

Enhancing ESP Students' Reading Comprehension by Using Text Structure Strategy**Halima BEDDIAF⁽¹⁾ Pr. Nacira HOCINE⁽²⁾**

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Received: 17/03/2019**Revised:** 25/04/2019**Accepted:** 30/04/2019**Abstract**

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the impact of text structure strategy on reading comprehension of students of French at the University of Khenchela. To carry out this research, a sample of 60 ESP students was chosen randomly to answer the questionnaire. Findings indicated that better comprehension can be gained through text structure understanding activities. Therefore, teaching text structure strategy might become a useful tool for teachers of ESP to facilitate reading comprehension of ESP learners.

Keywords: Enhancing, reading comprehension, text structure strategy, ESP learners.

تحسين استيعاب القراءة باستخدام إستراتيجية بنية النص لطلبة ESP**ملخص**

الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو التحقق من مدى تأثير إستراتيجية بنية النص على قدرة استيعاب القراءة لدى طلبة اللغة الفرنسية لبرنامج اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة خنشلة. لإجراء هذه الدراسة، تم اختيار عينة تتكون من 60 طالباً بطريقة عشوائية للإجابة على الاستبيان. أشارت نتائج هذه الدراسة إلى أنه يمكن الحصول على استيعاب أفضل للقراءة من خلال أنشطة فهم بنية النص. ولذلك يمكن لإستراتيجية بنية النص إن تسهل قدرة استيعاب القراءة لدى طلبة ESP وبالتالي يمكن أن تصبح أداة مفيدة للتدريس لأساتذة ESP.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحسين، قراءة والاستيعاب، إستراتيجية بنية نص، طلبة ESP.

Améliorer la Compréhension de Lecture des Etudiants d'ESP en utilisant la Stratégie de Structure du Texte

Résumé

La présente étude a pour objet d'étudier l'impact de la stratégie de la structure du texte sur la compréhension de la lecture des étudiants de langue française de l'université de Khenchela. Pour mener à bien cette recherche, un échantillon de 60 étudiants ESP a été choisi au hasard pour répondre au questionnaire. Les résultats ont montré qu'une meilleure compréhension peut être obtenue grâce aux activités de compréhension de la structure du texte. Par conséquent, l'enseignement de la stratégie de la structure du texte pourrait devenir un outil utile pour les enseignants afin de faciliter la compréhension de la lecture des apprenants de l'ESP.

Mots-clés: Amélioration, compréhension de lecture, stratégie, structure du texte, apprenants ESP.

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Introduction:

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been a very important and compulsory subject in many Algerian universities. Hence, reading in English has become a necessity for ESP students. Since most references in many areas of study are in English, students should read texts in that foreign language. The ability to read in a second language (L2) is one of the most important skills that should be improved in ESP academic settings. It is also one of the most difficult skills to develop to a high level of proficiency. Reading is an essential skill and probably the most important skill for EFL learners to master in academic contexts. Because reading comprehension has been distinctively important both in first and second/foreign languages, reading strategies are of great interest in the field of reading research. A large number of research studies have shown that skilled readers use a variety of strategies to comprehend the text⁽¹⁾. Therefore, ESP students need to use reading comprehension strategies in order to comprehend English written texts.

The question is how teachers can teach students reading strategies. Since many readers are not aware of reading strategies, there is a need to devote special attention to teach these strategies explicitly.

In fact, it is noticed that teaching comprehension strategies to ESP readers is generally ignored. The strategies used are mostly finding the meaning of the unknown vocabularies, teaching grammatical rules, and sometimes translating the texts into students' native language. The courses do not focus on training students in using reading comprehension strategies such as text structure awareness that is considered one of the valuable reading comprehension strategies for text interpretation. Reading researchers believe that readers' awareness of different kinds of text structure is a useful strategy for better comprehension⁽²⁾. Discourse or text structures can be understood as knowledge structures or basic rhetorical patterns in texts. Discourse structure serves functional purposes and these purposes are recognized by good readers and writers⁽³⁾.

Text structure strategy reflects the organization of ideas selected by an author for transmitting an intended message. Hence, the knowledge of the way these relations are manifested in the text has become a necessity for ESP students to comprehend the text. A text usually has a universal structure which may be of the type General-Particular, Problem-Solution, Topic-Restriction -Illustration, etc., which is at the same time made up of relations of various types: cause-effect, contrast, comparison, etc. consequently, our exploitation of text structure as a tool to improve reading comprehension has an ultimate objective to make readers capable of using that rhetorical information in an adequate way. In other words, for ESP students to comprehend texts in English, they should be aware of the effectiveness of using reading strategies, particularly text structure strategy, whereby they encounter many types of texts and whereby they will grasp the different patterns of organizing a text. Therefore teachers should be aware of the effectiveness of teaching text structure strategy for ESP students' reading comprehension.

1. Literature review:

According to many researchers, reading is the most important skill in academic studies and the primary goal of reading is comprehension⁽⁴⁾. Comprehension which is defined as "an active process to which each reader brings his or her individual attitudes, interests, expectations, skills, and prior knowledge" (Irwin, 2007)⁽⁵⁾ is "the essence of the reading act"⁽⁶⁾. They maintain that reading comprehension requires literal comprehension, the ability to study and learn from text, and higher-level comprehension. Reading comprehension is also described as "a complex accomplishment that requires readers to coordinate multiple features of text - seamlessly and fluidly - for optimal performance"⁽⁷⁾. Furthermore, it is "a product of complex interactions between the properties of the text and what readers bring to the reading situation"⁽⁸⁾. Moreover, reading comprehension is "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. It consists of three elements: reader, text, and activity or purpose for reading"⁽⁹⁾. Reading

comprehension in EAP and the required text structure strategies are common to all University students, unless you determine specific need of learners of French. They are unaware of the reading strategies, mainly text structure strategy. They ignore the structural organization of texts, especially expository texts and thus face many problems while reading such texts. Previous researchers have carried out research relevant to the study at hand and reported convincing evidence that knowing the text organization influences the comprehension of the text. Text structure refers to the structure of a text. In other words, it refers to the form of a text in terms of how ideas are presented. The term text structure has been equated with other terms such as discourse structure, discourse organization and even text structure and discourse organization⁽¹⁰⁾. Students need to know that texts are not the collection of words or sentences but they have rhetorical structures that organize information in a way that serves writers' purposes; when instructing text organizing features, students should be made aware that it is writers' goals and expectations that determine basic discourse organization⁽¹¹⁾. It has been asserted that "all texts have structures above the level of the sentence"⁽¹²⁾. According to Grabe (2002)⁽¹³⁾ "Discourse, or text, structures can be understood as knowledge structures or basic rhetorical patterns in texts". Students should be taught to recognize and use structural organization of text to improve comprehension and recall. As a reading comprehension strategy, expository text structure awareness should be explicitly taught⁽¹⁴⁾.

Text structure is defined as the ideas of a text which are interrelated to convey a message to the reader⁽¹⁵⁾. Competent readers with the knowledge of text structure are able to construct mental models of the main ideas, as well as learn and remember the information presented in the text⁽¹⁶⁾. Also, text structure is defined as "the way a text is organized to guide readers in identifying key information" (Klingner, et al, 2015, p 77)⁽¹⁷⁾. This means that there are important ideas and less important ones. Another research indicated that texts with specific logical patterns of organization, such as comparison, contrast, problem solution, and cause-effect, are more likely to require recall and comprehension rather than texts organized loosely around the collection of facts⁽¹⁸⁾. Furthermore, the amount of information that students recall depends largely on the kind of organization of a text⁽¹⁹⁾. It has been believed that "knowledge of text structure should enhance text-meaning construction in measurable ways"⁽²⁰⁾. According to the reading literature, authors make use of five common text structures to organize ideas; these structures are: description, comparison, sequence, cause/effect and problem/solution⁽²¹⁾.

Description involves features or attributes about a particular topic. The author describes topics, persons, events or ideas by giving specific details. The common signal words used in this structure involve: for example, for instance, in particular, in addition, etc.

Comparison involves comparing two or more things or ideas and defining how they are similar and/or different. The ideas in this structure are arranged according to similarities and differences between two or more topics. Common signal words such as like, still, as, but, although, however, yet, and on the other hand are often used in this structure.

The text in the sequence structure presents information or events in terms of time and order progression. It includes such signal words as first, second, during, earlier, now, later, then, after, next, last, and finally.

Cause/effect demonstrates a causal relationship, involving a cause and an effect. This structure links events with their causes. The kind of such texts includes phrases or key words termed 'causal indicators' to signal a cause/effect relationship structure. Signal words usually used include: because, therefore, due to, for, so, since, consequently, and as a result.

Problem/solution includes a problem and a solution that replies to the problem or a question and its responsive answer. The text provides a problem, and then offers possible solutions. Signal words frequently used are: for example, if then, because, so that, the problem is, the dilemma is, the question/answer is, and the puzzle is solved.

Researchers have also investigated the students' awareness of each text structure type and came up with the results that more organized text types like comparison and causation seemed

easier than the less organized text like collection of descriptions that require students to recall background information. However, with reference to text structure awareness, there was no difference on awareness of students who read the comparison, causation and collection of descriptions but students were less focused and found the problem/solution texts to be more difficult. Writers employ text organizing signals (interactive metadiscourse) to generate a text that readers find coherent and convincing⁽²²⁾. These features he notes are not simply text organizing signals but their use depends on “writer’s assessment of the reader’s assumed comprehension capacities, understandings of related texts, and need for interpretive guidance, as well as the relationship between the writer and reader.” He adds that knowledge of text organizing signals informs learners about where writers are and where they are going.

2. Experimental Study:

2.1. Subjects:

The subjects of our study are 60 Algerian students of English as Foreign Language; they are third year undergraduate students of French at Khenchela University. The participants of the study are chosen randomly from a total population of 120 students, which makes the sample representative to some extent.

2.2. Instrument:

Since the questionnaire is considered as an important instrument of research for gathering information, we chose it to use it as a tool of our study, in order to gather information about students’ comprehension abilities in English. It also diagnoses the reading strategies used by 3rd year French students.

2.3 Description of the questionnaire: The questionnaire (Appendix 1) consists of 15 questions. It was composed of three parts, namely, reading habits, reading comprehension strategies, reading comprehension problems and the use of text structure as a reading strategy. The first part included three questions; the second, three; the third, four, and the fourth five which made 15 questions.

a- Reading Habits: (Questions 1 to 3): This section includes three questions. The questions aimed at getting insights on the reading habits of the students. Whether or not the students read in English (question 1), do they read materials that are related to the field of their studies (question 2), and whether the reading skill is important in their academic studies or not (question 3).

b- Reading comprehension Strategies: (Questions 4 to 6): This section includes three questions. The questions are related to the use of some reading strategies by students before, during and after reading texts, if they look at any headings, graphs, etc (question 4), do they read the whole text for looking for specific information (question5), if they can grasp the author’s message after reading the text (question 6).

c- Reading Comprehension Problems: (Questions 7 to 10): This part includes four questions on reading comprehension problems in the students’ specialty. The questions were organized as follows: how do they find reading in English (question 7), how do they find reading comprehension in this language if easy, difficult, etc (question 8), whether they have difficulties of understanding texts in their field of study (question 9), and how do they find reading strategies when they face difficulties on comprehension of texts (question 10).

d- The Use of Text Structure as a Reading Strategy: (Questions 11 to 15): This section is concerned with the awareness of text structure as a reading strategy by students of French; we asked them if they use strategies of how to read texts (question11), if they find reading comprehension easy or not (question12), if they use text structure as a reading strategy when comprehension breaks down (question13), if they are able to summarize the text in a paragraph or in a form of a graphic organizer after reading it (question14), and we have asked (question15) as a last question to know if it is important for them to have courses related to text structure understanding for enhancing their reading comprehension.

2.4 Administration of the questionnaire: In a regular one hour and a half class meeting, in the tutorial’s classroom, the questionnaire was administered to the sample population. It was

written in English and enough time was given to the students for careful reading of the questions. The researcher explained to the students what they had to do for answering the question and stated the purpose of the questionnaire as well as drew their attention to the importance of answering honestly as much as possible, since they were not going to be evaluated for the correct or incorrect answers. All the questionnaires were completed in the presence of the researcher who dealt with the questions one by one with students. The questionnaire consists of closed questions i.e. yes or no question and multiple choice questions.

2.5. Statistical analysis:

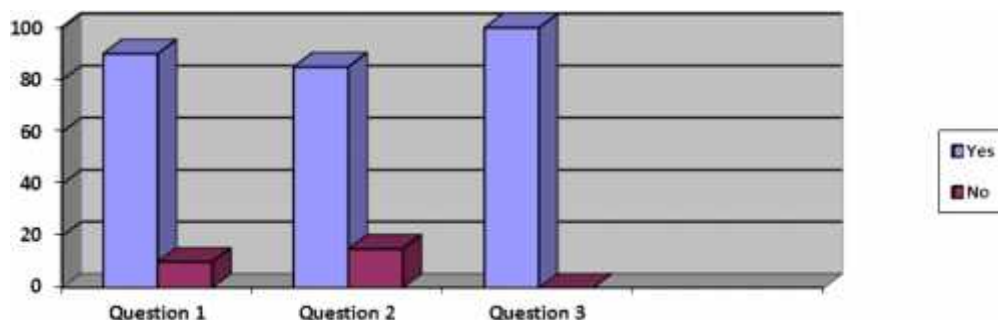
A. Reading Habits:

Table 1 below shows that almost all the participants (90%) read in English, only few of them said no (10%). The majority of the participants (85%) read materials that are related to their field of study; however only 15% don't do so. As for the importance of the reading skill, all the participants (100%) agreed that it is an important skill for their academic studies.

Table 01: Students' Habits of Reading in English

Question n°	Yes	No	Number
1	54 /90%	6/10%	60
2	51/85%	9/15%	60
3	60/100%	00/0%	60

Figure 01: Students' Habits of Reading in English



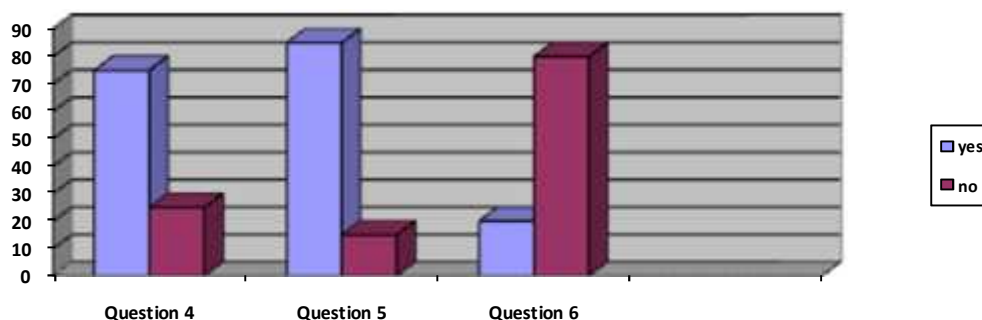
B. Reading Comprehension Strategies:

As shown in table and figure 2, the majority of the participants (75%) before reading a text, they look first at illustrations that are offered in the text and give much importance to them, only (25%) don't give much importance to that. Most of the participants (85%) read the whole text to look for specific information; few of them (15%) don't do so. Most of the participants (80%) claimed that they can't grasp the author's message after reading the text. Only 20% said that they can grasp the author's message.

Table 02: Reading Comprehension Strategies

Question n°	Yes	No	Number
4	45/75%	15/25%	60
5	51 /85%	9/15%	60
6	12/20%	48/80%	60

Figure 02: Reading Comprehension Strategies



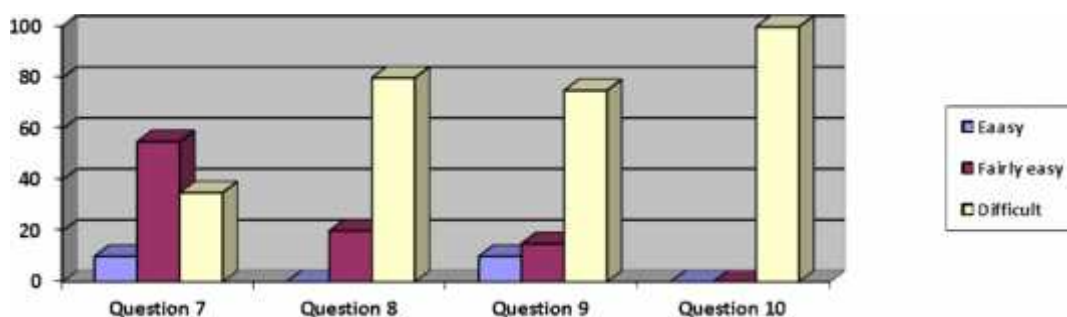
C. Reading Comprehension Problems:

As demonstrated in table and figure 3 most of the participants 55% find reading in English fairly easy, 37% of the participants find reading in English difficult and others (10%) find it easy for them. 80% of the participants find reading comprehension difficult, and few of them (20%) find it fairly easy. The majority of participants (75%) find understanding of texts in the field of their study difficult, only 15% of the participants find it fairly easy and (10%) of them find it easy. All the participants (100%) claimed that when facing difficulties in comprehending texts, they find using reading strategies difficult to use. This means that, they are not able to use reading comprehension strategies for comprehending written text.

Table 03: Students Reading Comprehension Problems

Question n°	Easy	Fairly easy	Difficult	Number
7	6/10%	33 /55%	21/35%	60
8	00/00%	12/20%	48/80%	60
9	6 /10%	9 /15%	45 /75%	60
10	00/00%	00/00%	60/100%	60

Figure 03: Students Reading Comprehension Problems



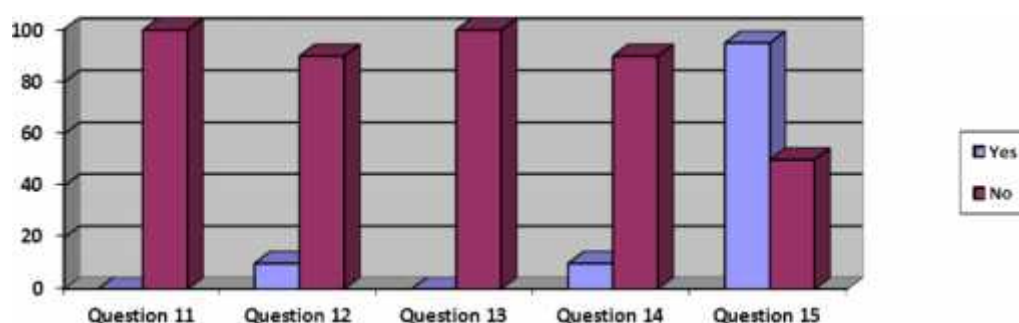
D. The Use of Text Structure as a Reading Strategy:

As showed in table and figure 4, all the participants (100%) don't use any of the reading strategies of how to read texts. 90% of the participants claimed that they find reading comprehension not easy for them, only 10% find it easy. All of the participants claimed that they don't use text structure as a reading strategy when reading comprehension breaks down (100%). 90% of the participants said that they can't summarize the text in a form of paragraph or graphic organizer; however, (10%) of them said that they can do. As regards, the majority of participants (95%) agreed that they consider learning courses related to text structure understanding as an important strategy for enhancing their reading comprehension.

Table 04: Students’ Use of Text Structure Strategy

Question n°	Yes	No	Number
11	00/00%	60/100%	60
12	6/10%	54/90%	60
13	00/00%	60/100%	60
14	6/10%	50/90%	60
15	57/95%	3 /5%	60

Figure 04: Students’ Use of Text Structure Strategy



3. Discussion of the results:

The questionnaire analysis shows that almost all the respondents read in English; most of them read materials that are related to their academic studies. Hence, they consider reading as an interesting skill for their studies. However, they do not know how to read. In other words, they do not read strategically. In most ESP reading classes there is absence of teaching comprehension strategies to students; particularly for ESP students at Khenchela University, the majority of students are unaware of the use of reading strategies and how they can help them in enhancing their reading comprehension. Though they read a variety of text types, they said, they face many difficulties such as in getting the main idea of a text. They tend to read the whole text in order to get the main idea. Also, they ignore the majority of the reading comprehension strategies including the use of text structure understanding strategy. Though they take notes, they cannot write a summary to the text in a paragraph or a graphic organizer. ESP students at university of Khenchela do not display a high awareness about reading strategies. The notion of strategy is rather vague to them. Therefore, there is a need of explicit teaching instruction to develop those strategies, mainly text structure strategy. Hence, making students aware of the effectiveness of using reading strategies, particularly text structure strategy, is a necessity for enhancing their reading comprehension. Consequently, the teaching of text structure understanding strategy for ESP students is effective for better reading comprehension of expository texts as it will assist students become autonomous, powerful as well as skillful readers and enhance their reading comprehension i.e. ESP students at the department of French at Khenchela University should have courses of reading comprehension, whereby they encounter many types of texts and whereby they will grasp the different patterns of organizing a text. In short, it is important to make students of ESP aware of reading strategies, mainly, text structure strategy, and teaching them text structure strategy will enhance and improve their reading comprehension of written texts and students’ level in reading comprehension would be better. Text structure strategy is a very important strategy in the reading comprehension process. It appears that knowledge of how a text is structured contributes to distinguishing main ideas from supporting details. This means that students can comprehend texts easily. The conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that third year students of French at Khenchela University should be aware of the importance of reading comprehension strategies in general and text structure awareness in particular if they are to comprehend written texts.

4. Pedagogical Implications:

It is of a great importance to recommend ESP teachers, syllabus designers, university administrators and even ESP students to take into account the following pedagogical implications and consider the results of this study as the basis for developing effective reading comprehension program:

- 1-** For enhancing the students' reading comprehension skill, it is significant for the teachers to instruct the text structure understanding strategy from the beginning of their learning, so the students would learn how the text is organized and they would perform the reading task in a shorter duration with better understanding of the main ideas in the text.
- 2-** ESP students at the department of French at Khenchela University should have courses of reading comprehension, whereby they encounter many types of texts and whereby they will grasp the different patterns of organizing a text.
- 3-** It would be better if syllabus designers include reading tasks that are more focused on text structures and have activities that deal with sentence relationships, main ideas and supporting without engaging them in finding the meaning of the difficult words.
- 4-** ESP Teachers should also be aware of the importance of using reading strategies, mainly using text structure awareness, in terms of time saving and efficiency.
- 5-** Most of the class time should be devoted to teaching text structure tasks and activities that help the students enhance their reading comprehension skill and improve their reading.
- 6-** Text structure awareness strategy should be taught and learnt during ESP classes, within an interactive approach to reading which is most suitable to ESP learners. Therefore, teachers should make students aware of text structures as a dominant reading strategy that helps readers to comprehend the main idea of texts easily.
- 7-** By teaching text structure the students learn that instead of memorizing and translating the difficult words, they need to first identify whether the text is cause/effect, compare/contrast or other types of text structures. This will help students to find the sentence relationships and main ideas to understand the text.
- 8-** It is deduced that when the ESP students become aware of text structure, they increase their reading comprehension skills. Eventually, they will become competent readers and perform better in their academic studies.
- 9-** There is a need to devote special attention to teach reading strategies, mainly text structure, explicitly.
- 10-** Teachers should have specific training in ESP; i.e. they should be qualified ESP teachers.
- 11-** Students need to know how to use reading comprehension strategies, and how ideas are related together as well as how to spot information in a text.
- 12-** Moreover, by teaching text-structure awareness, teachers could help students change their learning styles from a dependent to an independent style.
- 13-** The use of text-structure awareness in comprehension instruction can have many benefits for ESP students.
- 14-** Students can have a better idea of the information to be used and how the information can be organized in their own work.

Conclusion:

The major aim of this study was to investigate the effect of text structure awareness strategy on ESP learners' reading comprehension. The results of this study have to be taken into account for an effective exploitation of text structure to improve reading comprehension. To sum up, several points should be taken into consideration in order to exploit the rhetorical organization of texts as a resource for readers to improve their reading comprehension. This exploitation should be based on making readers aware and capable of interpreting the rhetorical features or rhetorical information of texts. Hence, training should be oriented to the development of such procedural capacity to integrate indications from different levels to arrive at an interpretation. Another point of crucial importance is that effective second language reading pedagogy must include not only training in the use of strategies but

information about the significance and outcome of these strategies and their usefulness. In other words, adding instruction in awareness of text structure as an effective reading strategy would greatly increase the positive outcomes of students' reading comprehension. Students in academic settings, mainly in ESP settings, should be aware of the significance of reading comprehension strategies in general and text structure awareness in particular if they are to comprehend written texts. In fact, in most English reading classes, especially in Algeria, teaching comprehension strategies to readers are ignored. Many readers are not aware of the reading strategies. Since, the course does not focus on training students in using reading comprehension strategies, particularly text structure understanding strategy. Therefore, there is a need to devote special attention to teach these strategies explicitly. It appears that teaching text structure to students helps them to learn instead of memorizing and translating the difficult words, they need first to identify whether the text is cause/effect, compare/contrast or other types of text structures. This will help students to find the sentence relationships, main ideas to understand the text. Hence, they can comprehend texts without difficulties.

In concluding terms, the majority of the students of French at Khenchela University claimed that they are unaware of the use of reading strategies and how those strategies can enhance their reading comprehension. Although most of their courses are about reading texts and analyzing them, they still face difficulties in getting the main idea of a text. They tend to read the whole text in order to get the main idea. Therefore, teachers of ESP should be aware of the importance of teaching their students what are the reading strategies and how to use them, mainly text structure awareness strategy, in terms of time saving and efficiency, it is important for them if they teach the text structure understanding strategy, so that the students would learn how the text is organized and they would perform the reading task with better understanding of the main ideas in the text. Most of the class time should be devoted to teaching text structure tasks and activities that help the students enhancing and proving their reading comprehension skill. Students need to know how to use reading comprehension strategies, and how ideas are related together as well as how to spot information in a text. Moreover, by teaching text-structure awareness, teachers could help students change their learning styles from a dependent to an independent style. The use of text-structure awareness in comprehension instruction can have many benefits for ESP students.

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APPENDIX:

THE STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE:

The purpose of this questionnaire is to shed light on how you attain comprehension when reading texts of your academic studied, and to examine your opinions and attitudes towards using text structure strategy as a tool for enhancing your reading comprehension of texts. The results of this research will be beneficial for ESP instruction. So you are kindly requested to answer the following questionnaire.

Please, tick the appropriate box ().

A. Reading habits:

1- Do you read in English?

Yes No

2- Do you read materials that are related to the field of your studies?

Yes No

3- Do you consider reading as an important skill for your studies?

Yes No

B. Reading comprehension strategies:

4- Before reading a text, do you look at any headings, graphs, drawings?

Yes No

5- Do you read the whole text for looking for specific information?

YesNo

6- Can you grasp the author's message after reading the text?

YesNo

C. Reading comprehension problems:

7- How do you find read in English?

Easy Fairly easy Difficult

8- How do you find reading comprehension in English?

Easy Fairly easy Difficult.

9- How do you find understanding texts in the field of my study?

Easy Fairly easy Difficult

10- When you face difficulties on comprehension of texts, do you find using reading strategies:

Easy Fairly easy Difficult

D.The use of text structure as a reading strategy

11- Do you use strategies of how to read texts?

Yes No

12- Do you find reading comprehension to written texts easy?

Yes No

13- Do you use text structure as a reading strategy when comprehension breaks down?

Yes No

14- After finishing reading a text, can you summarize it in a paragraph or in a form of a graphic organizer?

Yes No

15- Is it important for you to learn courses related to text structure understanding strategy for enhancing your reading comprehension?

Yes No