

IMPROVING POLITICAL SCIENCES STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION OF ENGLISH TEXTS

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Abstract. *Teaching English for specific purposes involves teachers to find appropriate approaches, methods, and techniques to be used to address their students' needs and problems. Along this line of thought, the present investigation aims at exploring the problems encountered by Algerian political sciences students when reading English texts in their field of study. For this purpose, a case study including 50 master's students from the department of political sciences; University of M'sila (Algeria) was undertaken. Various research instruments were used to cross-check gathered data (two questionnaires, the think-aloud procedure, and a reading comprehension test). Qualitative and quantitative analyses of data revealed a low reading comprehension proficiency attributed to lack of linguistic, strategic, and discourse competences. Accordingly, the broad lines of an English course that would suit the needs of political sciences students were drawn. This course would focus on developing students' linguistic, strategic, and discourse competences to be used not only in reading different English political texts, but also in the other skills. The C.B.A was proposed as an appropriate instructional model used to develop the different skills and competences. Summing up, the learner's needs analysis reached a detailed description of language skills, functions, forms, and teaching materials which in turn led to a course design. The tailor made course exposes students to different authentic English political texts and activities which in turn help students to develop general and specific language skills, functions, forms, and strategies required in their specific educational purposes.*

Key words: *Reading comprehension, English for Specific Purposes, Linguistic competence, strategic competence, discourse competence, Competency-based approach.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, many researchers worked on the way a particular language was taught for general purposes. Their objective was to discover the general components of a particular language and how these components could be taught for students whose aim was not specifically determined- using the appropriate approaches, methods, and techniques in an educational context. However, after the Second World War, there was an expansion in scientific, technological, and economic activities on an international scale. This expansion brought a unified world dominated by two major forces: technology and commerce, and imposed English as an international language. Consequently, a new type

of language learner emerged, a learner who needed the language for specific purposes. This development required researchers to switch from teaching English for general purposes to teaching English for specific purposes (ESP). Thus, most researchers were required to make investigations concerning the needs of the new mass of people who wanted to learn ESP, among these people students whose sources and references included books and journals available only in English (Hutchinson and Waters 1987, 6). Hence, students in different fields of study such as commerce, medical sciences, biology, etc. had to be provided with specific syllabi which addressed their needs and problems and focused on the language skills required in their professional settings. A case in point, Algerian political sciences students who need to read and comprehend books and articles written in English so important for their studies and academic achievement and who do not possess the necessary competence to do so. Therefore, the present paper aims, first, to identify the source/s of reading difficulties of Algerian Master's students at the department of political sciences when dealing with English political texts; and second, to propose a course which addresses the English language needs of these students focusing on the development of the reading skill. Consequently, the following research questions are put forward:

- 1) Is students' low proficiency in reading English political texts related to their linguistic, discourse and/or strategic competence?
- 2) What type of course and instructional model would be appropriate to develop political sciences students' reading proficiency in English?

To sum up, the current investigation aims at exploring the different problems faced by students at the department of political sciences and related to linguistic, strategic, and discourse competences when reading English texts in order to provide suggestions for their English course which would address their English language needs alongside the development of the reading skill.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers have conducted different investigations for the sake of exploring the difficulties experienced by students when reading English texts in an ESP context at the university level (Mebarki, 2008; Azeroual, 2013; Lamri, 2015). In this respect, Kashef et al. (2012, 173) state that:

“The problem emerges when students enter universities and their curricula focus on the content area of their specialization. Since, except English majors, most students do not have to take English courses after the first year of their studies, they begin to struggle with difficulties posed by complex English texts college professors assign them to read.”

In other words, students start facing problems in reading when they are exposed to the specific English language which they have never been exposed to before. These reading comprehension problems are closely linked to linguistic, strategic, and discourse competences according to the results of different investigations (Rezai et al. 2012; Azeroual, 2013; Mebarki, 2008; Rozimela, 2014; Barus, 2009).

With regard to the linguistic competence, previous research has revealed different reading problems at the phonological, morphological, semantic, and syntactic levels. At the phonological level, readers who have difficulties in presenting sounds of written letters suffer when processing information found in a particular text. Also, other forms of dyslexia and reading problems are the result of the difficulties in the phonological aspects of decoding. In other words, readers have difficulty in some aspects of phonemic awareness such as the ability to identify sounds and understand the alphabetic principle which holds that the letters in words are systematically represented by sounds (Westwood 2004, 95). At the morphological level, Wiig and Semel (1984, qtd in Boyle and Scanlon 2010, 124) come to the conclusion that problems in reading are also caused by some morphological problems which often occur with more complex or higher-level morphological components such as irregular word endings, noun derivatives, and understanding of prefixes. Concerning semantics, Kamil and Hiebert (2005, 98) emphasize the fact that most students' problems in reading comprehension are due to their small range of vocabulary resulting from lack of exposure to words. Both technical and non-technical vocabulary knowledge seems in fact to be the key to successful reading comprehension (Azarnoosh et al. 2016, 123). At the syntactic level, Nation and Snowling (2000 qtd. in Weiss 2010, 115) state that readers with impaired syntactic awareness seem to experience more information processing difficulties; Therefore, "it is clear that inadequate syntactic skills would place constraints on the ability to process phrases and sentences in running text" (Brainerd and Pressley 1982, 76).

With respect to strategic competence, research has also attributed students' reading comprehension difficulties to the use of poor reading comprehension strategies (Boyle and Scanlon 2010, 195). Concerning the meta-cognitive strategies, Meltzer et al. (1989 qtd in French et al. 1995, 46) view that students with learning disabilities do lack strategies related to reading comprehension and other study skills. Examples of these strategies would include general disorganization, lack of monitoring strategy use, and an inability to switch strategies when and if necessary. In this respect, HØien and Lundberg (2000, 107) explain that most poor readers do not typically use their meta-cognitive strategies when reading. In other word, they intend to read passively without self-regulating control of their own understanding. They cannot realize and correct their faulty comprehension. Thus, research focusing on the comparison between poor and good readers has identified a variety of metacognitive strategies that enhance reading comprehension (Hartman and Glasgow 2002, 90). For the cognitive strategies, HØien and Lundberg (2000, 109-110) state that "it is typical of many poor readers and dyslexics that they are passive. Somewhat exaggeratedly, we can say of poor readers: they cannot read clearly, they rarely re-read, they do not plan, do not take notes, and do not underline; nor do they attempt to express the content of the text in their own words, do not sum up, cannot distinguish between important and not important, and do not draw any conscious conclusions; they do not deliberately vary their reading speed, and do not realize that they do not understand." In other word, poor readers lack some cognitive strategies which can be used during their reading process. Concerning problems related to socio-affective strategies, Pearson et al. (1984, 609) demonstrate that "Poor readers may have motivational handicaps such as low expectation for success, anxiety about their reading, and unwillingness persevere in the face of difficulty". Usually students with poor reading ability possess an initial negative attitude towards their success. Thus, their negative expectation is usually followed by discouragement, low self-confidence, and failure (Pumfrey and Reason 1991, 68). Good readers intend to make an internal dialogue (self-talk) to guide themselves and address problems they face during

reading. However, poor readers have difficulty to do so (Israel et al. 2005, 195). Above all, they do not ask for help when they face reading comprehension problems. They intend to limit their interaction with the text because they consider themselves as poor comprehenders (Hall et al. 2011, 40-41).

Other researchers have also attributed students' reading comprehension problems to lack of knowledge related to discourse competence particularly knowledge which includes text organization, text genre, and cohesive devices used when constructing a text. In this respect, McKenna et al. (2003, 19) state that "an inability to recognize the organizational structure of the text could reflect a lack of understanding concerning how the ideas fit together conceptually and difficulty remembering the ideas". They also reveal that most readers face difficulties in recognizing text structures simply because they do not understand how to recognize the different parts of the overall structure in a particular text. In other words, students may have difficulty in recognizing the main ideas and supporting details, and may not be aware of the fact that one main idea can be supported by subordinate ideas and examples (Seidenberg 1991, 4). Thus, according to Englert & Thomas (1987 qtd in Simmons and Kameenui 1998, 258), these comprehension difficulties are attributed to students' deficits in text structure awareness. Concerning problems attributed to text genre, Woolley (2014, 132) explains that "each genre has specialised features that need to become familiar and to be navigated regularly. For example, the vocabulary in exposition texts is usually subject-or domain-specific and often unfamiliar to young learners. Consequently, unskilled and novice readers will have more difficulty in using the context to construct the meaning of new words". Text genre causes also some comprehension problems particularly when students are less exposed to different English political texts with different genres. Thus, Gajria et al. (2007 qtd in Woolley 2011, 115) illustrate that unskilled readers seem more comfortable when dealing with narrative texts simply because this particular genre describes events through time using very simple language and structure; while, expository texts intend to discuss more advanced concepts using complex language and structure. Therefore, Dreher and Grey (2009 qtd in Woolley 2011, 115) stress the idea that different genres used in texts can be really challenging for readers especially if they do not receive instruction in how to exploit the features of each genre in order to gain knowledge about the text being read. On the other hand, misunderstanding of cohesive devices used in a particular text can also prevent students from comprehending its ideas. For example, Pollatsek and Treiman (2015, 351) reveal that poor readers face difficulties in deducing and understanding different anaphors used to link sentences and clauses. Likewise, Chen et al. (2016, 177) conclude that misunderstanding of the function and the precise meaning expressed by connectives may be a reason behind students' reading comprehension difficulties. Pronominal references seem also to cause problems to students during reading particularly when the pronoun and its referent are not adjacent (Butler and Silliman 2002, 93). Thus, students with lack of knowledge concerning different cohesive devices are more exposed to reading comprehension problems.

3. METHOD

In this section the participants, instruments, and data collection procedures used are presented and described. In addition, the result obtained from the analysis of the data gathered is reported.

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study fall into two groups: students and teachers in the Department of Political Sciences, Faculty of Law and Politics, University of M'sila (Algeria). This Department includes 105 Master's students among whom 50 students (i.e. 47.61%) are randomly selected to participate in this study. The sample population consists of 23 male and 27 female students belonging to the age group between 24 and 28 years old. The reason behind choosing this particular population is based on the fact that Master's students at the Department of Political Sciences are required to read continuously books and articles related to their field of study many of which are written in English. They are also required, at the end of their studies, to write a dissertation in which they use many English sources.

On the other hand, all 6 teachers who teach English at the Department of Political Sciences participate in the present study. Three teachers are subject specialists and the other three are English language teachers. The three subject specialists and one English teacher hold a Ph degree, and the other two English teachers hold a *Magister* degree.

3.2. Instruments

Three research instruments were used in this investigation: the think-aloud procedure, the test and the questionnaire. Each will be described below.

3.2.1. Think-aloud procedure

This procedure is defined by Hartson and Pyla (2012, 440) as "a qualitative data collection technique in which user participants, as the name implies, express verbally their thoughts about their interaction experience". The think-aloud procedure provides qualitative information about humans' cognitive processes. Hartson and Pyla (2012, 440) state also the reason behind using this procedure "By this method, participants let us in on their thinking, giving us access to precious understanding of their perspective of the task and interaction design, their expectations, strategies, biases, likes, and dislikes." Thus, the aim behind using this procedure in the current research is to identify the different problems students encounter when reading a text and to determine the type and frequency of strategies used during their reading process.

10 students out of the 50 informants were subject to the think-aloud procedure. After the training phase of using this procedure, they were provided with a text, asked to read it, and answer the questions of comprehension. At the same time, they were required to verbalize their thoughts at each step. Most of the strategies recorded in this research were found in O'Malley and Chamot in 1990, and some others were recorded by Mebarki (2008) in her research exploring the different strategies used by students when reading English texts in an ESP context.

3.2.2. Reading Comprehension Test

The test was purposely undertaken in order to obtain numerical data that help to interpret and explore the different problems which prevent students from comprehending the different English political texts. The test was downloaded from the University of Ramkhamhaeng,

Thailand e-book website¹. This web-site provides both students and teachers with placement tests used to evaluate students' proficiency level before attending a particular program. It is linked to the field of political sciences. The test was adapted according to the purpose of this study. It contained questions which focused on testing students' knowledge related to discourse and linguistic competences. In effect, while think-aloud procedure data was aimed at unveiling students' strategic competence, the test targeted discourse and linguistic competences (it contained 15 questions: 10 questions related to discourse competence and 5 questions linked to the linguistic competence). The test was first piloted. The reliability of the test was calculated through the use of the Kuder-Richardson formula 21. (KR-21). 0.7 is the reliability of the test.

3.2.3. Questionnaire

There were two questionnaires designed: one addressed to teachers and the other to students. The latter was formulated in order to cross-check the data gathered from the think-aloud procedure. It aimed namely at identifying different problems faced by students to comprehend a particular English text related to their field of study. Consequently, it was composed of three main sections: students' profile, their reading habits, and their problems and use of the linguistic, strategic, and discourse competences. On the other hand, the teacher questionnaire was also aimed to discover problems encountered by students to comprehend different English political texts. Therefore, it contained three main parts: teacher's profile, students' reading comprehension problems, and reasons behind these problems.

3.3. Procedure

Before data collection, the researchers trained students to use the think-aloud technique and piloted both questionnaires and the test. The questionnaires were piloted with 15 students and 5 teachers out of the sample population. The data collected from these piloted questionnaires helped the researchers to make the necessary modifications in order to obtain more reliable data. The test was also tried out with 8 students who were asked to answer the reading comprehension test and determine what they could not understand. The results obtained pushed the researchers to collaborate with a subject specialist to modify the test.

After readjustment of the research tools, the researchers started collecting the data used in this study. 10 students were involved in the think-aloud procedure, they were recorded while verbalizing their thoughts then the data obtained were transcribed. The student questionnaire was distributed to 50 informants during a classroom session. The teacher questionnaire was addressed to 6 teachers, one of them was sent by e-mail.

4. RESULTS

The resulting data were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed. The think-aloud protocols, which were meant to unveil students' strategy use (strategic competence) when reading the text and answering comprehension questions, were qualitatively analyzed. On the other hand, the data gathered from the test were quantitatively analyzed as they provided

¹ <http://e-book.ram.edu/e-book/inside/html/dlbook.asp?code=EN327>

numerical information concerning students' scores when answering questions related to discourse and linguistic competences. Finally, the questionnaires were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed in accordance with the data obtained related to students' three competences targeted in this study. The results obtained are displayed below.

4.1. Is students' low proficiency in reading English political texts related to their linguistic, discourse and/or strategic competences?

The results obtained from the three research instruments unveiled different problems which political sciences students encountered during their reading process. These results will be put under three main categories: linguistic, discourse and strategic competences.

4.1.1. Linguistic competence

For the linguistic competence, the results obtained from the research instruments provided problems at the different linguistic levels: phonological, morphological, semantic, and syntactic. First, the results gathered from the think-aloud procedure presented a particular phonological problem faced by some students which is phonemic unawareness. The latter is the inability to focus on and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. According to the records of the think-aloud procedure, some students were not able to determine the difference between the phonemes /ɪ/ and /aɪ/ in words like written /rɪtɪn/ and writing /raɪtɪŋ/. They read 'written' as 'writing'. Other students were unable to differentiate between phonemes like /æ/ and /eɪ/ when reading words like matter /mætə/ and mater /meɪtə/. The following words are some examples of recorded phonemic unawareness (Table 1):

Table 1 Examples of phonemic unawareness

Words	Student's pronunciation	Standard pronunciation
Like	li:k	laɪk
People	pju:pl	pi:pl
Must	məʊst	mʌst
Many	mʌni	mɛni

In addition, the results obtained from the student questionnaire corroborate these findings as 78% of students reported that word pronunciation was one of the problems which prohibited them from comprehending English political texts (see figure 1).

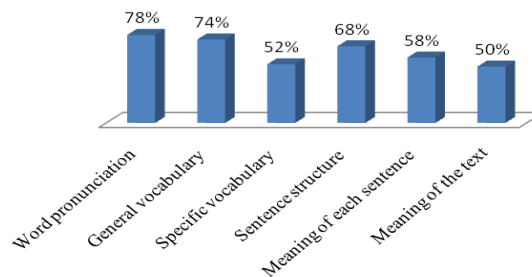


Fig. 1 Questionnaire results on students' reading comprehension problems

Second, according to the data obtained through students' questionnaire, it has been confirmed that students also experience problems at the morphological level. For example, most participants (58%) agreed that they experienced problems in dividing words into their constituent parts (see figure 2). A Related finding was also confirmed through the test when students were asked to determine the constituent parts of words (affixes and roots). In other words, most participants (60%) could not divide words into their affixes and roots during the test (see figure 3 below). Furthermore, some students admitted during the think-aloud procedure that they were not aware of the different prefixes and suffixes found in English.

Third, at the semantic level, the results gathered from the student questionnaire revealed that general vocabulary was considered as one of the major problems (74%) behind students' low level of reading proficiency (see figure 1). Concerning vocabulary related to the field of study, 52% of students confirmed that it prevented them from comprehending English political texts. The test also confirmed this finding as 45% of the students failed when answering questions related to vocabulary and its meaning.

Fourth, at the syntactic level, sentence structure was seen by the majority of students (68%), who answered the questionnaire, as a problem which impeded their reading comprehension (see figure1). This finding was confirmed by the test results as 54 % of participants were unable to determine the different parts of speech found in a particular sentence when they were asked to determine whether the underlined word in different sentences was a noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, or conjunction (see figure3). The verbal protocols also showed that the participants were not aware of the different parts of speech found in English such as conjunctions and prepositions, or over-generalized rules. Moreover, some students believed that the English sentence takes the same structure as the Arabic one. This refers to negative transfer because they are unaware that the English sentence structure (subject, verb, and object) differs from their Arabic sentence structure (verb, subject, and object).

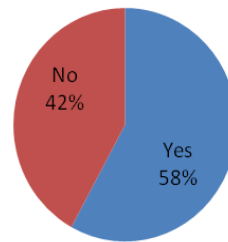


Fig. 2 Questionnaire results on students' ability to divide words into their constituent parts

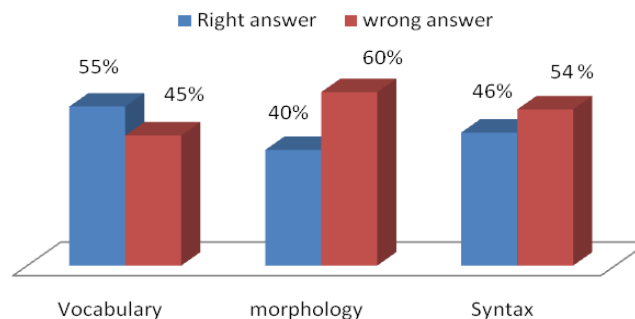


Fig. 3 Students' test performance in questions related to linguistic competence

On the other hand, teachers provided also their answers concerning students' problems related to linguistic competence. At the phonological level, the results obtained show that most teachers (83.33%) confirmed that students face problems in recognizing individual sounds when pronouncing words (e.g., day /deɪ / and die / daɪ /). At the morphological level, 66.66% of teachers emphasized that differentiating between homonyms (e.g., cat/cut) constitutes a real handicap in students' reading comprehension. At the semantic level, all teachers corroborated that students cannot recognize the exact meaning of words which have different meanings in different contexts (e.g., the word 'Right' which has different meanings). At the syntactic level, half of teachers (50%) admitted that their students experience problems in identifying the different functions of words found in a sentence. Concerning general and specific vocabulary, (66.66 %) of the teachers confirmed that general vocabulary does not constitute reading comprehension problems to students. However, (83.33%) of subject specialists corroborated that specific vocabulary related to the field of study prohibits students' reading comprehension.

4.1.2. Discourse competence

Problems related to discourse competence include three main categories: text organization, text genre, and cohesive devices. Regarding text organization, half of the students stated in the questionnaire that they faced problems in understanding the meaning of the whole text and more than the half (58%) in understanding each individual sentence (see figure 1). According to the records of the think-aloud procedure, the participants were not able to differentiate between preceding and following sentences in the text provided. The test results also showed that some students (39.5 %) could not identify the different parts of the text such as main topic, thesis statement, supporting details, and concluding sentence, i.e., text organization (see figure4).

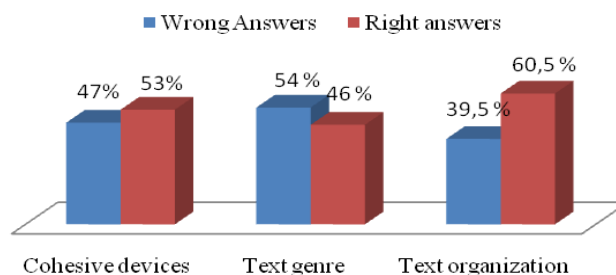


Fig. 4 Students' test performance in questions related to discourse competence

Another emerging problem was students' inability to identify the genre of the text. According to the results obtained from the reading comprehension test, more than half of the students (54%) failed in identifying the text genre (figure 4). In other words, the participants were not able to determine whether the text was informative, descriptive, comparative, argumentative, or prescriptive. Their verbal protocols also revealed that they were unaware of the different genres usually found in English texts and what features characterized each genre.

Concerning problems related to cohesive devices, the test results concluded that some students (47%) were not aware of the different linkers used to insure cohesion in a text

(see figure 4). Indeed, students in the reading comprehension test could not recognize the function of some conjunctions such as: unlike, for instance, as well as, and therefore. In addition, students were unable to determine the reference of particular phrases and words found in the text such as pronouns.

On the other hand, teachers also provided their answers concerning students' problems related to discourse competence. Concerning text organization, all teachers consented that students tend to indentify the main topic of the text during their reading process. Regarding the main ideas, most teachers (83.33%) admitted that students face problems in recognizing the main ideas of a text. Also, all teachers (100%) agreed on the fact that students cannot differentiate between main ideas and supporting details. Thus, their reading comprehension is prohibited. In addition to this, (66.66%) of teachers viewed that students do not try to link between the following and preceding ideas when reading a text. Contrary, majority of subject specialists (83.33%) admitted that students tend to link between preceding and following paragraphs within a text.

Regarding cohesive devices and text genre, 66.66% of teachers confirmed that recognizing word and phrase references constitutes a real handicap to students' reading comprehension. Half of teachers (50%) viewed that students cannot determine the genre of texts which they usually read with its features.

4.1.3. Strategic competence

Regarding strategic competence, the results obtained from the think-aloud procedure provided the researchers with the nature and frequency of strategies used by students when reading English political texts. Accordingly, three categories of strategies emerged: meta-cognitive, cognitive, and affective strategies. Thus, the cognitive strategies which were mostly used include translating, repeating words and sentences, underlying information, over generalizing rules, and understanding sentences word by word. However, other cognitive strategies were rarely exploited like guessing, elaborating, note taking, confirming and rejecting guess, contextualizing, previewing the text, summarizing, and adding information. For Meta-cognitive strategies, most of students intended to use rarely strategies like monitoring comprehension, planning for reading, and evaluating comprehension. Other strategies were not used like monitoring and evaluating strategy. Failure to understand something was the only affective strategy exploited mostly by all students during their reading. Self reinforcement was rarely used. According to this result, students seem to lack different types of strategies which can be used when reading texts in a foreign language. This lack affects and prohibits their reading comprehension particularly in an ESP context.

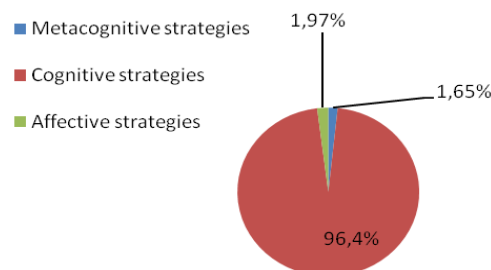


Fig. 5 Frequency of students' strategies used during the reading process

Regarding the results obtained from questionnaires (See Figure6), the meta-cognitive strategies which students admitted that they do not use include the ones which scored the highest percentages of 'No' answer such as stating purpose for reading (58%), planning for reading (86%), monitoring comprehension (58%), monitoring strategy (82%), and evaluating comprehension (78%). However, previewing the text (58%) is the only meta-cognitive strategy students stated that they usually use before the reading process.

The cognitive strategies which are not used by most of the students include repeating sentences (58%), understanding sentence as whole (56%), adding information (76%), taking notes (62%), summarizing (82%), guessing (62%), rejecting and confirming guess (76%), and self-questioning (64%). Other cognitive strategies have been proved to be used by most of the respondents. These strategies incorporate underlying information (68%), understanding sentence word by word (58%), translating (94%), repeating words (76%), and elaborating (60%).

Concerning the affective strategies, most of students (54%) intend to express their failure when they do not understand something. Only (34%) of the respondents admitted that they reinforce themselves when they understand something during the reading process.

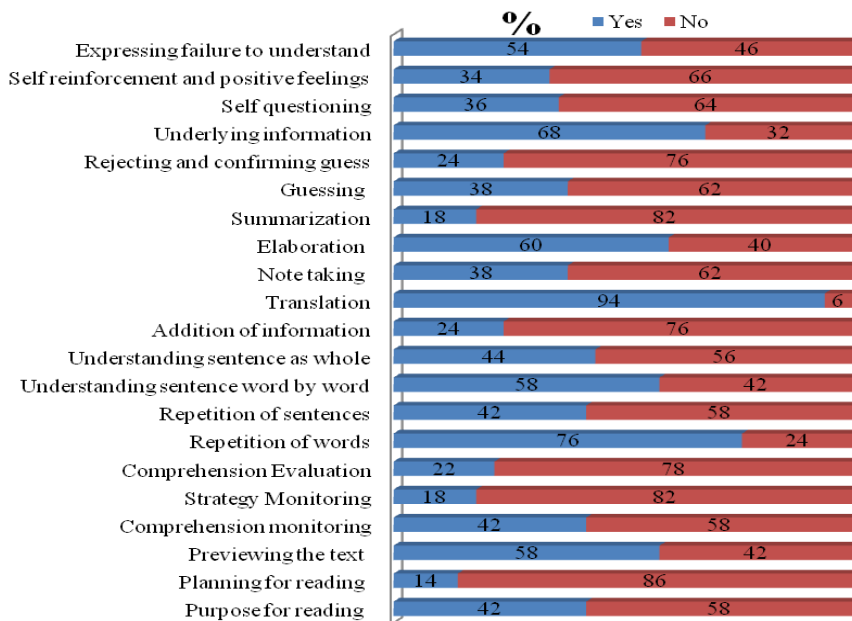


Fig. 6 Students' answers of questionnaires concerning the use of meta-cognitive, cognitive, and affective strategies

On the other hand, teachers also provided their answers concerning students' use of different strategies. Hence, the metacognitive strategies which teachers admitted that students do not use include the ones which scored the highest percentage of 'No' answer. These strategies refer to purpose for reading (100%), pating for reading (83.33%), previewing the text (66.66%), monitoring comprehension (83.33%), monitoring strategy (83.33%), and evaluating strategy (100%).

According to teachers' answers, the different cognitive strategies which are not used by students include understanding a sentence as whole (66.66%), adding information (66.66%), taking notes (66.66%), Elaborating (66.66%), and confirming and rejecting guess (83.33%).

Like students' answers, teachers also confirmed that most students do not use the different affective strategies. To explain more, most teachers (66.66%) agreed that students rarely reinforce themselves when understanding something. Majority of teachers (83.33%) admitted as well that students express their failure when they do not understand something.

According to the results obtained from teachers' questionnaire (Figure 7), students experience problems when reading English political texts. These problems are attributed to different reasons. All teachers believe that lack of knowledge related to linguistic competence is the primary reason which prohibits students from comprehending English political texts. In other words, students encounter problems when reading in English simply because they lack knowledge related to word pronunciations, word meanings, jargons, irregular word endings, noun derivatives, understanding of affixes, and sentence structures. Most teachers (66.67%) attributed also students' low level of reading proficiency to the insufficient strategies exploited during the reading process. To explain more, students lack some metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies. This lack blocks students' reading comprehension. Only three teachers (50%) who viewed that lack of knowledge in discourse competence can be considered as a reason behind reading comprehension problems. Time allocated to teaching English seems also to be one of the main reasons which cause different reading comprehension problems to students. Most teachers (83.33%) believed that one session per-week is not sufficient to teach all aspects related to both general and specific English. Other teachers (50%) emphasized that students' low motivation and interests seem also to generate reading comprehension problems. Lack of teaching materials according to teachers' answers (16.67%) decreases students' exposure to the English language. Only one teacher who believed that using inappropriate teaching method is also a reason behind problems that students encounter when reading in English.

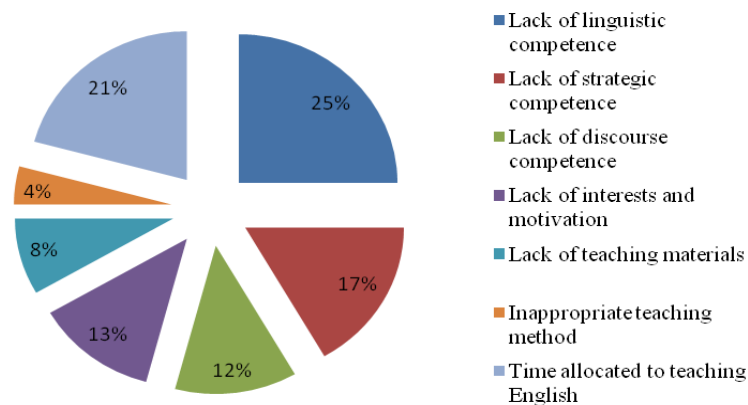


Fig. 7 Reasons behind students' reading comprehension problems

4.2. What type of course and instructional model would be appropriate to develop political sciences students' reading proficiency in English?

Based on the results obtained, political sciences students need an English course which would have the following objectives:

- Develop students' linguistic, strategic, and discourse competences to improve their reading comprehension
- Train students to use successful meta-cognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies during their reading.
- To provide students with different authentic political texts written in English with different text organization and genre.
- Help students build ideas and terminology related to their field of study.
- Develop students' reading skill in addition to the other language skills.

Concerning its description, this designed syllabus follows the skill-centered approach when design a course. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987, 69) stated "A skill-centred course, therefore, will present its learning objectives in terms of both performance and competence". Thus, the course focuses on teaching the three main competences: linguistic, strategic, and discourse competences to be used when dealing with the reading task. Thus, the course will provide students with different authentic texts and pictures from English political books and documents in order to be read and analyzed through various activities. The content of the course provides students with the basic knowledge related to the different linguistic levels. In other words, the syllabus focuses on teaching word pronunciation, the structure of words, general English vocabulary and political jargons, and the different grammatical structures found in these authentic texts. The course helps also students to use different successful meta-cognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies before, while, and after the reading process. Students will be equipped with knowledge related to discourse competence as well. That is to say, teaching the different linkers used to insure cohesion in a text, the different parts of the text (e.g., main topic, thesis statement, supporting details...etc), and the different genres of political English texts. Above all, the syllabus intends to teach reading skill in relation to other language skills. In terms of performance, students will be able by the end of the course to catalogue books written in English related to political sciences (Hutchinson and Waters 1987, 69).

The Competency-based instructional model would be an appropriate teaching method to help student develop their global linguistic, strategic, and discourse competences. This model is based on the outcomes obtained from an analysis of tasks needed for students' life situations. Thus, it is adaptive to the changing needs of group of students (Richards & Rodgers 2001,141). In different words, this adaptive approach focuses on teaching the syllabus which is based on the analysis of students' needs. The CBA emphasizes mainly on the development of group of competencies included in one global competence. To explain more, Biggs (2010, 320) emphasizes that the term competency in this method refers to skills, knowledge, and attitudes. A collection of competencies are grouped within the term competence. According to this current distinction between these two terms, the CBA aims at teaching all skills, knowledge, attitudes grouped in a competency. Therefore, all competencies related to global linguistic, strategic, and discourse competences would be addressed according to this approach. Differently stated, students' observable behaviors obtained from the research instruments showed that most participants do lack knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to the three competences. In this respect, (Richards & Rodgers 2001,141) emphasized that the

CBA determines “educational goals in terms of precise measurable descriptions of knowledge, skills, and behaviors students should possess at the end of a course of study”. Thus, the current approach helps teachers to know whether students develop their competences or not depending on the assessment which will provide observable behaviors and results.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore the different problems encountered by Master’s students at the department of political sciences when reading English texts. It also intended to find the sources of these problems and design a course which would address these students’ English language needs in general and reading comprehension problems in particular. According to the aims of the investigation, the results gathered have concluded three main findings. First, it has been confirmed that most of students in an ESP context suffer at the university level when dealing with the English language simply because of the curricula which focus on the content area of their specialization. That is to say, students used at high schools to deal with English curricula which stress the use of general and simple English words and structures. However, once students become specialized in a particular field of study at the university level, the English curricula automatically switch to teaching and using complex and specific English structures and jargons. Second, the results reached have emphasized that the different problems encountered by students when dealing with reading comprehension tasks are due to lack of knowledge in discourse competence. In other words, students are not aware of the different cohesive devices, text structures, and genres found in English in general and in political texts in particular. Third, students’ low level of reading proficiency has been proved to be attributed to the insufficient strategies exploited during the reading process.

Thus, it has been recommended that teaching English in an ESP context requires a learner needs analysis in order to reach specifically the detailed description of general and specific language skills, functions, and forms students should possess. Having such kind of course design provides students with necessary English knowledge and jargons related to their field of study. It also helps them to learn the different general and specific language skills, forms, and strategies required in their ESP context.

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