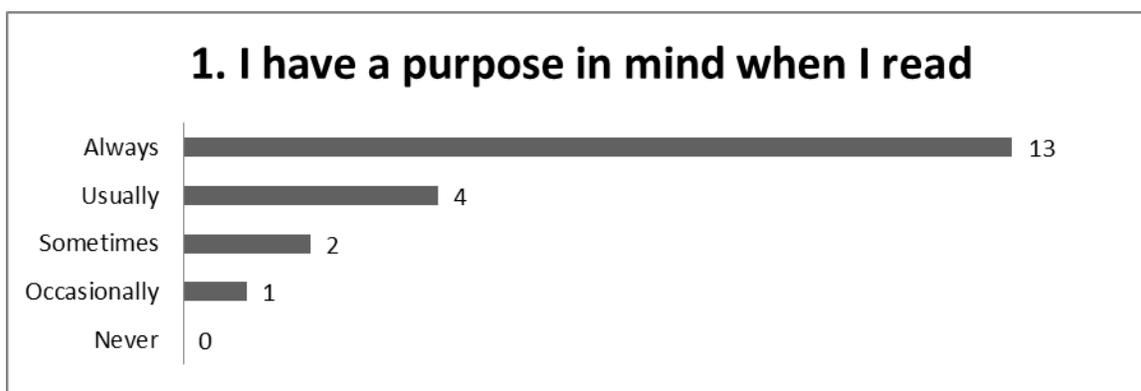
On the other hand, Plot 2 clearly depicts that the majority of L2 readers i.e. (5+7=12) initially recognize the reading material is stimulating or their purpose or not. On the other side, three participants have attempted that they occasionally think about the text matches their purpose or not.

2. I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose.

|	
Always	5
Usually	7
Sometimes	5
Occasionally	3
Never	0

Plot 3 displays that the third reading strategy is also common for measuring reading proficiency. Those readers are habitual of reading they used to identify the typographical features or notes for saving time and energy. This statement is quite interesting because the first majority i.e. six who sometimes employ this technique, second who always employ i.e. 5, third who never i.e. 4, fourth who usually and only two participants who occasionally employ it.

3. I use typographical features like bold face and italics to identify key information.

Always	5
Usually	3
Sometimes	6
Occasionally	2
Never	4
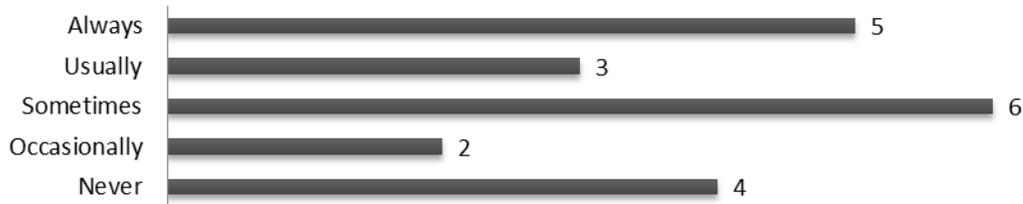
Plot 4 clearly demonstrates that the fourth reading strategy is also useful for measuring reading proficiency. As the proficient readers style varies from person to person as in the highest number of the respondents i.e. 10 read the text slowly for better understanding while equal number of the respondents i.e. 4 who usually and never read the assigned text slowly.

4. I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading.

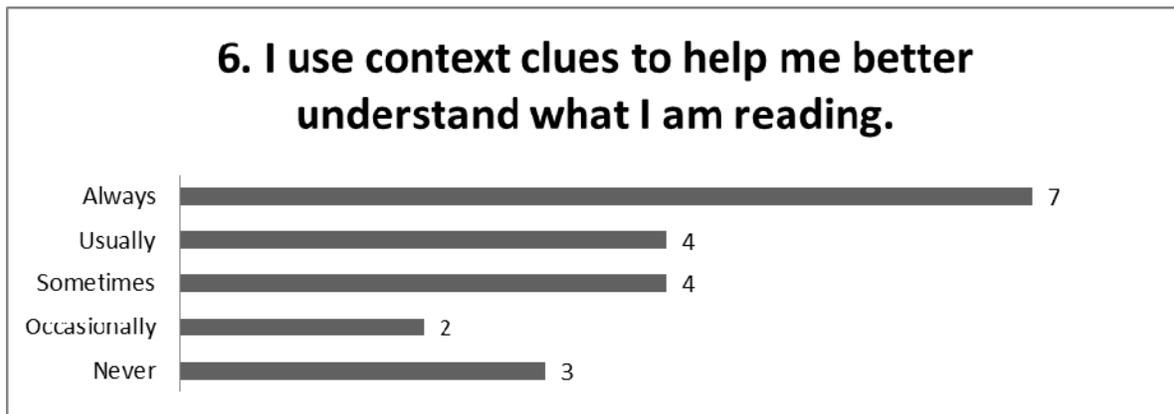|	
Always	10
Usually	4
Sometimes	2
Occasionally	0
Never	4
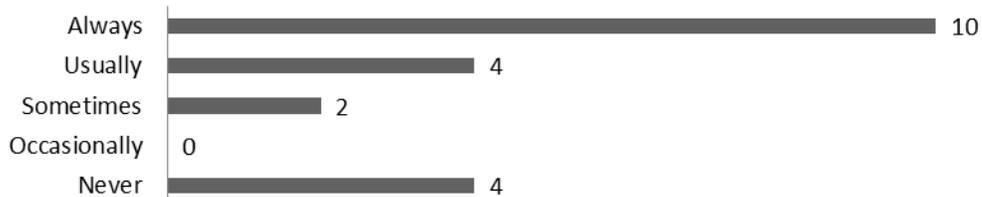
Plot 5 visibly displays that the fifth reading strategy is also useful for measuring reading proficiency. The proficient readers decide the pace of reading after reviewing the nature of the piece of the reading materials. In this statement, the highest number of participants usually employs the reading speed according to the nature of the text, six participants do it and equal number of the participants sometimes and occasionally employs this strategy.

5. I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading.

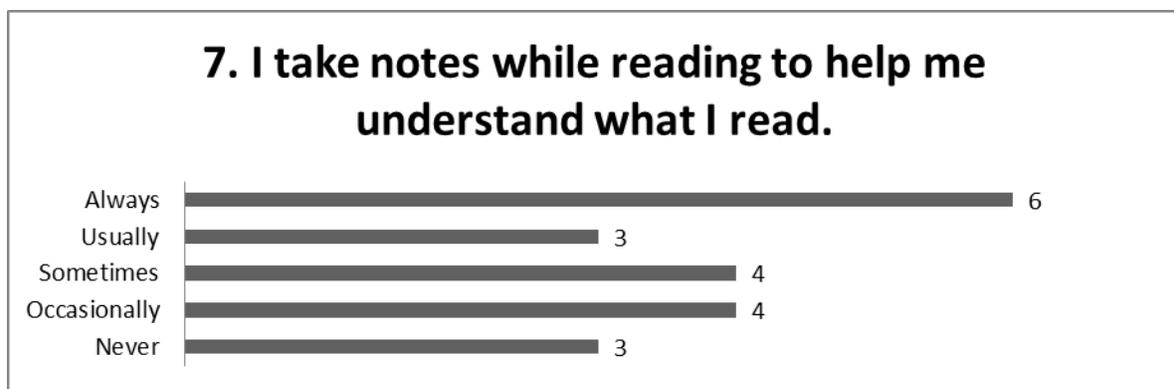|	
Always	6
Usually	10
Sometimes	2
Occasionally	2
Never	0

Plot 6 shows that the sixth reading strategy is also useful for identifying readers' proficiency. The proficient readers used to employ top-down strategy while reading though,
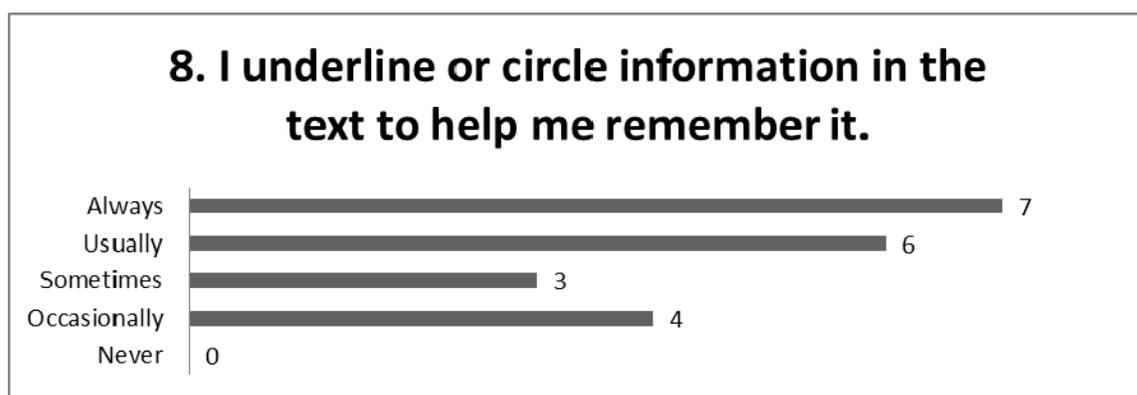
in the following study the highest number of the participants employs contextual clues i.e. 7, at the second position four participants usually and sometimes employ it, three participants never do it, and two occasionally do it.

6. I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading.

Always	7
Usually	4
Sometimes	4
Occasionally	2
Never	3

The seventh reading strategy, as can be seen in plot 7, may be employed by proficient readers. Again the highest number of the participants i.e. six has given positive response that they employ note taking while reading activity, four by four participants attempted sometimes and occasionally take notes, and three by three participants attempted usually and never.

7. I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read.

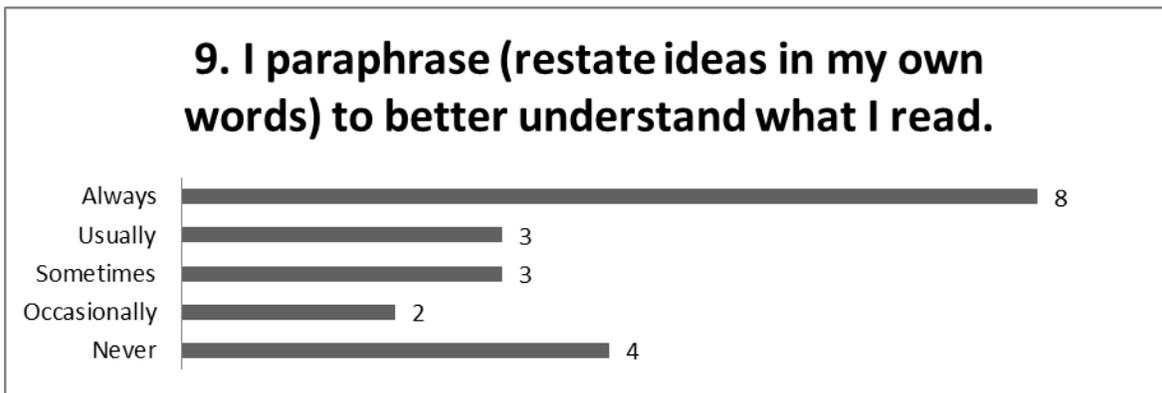|	
Always	6
Usually	3
Sometimes	4
Occasionally	4
Never	3

Plot 8 clearly displays that the eighth adopted reading strategy may be employed by proficient readers. Again, the highest number of the participants i.e. seven has given positive response that they do underlining and circle the key information while reading activity as to keep themselves energetic, six participants usually adopt this technique, four occasionally, and three sometimes employ it.

8. I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.

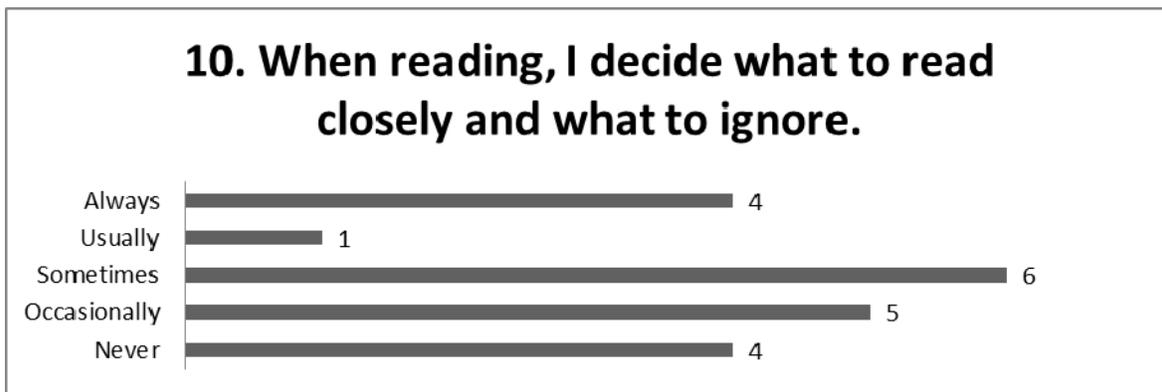|	
Always	7
Usually	6
Sometimes	3
Occasionally	4
Never	0

Plot 9 clearly shows that the ninth adopted supporting reading strategy may be employed by proficient readers. Again, the highest number of the participants i.e. eight has
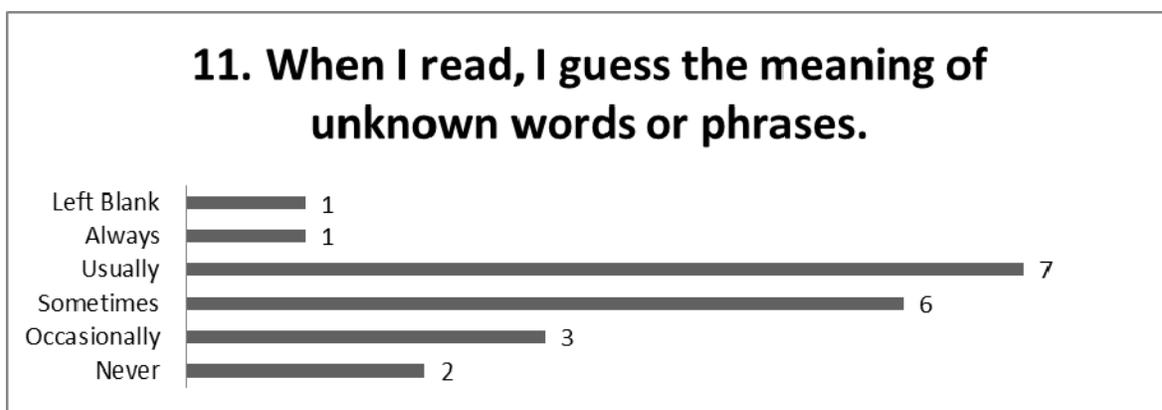
given positive response that they restate the main statements for better understanding, three participants have attempted usually similarly three attempted sometimes, two attempted occasionally, and four participants did not employ this reading supportive strategy.

9. I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.

Always	8
Usually	3
Sometimes	3
Occasionally	2
Never	4

Plot 10 clearly displays that the tenth adopted global reading strategy may be employed by proficient readers. In this statement, the majority of the participants i.e. six sometimes employ it, five occasionally, four always, four never and only one participant used to employ it.

10. When reading, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.

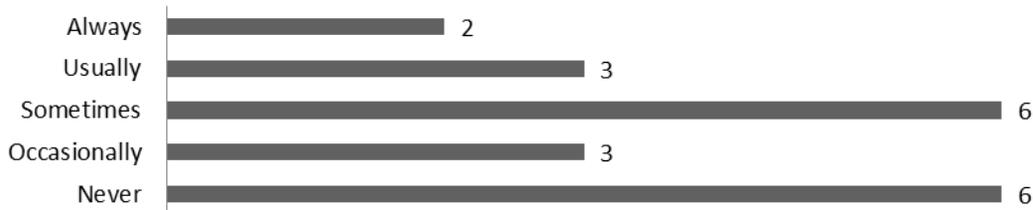|	
Always	4
Usually	1
Sometimes	6
Occasionally	5
Never	4

Plot 11 noticeably displays that the eleventh problem solving reading strategy may be employed by proficient readers. The majority of the participants i.e. seven usually guess the meaning of new words or phrases, six sometimes employ it, three occasionally, two never, and only one participant always employs it and one has left it blank.

11. When I read, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.

|	
Left Blank	1
Always	1
Usually	7
Sometimes	6
Occasionally	3
Never	2

Plot 12 clearly exhibits that the twelfth supporting reading strategy may be employed by proficient readers. The majority of the participants i.e. six sometimes translate the text into their L1, the number of the participants never do it, similarly three sometimes and three occasionally do it, and only two participants always translate the L2 text into L1.

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12. When reading, I translate from English into my native language.

| Response	Value
Always	2
Usually	3
Sometimes	6
Occasionally	3
Never	6

Plot 13 evidently indicates that the thirteenth supporting reading strategy may be employed by proficient readers. The majority of the participants agree with the statement that they think over the authorized or unauthorized reading material both in English and in his L1. Six participants sometimes have agreed upon the statement, five have occasionally agreed, four have always agreed, three have usually agreed and only two participants have never done so.

13. When reading, I think about information in both English and my mother tongue.

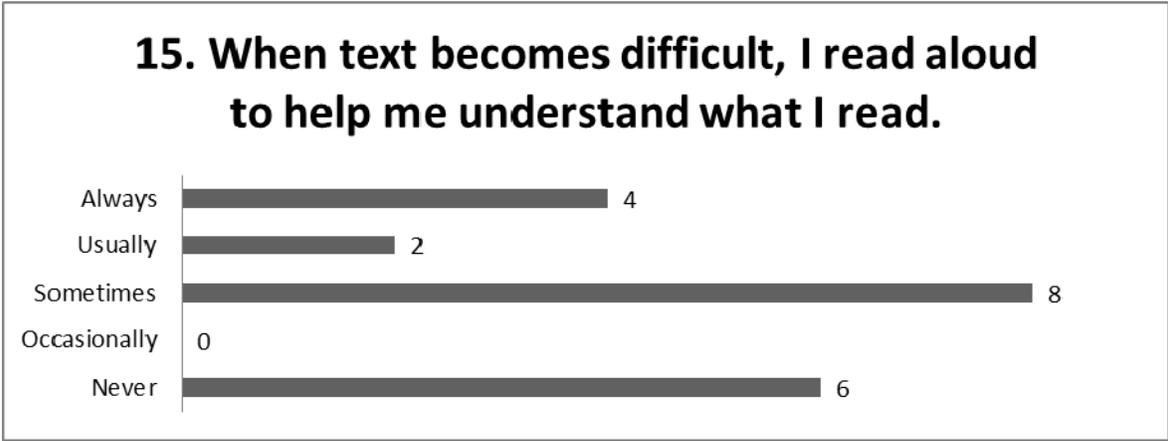| Response	Value
Always	4
Usually	3
Sometimes	6
Occasionally	5
Never	2
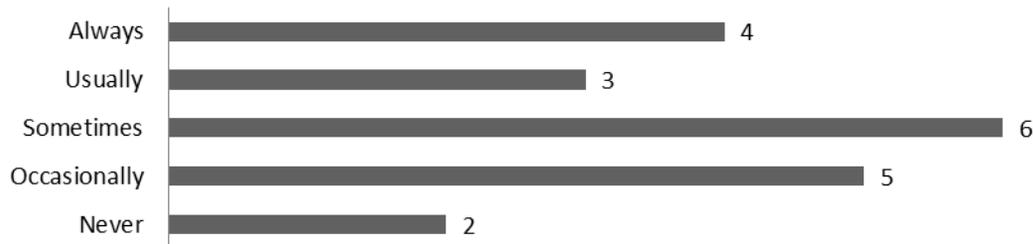
Plot 14 clearly shows that the fourteenth problem solving reading strategy may be employed by proficient readers. The majority of the participants agree with the statement that they re-read the statement for better understanding. Eleven participants always employ it, six usually employ it, and respectively one participant attempted in each left blank, sometimes, and never.

14. When text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding.

Response	Value
Left Balank	1
Always	11
Usually	6
Sometimes	1
Occasionally	0
Never	1
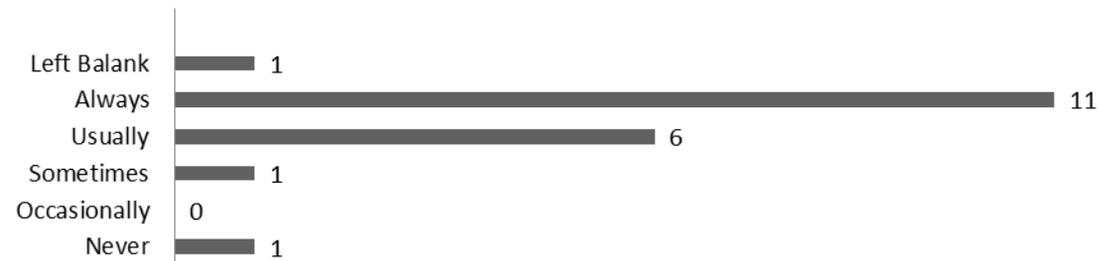
Plot 15 suggests that the fifteenth supporting reading strategy may be employed by

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proficient readers. The majority of the participants sometimes agree with the statement that they read the text aloud for understanding the text in better way; though eight participants sometimes agree with the statement, six never employ do so, four always employ it, and two participants usually do so.

15. When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.

Always	4
Usually	2
Sometimes	8
Occasionally	0
Never	6

Now, the analysis of self-produced five statements for assessing reading proficiency in the ESL context, as follows:

Plot 16 noticeably shows that the sixteenth statement tells about the reading hobby in the ESL learners. Many of the participants have agreed that they read the authorized or unauthorized text i.e. 7, four have sometimes agreed similarly four have attempted never response, three have occasionally agreed, and two have usually agreed with the statements.

16. In leisure, I read books in both L1 and L2?

|	
Always	7
Usually	2
Sometimes	4
Occasionally	3
Never	4
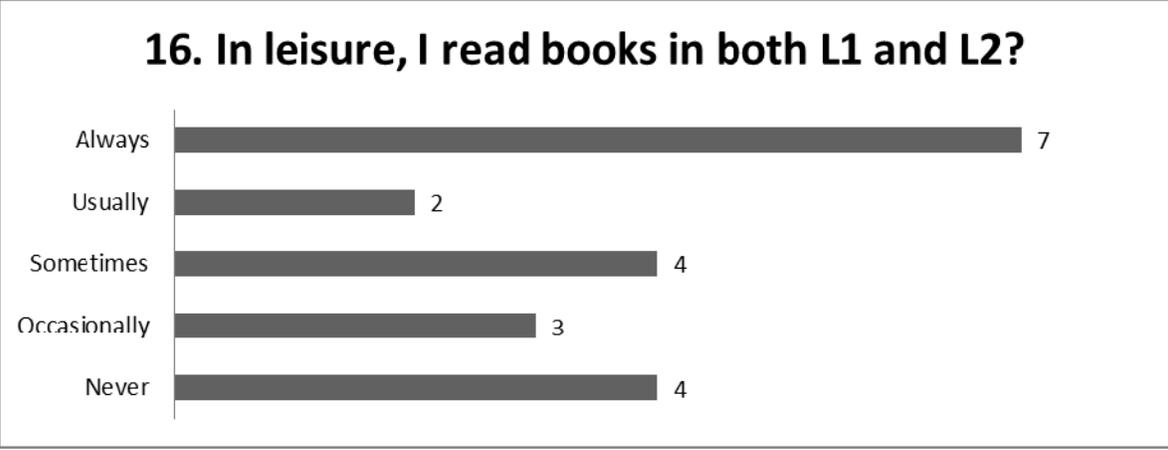
Plot 17 mentions that the seventeenth statement tells about the interest of the participants in school related academic reading material. Surprisingly, seven participants have attempted that they never read only school related academic reading material; five have responded that they usually do so; four have responded that they always do so and similarly four have responded they occasionally read school related academic reading material.

17. I read only school related academic reading materials.

| Response	Count
Always	4
Usually	5
Sometimes	0
Occasionally	4
Never	7

Plot 18 exhibits that the eighteenth statement can be utilized for examining participants reading proficiency. Six of the participants have responded that they cannot read the text with rhythm, four by four respondents that they sometimes and occasionally can do so; on the contrary, three by three respondents have agreed that they always and usually read the text with rhythm.

18. I can study the book or any material with rhythm.

| Response	Count
Always	3
Usually	3
Sometimes	4
Occasionally	4
Never	6
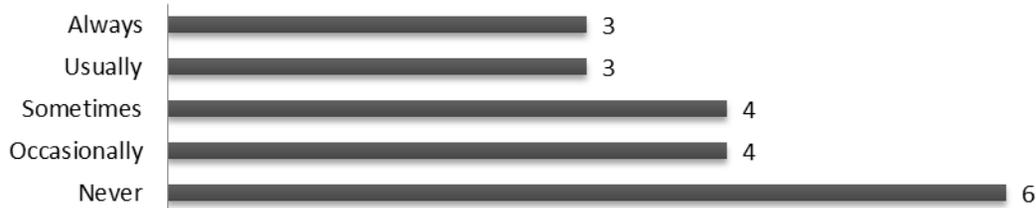
Plot 19 clearly displays that the nineteenth statement can be utilized for examining participants reading proficiency. The six out of 20 participants have responded that they can always comprehend any excerpt that shows their reading proficiency stamina, five can sometimes do so, four can usually do so, three can occasionally do so, and only 2 respondents have attempted never.

19. I can easily comprehend any piece of text.

Response	Count
Always	6
Usually	4
Sometimes	5
Occasionally	3
Never	2
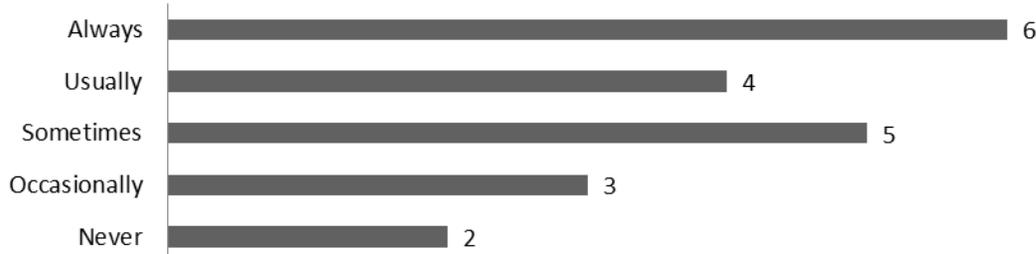
Plot 20 clearly shows that the twentieth statement can also be a reasonable and reliable tool for analyzing readers' proficiency in English language. The seven out of the total respondents have chosen sometimes new vocabulary becomes problem in their understanding, six have attempted that new words always hamper their reading

comprehension, two of them have attempted usually, one occasionally, and interestingly four of the participants have mentioned that new vocabulary does not become hurdle for them in comprehension.

20. New vocabulary becomes problem for me in understanding a piece text.

Always — 6
Usually — 2
Sometimes — 7
Occasionally — 1
Never — 4
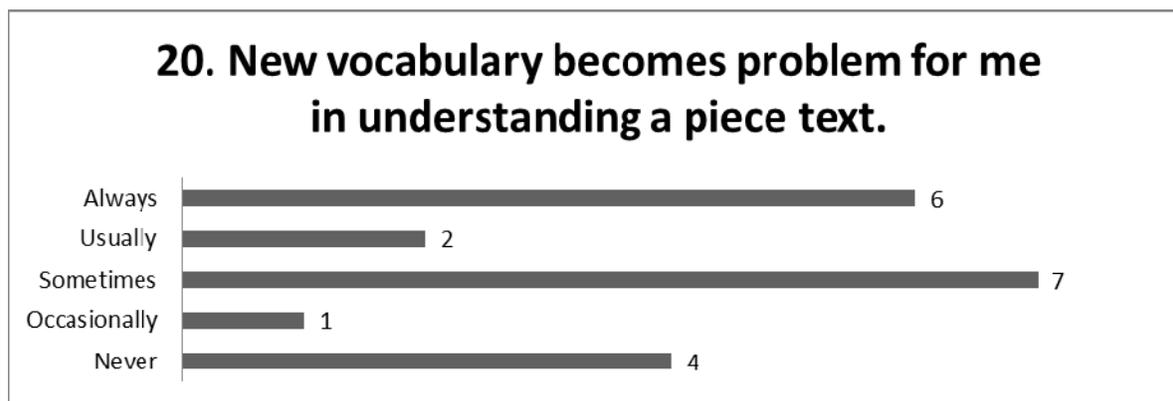
In the nut shell, the study has examined that the readers (both teachers and participants) are better in the proficiency in reading; however, there are some participants who need some more attention and reflective guidance for enhancing comprehension. Thereby, it can be suggested that the employed and reproduced effective reading strategies could be helpful for identifying reading proficiency to some extent.

Conclusion

This paper deals with the reading proficiency of ESL learners at the Government Boys Degree Colleges in Sindh. The study has employed a forced questionnaire based on 20 statements on the equal number of the respondents. However, the data has been analyzed through a bar chart by using MS excel. In this attempt, the proficiency of the readers in English language has been appraised through the adopted reading strategies. There are some techniques (having certain purpose before reading, noting typographical features, adjusting reading pace according to the nature of the text, extracting the meaning within the text, taking notes, paraphrasing and so on) which show that the randomly selected sample seems proficient in the reading activities to some extent. Similarly, there are some strategies (re-reading the text, reading aloud for more understanding, reading only school related books and the meaning of new vocabulary) which impel the L2 readers to enhance their performance in the reading skills. In short, the present attempt has described that to what extent the targeted population is proficient at reading.

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