



**The Relationship between Iraqi EFL Preparatory School  
Students' social learning strategies and Reading Comprehension Skill**

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**Abstract in English**

For many years, the significance of social learning strategies as a considerable provider to educational success has been the concentration of L2/FL learning research. Hence, social learning strategies (SLSs) are still as important as individual differences in language learning. SLSs are important strategies that help learners to manage language learning where they capable to relate the learning setting to their individual power of learning. Students capable to elucidate any received problems when learning the language. These strategies contribute to the improvement of students' reading skill. The encouraging milieu creates a positive influence on learners. Consequently, difficulties in learning a language are easy to be improved. Reading is a crucial skill that students should improve in the initial periods of learning the English language. Evolving this skill will support students to learn other skills of language such as listening, speaking, and writing. In which how to employ this skill properly, is very important in language learning. As a result, the present study aims to find out:

**Paper Info**

**Keywords**

*Social learning strategies, reading comprehension, reading*

doi: <https://doi.org/10.63797/bjh>.

- 1) Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' social learning strategies (SLSs).
- 2) Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' Level of Reading Comprehension (RC).
- 3) The correlation between Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' SLSs with their RC.
- 4) To what degree do Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' SLSs contribute to explaining the variation in their RC?

In view of that, a sample of (120) students are selected randomly from Iraqi EFL preparatory schools, from Karbala governorate throughout the academic year 2023 / 2024. To achieve the aims of the present study, two instruments are used; Phothongsnun's (2006) questionnaire has been adapted to asses SLSs and the test of reading comprehension, which is adopted from (liveworksheets.com) to measure the Students' level of reading comprehension. After confirming the validity and reliability of the tools, which have been applied and the statistics have been gathered. At that point, a number of numerical instruments have been implemented to analyze the achieved data. The results show that the learners have a high level of social learning strategies and a moderate level of reading comprehension. Additionally, the findings as well, reveal that contributors' social learning strategies are statistically correlated with their reading comprehension. Finally, conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions are put forward.

**Key words:** proficiency.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The problem and its significance

The current study problem can be stated in the following question; Is there a correlational relation between Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' social learning strategies and their reading comprehension? Based on the above problem statement, this current study attempts to attain the purpose of investigating the association between Iraqi EFL preparatory school learners' social learning strategies and their reading comprehension. Reading is an important skill in English language teaching as a foreign language (EFL) that each learner must master it in order to grow well academically, especially at the preparatory level. In reality, understanding of written materials is the first stage in acquiring a language. The capacity to grasp the key concepts in a book and the relationships that link these ideas is referred to comprehension. The application of reading comprehension methods by students is critical to achieve a great level of understanding. Therefore, learners have to comprehend the given text, observe their understanding and assess the text content. On the other hand, students ought to develop their individual skills in the act of reading.

Despite that, many students have many problems concerning understanding. They struggle on the part of their reading understanding for a variety of causes and they do not perform to be adept enough to employ reading comprehension methods, which are important to many activities of reading and tasks. Thus, their performance is weak.

Because social learning strategies have a strong link to learning the language and comprehending reading skill that has an significant phase of the process of reading, various studies have been conducted to look into the relationship between social learning strategies and reading comprehension skill in order to advance the position of English learning/teaching process.

In our high schools, students face many difficulties concerning the comprehension of reading skill particularly when they try to response the (unseen passage) question in paper of monthly, mid and final examinations of English.

## **1.2 Aims**

This study aims at Finding out Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Students' social Learning Strategies and Their Correlation with reading comprehension.

## **1.3 Limits**

The current study is limited to Iraqi EFL preparatory school students (fifth Class) for the academic year 2023-2024.

## **1.4 The definitions of Basic Terms**

### **1.4.1 Social Learning Strategies**

As stated by Richards and Renandya (2002, p.122), social Learning Strategies can be defined as "actions learners take to interact with users of the language". Furthermore, are also referred to as "learning by interacting with others, such as working with follow students or asking teacher's help" (Cook, 2001, p.129). The procedural definition of social learning strategies is adopted from Oxford (1990), "Language is a form of social behavior; it is communication, and communication occurs between and among people. Learning a language thus involves other people, and appropriate social strategies are very important in this process".

### **1.4.2 Reading Comprehension**

Reading comprehension is the capacity to understand what has been read to communicate effectively (Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen, 2009).

According to Hallahan et al. (2009), reading excessively slowly or haltingly interferes with one's capacity to understand material. The capacity to study and learn from literature is one of many levels of understanding, according to Caldwell et al. (2010:171). Other degrees of comprehension include literal comprehension, higher-level comprehension, and drawing on prior experiences. Expository comprehension, which refers to informative texts like scientific books, and narrative comprehension, which refers to stories and novels, are the two forms of reading comprehension.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### **2.1 Language Learning Strategies**

The term of language learning strategies can be defined as "any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information" (Wenden & Rubin, 1987, p.19). As mentioned by Oxford, (1990) that LLSs are precise activities taken by the student to facilitate learning, make it faster, more amusing, more self-directed, operative, and convenient to novel conditions.

LLSs are concerned as processes which make learning activities easier. LLSs are regarded as goal-oriented as well, conscious (Chamot, 2004). Accordingly, Ortega (2009) characterizes that LLSs are deliberate intellectual and behavioral processes that learners involve in to get regulate their learning the foreign language. Griffiths (2008) points out those LLSs are deliberate choices made by students to governor their own learning. LLSs are intricate, active activities, which EFLs select besides using in particular circumstances to achieve certain language objectives as well as further their foreign language growth. To meet the learning needs of

students, LLSs are repeatedly integrated and regulated in varied methods. Accordingly, Oxford (2016) states that personality type and contextual factors determine whether techniques are appropriate. **2.1.1 The Concept of Social Learning Strategies**

Social tactics are important in the subject of communication as they are employed amongst individuals. As said by Oxford (1990), social language learning strategies contain asking questions, work together with others, showing empathy for others, and looking for prospects. Asking questions is always the best course of action and brings you the closest to the meaning. It also makes communication easier by prompting a response from the other person and showing interest and engagement. A sense of community is fostered and challenge is replaced by cooperation.

Bremner (2000) in his research shows that cooperative learning promptly increases self-esteem, confidence, and academic achievement. Students do not obviously employ cooperative strategies subsequently educational institutions place such a strong focus on competition. While competition often results in anxiety and a fear of failing, it can occasionally trigger a strong desire to outperform others. It is crucial to assist students in changing their views from challenge and conflict to cooperation. Empathy, or the capacity to comprehend others, is essential in communication. Students can apply social skills and reading comprehension to acquire diverse beliefs and to be thoughtful to the emotional state and ideas. Students can apply the cooperative learning strategy by collaborating to finish a task in the language they are studying.

Based on Phothongsunan (2006, p.31), "Social strategies are crucial for EFL learning because they give students the chance to improve their

English skills and use the language as a medium of communication by giving them exposure to and practice in the target language".

### 2.1.1.1 Types of Social Learning Strategies

Social Learning Strategies contain the following:

**A) Asking questions:** It is regarded as the most important social exchanges, which assists to get the levels learners' understanding more precise to the intentional meaning, (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). It includes:

- 1) **Asking for Clarification or Verification:** Asking the interlocutor to revise, paraphrase, clarify, or give a pattern; inquiring whether a particular discourse is appropriate. Since requesting clarification otherwise confirmation is achieved inversely in diverse values that learners need to recognize the correct methods to do so (Oxford, 1990).
- 2) **Asking for Correction:** Asking for alteration from somebody throughout a conversation. The approach is utilized for communication and in writing since learning a novel language causes errors obvious. This approach is related with the students' self-monitoring performance to categorize and report their difficulties.

**B) Cooperating with others:** Learners have to collaborate both with mates and with the language advanced interlocutors. (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). Cooperating with others embraces;

- 1) **Collaborating with peers:** cooperating with EFL learners to improve their skills. Working with natives in a group or couple in which contributing in social mediating tasks and connecting in interpersonal interactions and active participation in educational responsibilities is very essential (Oxford, 1990).

- 2) Collaborating with Expert speakers of the target language:** functioning out of the classroom with natives or talented speakers of the required language. The method focuses on several colloquial turns in which every learner accepts (Oxford, 1990).
- C) Empathizing with others:** Raising awareness of other people's feelings and perspectives in addition to cultural sensitivity (Oxford, 1990). Empathy is vital for effective communication in any language, mainly when learning a new one.
- 1) Evolving Cultural awareness:** refers to understanding someone by learning their culture and attempting to comprehend the learner's connection to the target culture.
- 2) Awareness about individuals' Beliefs and Emotions:** In order to notice participants' performances to be regarded as possible signs to their own opinions and emotional states and to request about the considerations and feelings.
- D) Seeking Opportunities:** refers to finding a chance to develop the four skills of the language.

## 2.2 Reading Skill

Reading is a verbal activity that is linked to thinking and other interactional skills like as listening, speaking, and writing. Reading is the process of reconstructing ideas and information from patterns and symbols displayed on the page. Reading, according to Attia (2007:91), is a process that naturally relates speech-language to written symbols and contains the meaning as well as the sign representing sound. First, seeing textual symbols via the sense of sight and transmitting these pictures to the brain for content analysis and understanding. Second, via the permission that the

brain grants to the participants of the scene, these signals are interpreted and converted into words.

### 2.2.1 Reading Comprehension

"Making understanding of and learning from literature is referred to as reading comprehension. The reader, the text, and the action are the three components of understanding, according to Snow and colleagues"

(O'Malley and Chamot, 1990, p95). A broader sociocultural framework encompasses classroom instruction, the student's institutional background, self-notions, face-to-face interaction, school culture, and learning setting. Klingner et al. (2007, p8) define reading comprehension as "The process of obtaining meaning from a text through communication between readers and the information they bring to the manuscript, such as past knowledge or scientific background, or by employing specialized techniques".

As stated by Badr El-Deen (2011, p11), "Reading comprehension is the ability to transmit a manuscript that includes interpreting and decoding sentences and vocabulary, using cognitive strategies, metacognition, and prior experiences related to the text to obtain the meaning or aimed message that the writer wants to present through the words". Elradii (2014, p14) asserted " Reading capacity is an individual's ability to communicate in a manuscript in order to construct alternative interpretations or express the writer's thoughts using a comprehensible method that involves cognitive and metacognitive methods". Alternatively, competency of reading joins the given script and the writers' thoughts by using numerous skills related to reading.

### 2.2.1.1 Purposes of Reading

We read for a variety of reasons. Sometimes we read books to get a better understanding of the core concept, and other times we need to gather facts in order to make a decision. We could read more to have a better comprehension of the underlying concepts and supporting information (Grabe & Stoller, 2001).

According to Grabe (2009, pp7-10), "when one reads for a variety of goals, one will link in numerous sorts of reading, particularly in academics." He offered a few academic reasons for reading, such as:

- 1) Reading for Particular Knowledge: reading for the specialized aim of exploring restricted or specific knowledge is a typical sort of reading. As a result, reading necessitates looking for and rapidly locating precise data.
- 2) Reading for concepts and notions: It focuses on fundamental ideas, ideologies, and core of the subject delivered. The student finds out through the main subjects, headers, charts, in addition to outcomes to acquire an overall sense of the information. The interpretation of thoughts is improved by realizing that area of general research that relates concerns, material, and conversations.
- 3) Reading for knowledge needs a grasp of the link amongst the material provided as well as a broad concept of the given topic, along with the relationship between sections, subjects of primary ideas, and stretches.
- 4) Reading for combing data: The reader merges knowledge from numerous textbooks into a single lengthy document in this sort of reading.

- 5) Reading for criticism, evaluating knowledge, and putting it to use: comprehension and background information play a big role at this stage. The reader expends a great deal of effort when reading the book to re-explain the writers' material and concepts. (ibid.)

#### 2.2.1.2 Types of Reading Skill

- 1) **Intensive reading:** Texts are read in this style to acquire the necessary information. This category, according to Grellet (1994:4), is a sensitive activity involving detailed reading. This sort of reader is interested in the meaning and details of the words (semantic) in the text paragraphs. Readers must pay special attention to discourse markers, grammatical structures, and other information to get the complete picture.

Because most reading abilities are taught by reading tiny documents in depth, intensive reading is very helpful in increasing pupils' reading skills (Nuttal,1996:38). Similarly, Barry (2002:4) claims that intensive reading is superior than comprehensive reading. He (ibid.) urges pupils to study thoroughly and deliberately. Furthermore, he said that nothing significant in the book could be discovered without considerable reading.

- 2) **Extensive Reading:** it is a unique action, which the learners develop for themselves in their reading skill (Nuttall, 1996). It frequently occurs outside of the classroom or at work. According to Brown (2001, p313), "thorough or comprehensive reading is done to get a broad understanding of a normally much lengthier material, e.g. reading books, papers, essays, etc.
- 3) **Skimming:** refers to reading fast that permits the learner to obtain the main concept of a text with no attention to details. Skimming

may be accomplished in a number of techniques (Kartika, 2012). Reading the title might help you gain a quick overview of the material.

- A. Reading the first sentence of each paragraph in the text.
- B. Read the introduction and the body of the paper.
- C. Read the summary and the subheadings.

**4) Scanning:** It is the ability to search a reading text for keywords, ideas, and concepts. To teach this ability, pupils are instructed to seek for particular information, such as an explanation or a name of a location or person, or a term in the dictionary, according to AlKafarna (2015).

### **2.2.1.3 Reading Comprehension Levels**

At different comprehension levels, readers are expected to read and figure out the notion. To assess degrees of understanding, several layers of interpretation and various analyses of meaning are applied in this scenario. According to Westwood (2001, pp30-31), the standard of reading comprehension argues that reading comprehension involves four separate phases of thinking (namely literal, inferential, critical, and creative comprehension). In the next paragraphs, the four steps will be defined.

**1) Literal comprehension:** this entails jotting down information and connecting them, as well as looking for hints in the context of the text and recognizing text patterns. At this level, teachers or instructors will urge students to identify essential and inconsequential elements, use facts to get data, forecast meanings, locate details, and guess the meanings of unfamiliar terminology.

- 2) **Inferential comprehension:** the outcomes may expected by comprehending the text's information. For example, the student may be asked to determine a character's motivation in the book based on a description or usage of dialogue, describing the major concept, defining the title, the work's goal, and so on.
- 3) **Evaluative or critical comprehension:** this relates to assessing many characteristics of the text, such as the text's literary quality, the difference between facts and views, the author's competency, and so on.
- 4) The reader will take the facts or recommendations from what they've read to come up with fresh ideas in the creative stage. The reader is encouraged to learn in new and innovative ways because of the artistic degree.

#### 2.2.1.4 Methods of Reading Comprehension

Some strategies may contribute to the improvement of reading comprehension abilities, according to Abd Al-Hamid (2006:93); training pupils to grasp and arrange concepts while reading. Students should be taught to read sentences rather than words, and they should also be taught how to stand appropriately.

- 1) Students are taught how to grasp and organize information while reading.
- 2) Students should be taught to read sentences rather than words, and they should also be taught how to stand appropriately.
- 3) Students are taught how to appreciate the beauty of the text via aesthetic feeling and attractive meanings.
- 4) Students are taught to read, concentrate, and summarize what they read.

5) Using numerous types of motivation to motivate great pupils to read.

### 2.2.1.5 Models of Reading Comprehension

**A) The Bottom-up Model:** "Phonics is a bottom-up strategy that demands the learner to connect letters with sounds in a predetermined order, i.e. reading in a linear process in which readers decode a text word by word, linking the letters together . words into phrases, phrases into sentences, and sentences into paragraphs" (Kucer, 1987, pp27-51).

**B) The Top- down Model:** The top-down model is defined by Richards (1990, pp50-51) as "the use of prior information in comprehending the meaning of a given text," which implies a learner link his/her past understanding about a subject, background knowledge, or competency recorded in a database. "Scripts" and "schemata" are forms of long-term memory. To put it another way, under a top-down approach, reading is "mainly controlled by". Intentions and expectations of the readers' (Grabe & Stoller, 2002: 32).

## 3. Methodology

This section outlines the research design, participants, instruments, procedures for establishing validity and reliability, and the statistical analyses used to examine the data.

### 3.1 Participants

The sample for this study consists of (120) (Fifth Grade) preparatory School students randomly from Karbala Governorate during the academic Year 2023 / 2024.

### **3.2 Instruments**

To investigate the relationship between Social Learning Strategies (SLSs) and Reading Comprehension (RC), two instruments were employed: a researcher-constructed Reading Comprehension Test and an adapted Social Learning Strategies Questionnaire.

#### **3.2.1 Reading Comprehension Test**

Instead of adopting materials from non-academic websites, a researcher-constructed reading comprehension test was developed in accordance with Bachman's (1990) framework of language testing and contemporary reading assessment principles. The test consists of one expository reading passage (approximately 450–500 words) appropriate for fifth-grade preparatory students and fifteen items distributed as follows:

- 1) Five short-answer Wh-questions assessing literal comprehension.
- 2) Five True/False items measuring inferential understanding.
- 3) Five multiple-choice questions evaluating vocabulary in context and global comprehension.

Validity of content was submitted to a panel of five experts in TEFL and educational measurement to evaluate:

- Linguistic appropriateness
- Content relevance
- Clarity of instructions
- Alignment with reading comprehension constructs

Reliability of the test was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha. The reliability coefficient of the final version of the test was found to be acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ), indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

### **3.2.2 Social Learning Strategies Questionnaire**

This instrument was adapted from Phothongsunan (2006). The original instrument contains 29 items divided among four sub-strategies:

- 1) Requesting about clarification
- 2) Understanding others
- 3) Collaborating with peers
- 4) Searching for interaction chances

In addition, a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always) was used in this inquiry.

## **4. Results**

Analysis of the students' answers to the LP test and SLSs questionnaire yields the study's findings. Based on this, the answers are computed. The correlation coefficient between RC and SLSs has been 0.740. A t-test has been used to assess the relationship's significance. By means of 358 degrees of freedom and a level of 0.05 significance, the computed t-value is 20.555, that is considerably greater than the critical rate of 1.96. This t-value implies that SLSs and RC are directly related.

**Statistical indicators of Reading Comprehension Test**

Mean	23.01
Median	23
Mode	24
Standard Deviation	2.369
Variance	5.61
Skewness	-0.247
Kurtosis	0.748
Minimum	14
Maximum	30
Range	16

**5. Discussion**

The findings revealed a statistically significant and strong positive relationship between Social Learning Strategies and Reading Comprehension. The regression analysis further demonstrated that SLSs contribute substantially to explaining variance in RC performance. These results suggest that learners who actively engage in cooperation, clarification-seeking, and interaction are more likely to develop stronger reading comprehension skills. The findings align with socio-cognitive theories of language learning, which emphasize interaction as a facilitator of meaning construction.

**5. Conclusions**

The study findings conclude the following;

- 1) High reading comprehension students are autonomous learners who assess, analyze, and make choices in a variety of reading contexts.

They are able to read fluently and understand what they have learned.

- 2) There is a substantial correlation between the learners' success in the dependent variable of reading skill and the independent variable of social learning strategies. This finding enables the conclusion that there is a direct and positive association between the two variables.

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### Abstract in Arabic

لعدة سنوات، كانت أهمية الاستراتيجيات الاجتماعية كمساهم كبير في النجاح التعليمي محور أبحاث تعلم اللغة الثانية/الأجنبية. وبالتالي، فإن استراتيجيات التعلم الاجتماعية لا تزال مهمة بقدر أهمية الفروق الفردية في تعلم اللغة. تعتبر استراتيجيات التعلم الاجتماعية استراتيجيات مهمة تساعد الطلاب على التعامل مع تعلم اللغة حيث يصبحون قادرين على ربط بيئة التعلم بقوتهم الشخصية في التعلم. الطلاب قادرون على حل أي مشاكل واردة أثناء تعلم اللغة. تساهم هذه الاستراتيجيات في تعزيز مهارات القراءة لدى الطلاب. تخلق البيئة الإيجابية تأثيراً إيجابياً على الطلاب. وبالتالي، من السهل التغلب على العقبات في تعلم اللغة. القراءة هو أحد المهارات المستقبلية التي يجب على الطلاب تطويرها في المراحل المبكرة من تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. إن تطوير هذه المهارة سيساعد الطلاب على تعلم مهارات لغوية أخرى مثل الأصغاء والتحدث والكتابة. ومن هنا، فإن كيفية استخدام هذه المهارة بشكل صحيح أمر مهم للغاية في تعلم اللغة. وبناءً على ذلك، تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى معرفة:

- (1) استراتيجيات التعلم الاجتماعية لدى طلاب المدارس الإعدادية العراقية الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.
  - (2) مستوى مهارة القراءة لدى طلبة المدارس الإعدادية العراقية.
  - (3) العلاقة بين استراتيجيات التعلم الاجتماعية لدى طلبة المدارس الإعدادية العراقية ومستوى مهارة القراءة لديهم.
  - (4) إلى أي مدى تساهم استراتيجيات التعلم الاجتماعية لدى طلبة المدارس الإعدادية العراقية في تفسير التباين في مهارة القراءة لديهم؟
- وفي ضوء ذلك تم اختيار عينة عشوائية من (120) طالب وطالبة من المدارس الإعدادية العراقية في محافظة كربلاء خلال العام الدراسي 2024/2023. ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة الحالية تم استخدام أداتين؛ الاستبانة المعتمدة من قبل (فوتون سكينس 2006) لتقييم استراتيجيات التعلم الاجتماعية واختبار القراءة من موقع (liveworksheets.com) لتقييم مهارة القراءة لـ طلبة الإعدادية. وبعد التأكد من صحة وموثوقية الأدوات تم تطبيق الأدوات وجمع البيانات. ثم تم استخدام عدد من الأدوات الإحصائية لتحليل البيانات المتحصل عليها. وتكشف النتائج أن الطلبة لديهم مستوى مرتفع من استراتيجيات التعلم الاجتماعية ومستوى متوسط من مهارة القراءة. علاوة على ذلك، تكشف النتائج أيضاً أن استراتيجيات التعلم الاجتماعية للمشاركين ترتبط إحصائياً بكفاءتهم في القراءة. وأخيراً، تم طرح الاستنتاجات والتوصيات.