



The impact of reading strategies and self-efficacy on reading comprehension: The case of Saudi EFL learners

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the correlation between the reading strategies (RSs) and reading self-efficacy (RSE) for the Saudi EFL learners and to what extent this correlation affects reading comprehension (RC). To obtain the objective of this study, 183 EFL learners from the University of Bisha were selected as participants. A questionnaire was distributed to collect data about the subjects' reading strategies and self-efficacy factors. SPSS 25.0 version was used for analysing the data. The participants' scores in reading comprehension were collected from the teachers and analyzed with the data elicited from the questionnaire. The results showed that the Saudi EFL learners use various reading strategies, primarily the *global reading strategy*, followed by *memory strategy*. The most dominant self-efficacy factor among the learners was confidence, followed by self-regulation. The results also showed a strong positive correlation between the RSs and learners' RSE ($r = 0.502^{**}$). Additionally, it is found that there is a remarkable influence by the reading strategies in focus on all the reading self-efficacy factors. A link between SE and RC from one side and between RSs and RC was also evident. The study stipulates certain significant recommendations and implications to the syllabus makers, teachers, EFL learners and researchers.

Keywords: EFL learners; reading comprehension; reading strategies; reading self-efficacy; Saudi learners

1. Introduction

It is globally acknowledged that communication is one of the main goals of learning English. Still, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), it is seldom easy to find chances to interact with English native speakers. As the English learners in the KSA are mainly EFL learners, the receptive skills (listening and reading) are not easy to learn. Practicing speaking and writing usually occurs on the internet and through social media. Therefore, learning the reading skills occupies an important status in the context at hand. Assumingly, learners who have mastered reading skills to some extent can improve their writing and speaking skills (Mart, 2012 & Fei, 2019). In other words, reading ability is a key factor in performing various tasks required for English learning. In the modern era, reading has

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become a very important language skill for gaining information. As Anderson et al., (1985) put it, reading is an essential skill in life.

Recently, many studies on teaching methods to improve learners' reading skill have been undertaken, and they found that improving reading skills largely depends on particular factors. The learners' cognitive requirements such as intelligence and memory and some affective factors like motivation, strategies, perceptions, and self-efficacy are some of these factors (Habók & Magyar, 2020). Affective factors are more likely to change, depending on education and environment. So, these factors are increasingly becoming more important (Brown, 2007; Ehrman & Oxford, 1995). Among several affective factors, the present study selected English reading strategies and English reading self-efficacy to explore in the Saudi EFL context. Learning strategy is generally defined as a special skill that learners use to master the target language (Block, 1986; Oxford, 1990). Learners regularly using various learning strategies can improve their reading skills more and quicker than their counterparts can. Self-efficacy on the other hand stands for the learner's ability rather than the ability itself. Arguably, "a strong sense of self-efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being, while challenging situations and set weak goals" (Bandura, 1994, p. 71).

Based on reviewing the relevant literature, there have been few studies on the correlations between English reading strategies (ERSs), English reading self-efficacy (ERSE) and English reading comprehension (ERC) in the KSA situation. Therefore, there is still a lack of evidence on the topic. This study is an attempt to find the correlations and effects of the two variables. Hopefully, the investigation would be helpful for improving the ERSs, ERSE and the learners' ERC in KSA, in particular, and in the Arab World, in general. For the sake of accomplishing the objectives of this study, the following questions are stipulated:

1. What are the English reading strategies used by the Saudi EFL learners, particularly at the University of Bisha?
2. What is the degree of English reading self-efficacy of the Saudi EFL learners?
3. What is the relationship between the learners' ERSs and ERSE?
4. To what extent are the learners' RSs related to their RSE?
5. To what extent do the learners' RSs and SE affect their RC?

2. Literature Review

In this section, the researcher reviews the existing literature on reading strategies, self-efficacy, and reading comprehension as they have a direct connection to the present study. The subsections will be given accordingly.

2.1. The concepts of reading strategies and self-efficacy

Barnett (1988) defines reading strategies as "the mental operations involved when readers purposefully approach a text and make sense of what they read" (p. 66). There are many strategies or techniques that are used in reading, such as preview, skimming, scanning, etc. They are defined as "the conscious actions readers use to repair breakdowns in comprehension (cognitive strategies) or the deliberate actions readers use to monitor and oversee those attempts at repair (metacognitive strategies)" (McNeil, 2011, p. 885). All the strategies suggested by many scholars and researchers can be included in cognitive strategy, global reading strategy and memory strategy. Cognitive strategy is a strategy used for organizing and transforming materials for learners to learn. It includes activities that relate to classifying, analyzing and inferring materials or texts. Global reading strategy is the prudent strategy that learners use when managing their reading activities. It refers to a deliberately planned

strategy in which the learner determines the purpose of reading and determines the length and structure of the text. It includes activities such as estimating and using tables, figures, or pictures to help the reader comprehend the meaning of the passage. Memory strategy is a strategy that helps the reader memorize or remember information, vocabulary, etc., and use them when needed. It includes connecting, using images or sounds, reviewing, repeating, etc., (Schunk, 1991).

Bandura was the initiator of "self-efficacy" theory in 1977. Bandura (1993) stated that, "self-efficacy" stands for people's perception that they are capable of attaining a certain objective. Cognitive, motivational, emotional, and decisional processes are all affected by it. Bandura (1993) believes that the students with high self-efficacy feel confident in the process of solving a problem. He declares that strong self-efficacy enhances performance, but low self-efficacy leads to weak commitment to achievement. He confirms that the individuals' inability of successful achievement is because of the lack of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). High self-efficacious individuals can persist through difficulties and likely consider them challenges (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, Schunk and Pajares (2002) verified that high self-efficacious learners perform better than low self-efficacious ones. Studies asserted that self-efficacy predicts learners' academic performance (e.g. Pajares, 1996; Schunk, 1996). Therefore, self-efficacy leads to confidence, self-regulation and difficult task perseverance.

2.2. Relationship between reading strategies and self-efficacy

Language learning strategies (LLSs) played and are still playing a key role in learning English as an EFL/ESL. LLSs positively contribute to and facilitate the progression of students' language learning process (Oxford, 1986; Oxford, 1990; Oxford, 1994 & Chamot, 2004). Moreover, LLSs have a real connection to simplify and support the process of language learning for ESL/EFL learners. Abundant literature has been till now dealing with LLSs (Meshyan & Hernandez, 2002; Mohammed, 2021; O'Malley et al., 1985). Several researchers (e.g. Lin & Tsai, 2017; Phan & Ngu, 2016; Poulisse, 1990; Zarei & Naghdi, 2017) have explored self-efficacy in various academic fields.

A study by Mohammed (2021) tried to find out the strategies that are used to boost the speaking skills used in online learning by Saudi EFL students at the University of Bisha. The study found a promising result that students are using strategies to learn language skills through the different language learning strategies. On the other side, Zarei and Naghdi (2017) investigated the possible differences among self-efficacy as the outcomes of EFL learners' achievements. The findings of the study indicated that students have positive results regarding self-efficacy, which was noted from the students' achievements. In a similar vein, Poulisse (1990) explored the impacts of compensatory strategies used to determine lexical problems of EFL learners' comprehension level. As well, the impact of task-related issues on compensatory strategies was also tested. The study's sample is Dutch students, covering three different comprehension levels of students studying English. The study revealed that the comprehension level is in reverse to the total number of compensatory strategies. Furthermore, the three different comprehension levels of students used a smaller number of compensatory strategies. They typically resorted to all-inclusive strategies and other transfer strategies. On the other coin's face, Metz et al., (2013) suggested that researchers should take the relation between learning strategies with self-efficacy sources which in a way they develop the understandings regarding learning reading skills. By the same token, Yurt (2014) examined the link between SE sources and the achievement in mathematics issues. The study showed that all the causes were certainly related to the accomplishments.

2.3. Reading Skill

There is an abundant storm of debate over reading in the mother language (L1) against reading in a foreign/second language. Despite the fact that many specialists argue in favor of correspondence, others take the opposite position. Tarone (1984) argued that it is “difficult to draw a clear distinction between first and foreign language reading ... it is not clear to what extent reading in a foreign language is different from reading in a first language” (p. 86). Undoubtedly, reading is a complex phenomenon; the coordination of eyes and brain is highly required to comprehend the printed text. Despite the necessity of reading in understanding the written world, reading seems to be neglected in the modern education system. If the strategies used for developing reading skills are analyzed, then it can be found that, at the initial stage, the main emphasis remains on the identification of sounds of letters and the joining of those sounds to utter the words and then sentences and so on (Wolf, 2016).

The interpretation of texts depends upon the previous knowledge of the reader, the drive for reading, and the context in which the reading occurs. In other words, information hidden in the text and awareness influenced by the reader act together to yield a meaning of the text. Automatically, the text will lead readers to bring their memories and experiences, etc. (Smith et al., 2021). Based on a reader's previous experiences and information, he or she draws inferences. This will make many people understand that only decoding is not reading at all. Rather, it is just the initial stage enabling readers to make a connection between letters and sounds. Reading implies making sense and driving meaning from printed text (Brown, 2001).

2.4. Reading strategies, self-efficacy, and reading comprehension

Raissi and Roustaei (2013) conducted a study on the relation of reading strategies, extensive reading and self-efficacy of Iranian EFL learners, in which they found that there is "a significant effect of the reading strategy instructions on the performance of reading comprehension" (p. 634). They stated that the various reading strategies improved significantly the EFL learners' reading comprehension competence. Carrell et al., (1989) showed that enhancing students' strategies can facilitate their reading comprehension. Likewise, Fitri et al., (2019) found a significant correlation between learners' RSE and RC. They inferred that "the higher the reading self-efficacy, the higher the reading comprehension" (p. 10). Similarly, Shehzad et al., (2019) conducted a study on the correlation between SE and RC of 351 Saudi EFL learners of eight public universities. They concluded that "reading self-efficacy beliefs were significantly associated with reading comprehension" (p. 90). Hedges and Gable (2016) studied the impact of motivation and SE on reading achievements and the study revealed that "the construct of reading self-efficacy was the most important predictor of reading achievement" (p. 2). The authors found a link between RSE and reading achievement. In their study, Chamot et al., (1993) found that the recurrent application of learning strategies and attitudes of SE are positively correlated.

Arabai (2018) studied the correlation between Saudi EFL learners' self-efficacy and their academic performance of LSRW. Arabai found that the Saudi EFL learners have "very low overall self-efficacy beliefs about learning the English language" (p. 1351). At the same time, he discovered that the learners' self-efficacy is correlated positively with their language achievements" (p. 1351). Then, Arabai declares that his finding "verifies the relationship identified by earlier studies that recognized self-efficacy as the best predictor of learners' mastery in language skills" (p. 1355). McQuillan (2000) found that reading achievement is correlated with self-efficacy. This affirmed that self-efficacious readers perform better and persist through difficult reading tasks.

With this literature review in mind, investigating the ERSs and SE of Saudi EFL learners and their correlation with RC has been of little research. Noticeably, almost all the studies conducted on the RSs

and SE in relation to RC confirmed that reading self-efficacy, reading strategies and comprehension are positively correlated, but they did not show the degree of the correlation. Thus, this correlational study examines the correlation between English reading strategies, self-efficacy, and reading comprehension of Saudi EFL learners.

3. Method

This study ventured on examining the correlation between English reading strategies and English reading self-efficacy from one side and from the other side the correlation between such strategies and the Saudi EFL learners' reading comprehension abilities. It was conducted at the University of Bisha, KSA at the end of the second term of 2021, after the two courses "English Basic Skills" and "Advanced English Skills" were over. In the aforementioned courses, there is a portion of reading skills that is taught for four hours per week, i.e. 120 hours per the two courses over two full semesters.

3.1. Participants

One hundred eighty-three learners from the English Department at the University of Bisha who took the reading classes for two semesters (30 weeks) were randomly selected to take part in the study. Their participation was voluntary. All the participants studied reading skill as a main part of compulsory courses "English Basic Skills" and "Advanced English Skills". The scores of the same students were taken from the teachers who taught them for the intended purpose. The marks were classified into three categories; A, B and C. 36% of them got A, 34% got B and 30% got C. There were 87 male students (47.54%) and 96 female students (52.46%). Their age range is 19-24 years. The evaluation methods were different but the textbooks were the same.

3.2. Instrument(s)

Two basic instruments for collecting the required data were used – a questionnaire and students' score profiles. The marks of the students in reading comprehension in the two semesters in which they studied reading skill were collected from the teachers' mark sheets. The questionnaire was obtained to examine the level of the learners' self-efficacy and English reading strategies. It collected demographic information such as gender, age, level of study, data about reading strategies, and self-efficacy. In addition to the demographic information items, it consisted of 47 items: 23 items were specified for the reading strategies and 24 for self-efficacy. They were 5-point scale Likert ones, in which the participants should choose one of the options arranging as "Always", "Often", "Sometimes", "Rarely" and "Never". The items of English reading strategies were divided into three subcategories according to the types of strategies: (a) cognitive strategies (5 items), global reading strategies (12 items), and memory strategies (6 items). The items of self-efficacy were also divided into three sub-categories: confidence (8 items), self-regulation (8 items) and task difficulty (8 items). After the participants gave their consent, the questionnaire data were utilized.

3.3. Data collection procedures

After writing and ordering the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted. The questionnaire was sent to 20 students to fill in. The filled questionnaires were received and the data were checked for validity and it was found valid. Then, it was shared with the participants as a Google form. The collected data were coded and analyzed for validity and reliability. Reliability was verified through Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha (α) of all the items of ERSs was found to be 0.912 and that of the items of ERSE was 0.962. It means that the data collected were highly reliable. In addition, the

Cronbach's alpha values of the data of the subcategories are shown in Table 1. The participants' scores in reading comprehension were also coded and inserted for analysis.

Table 1. Reliability of English reading strategies and self-efficacy

	English Reading Strategies			Self-Efficacy		
	Cognitive strategy	Global reading strategy	Memory strategy	Confidence	Self-regulation	Task difficulty
Number of Items	5	12	6	8	8	8
Cronbach's Alpha	0.739	0.842	0.707	0.932	0.825	0.894
		0.912			0.962	

3.4. Data analysis

After coding the data, analyses of the data were performed using the SPSS (25.0 Version) to handle the following points. Each one corresponds to the appropriate statistical measures/tests.

1. The general characteristics of the study participants using frequency analysis.
2. ERSs and ERSE of the study sample using the means and standard deviations.
3. The difference between the ERSs used by the learners among their RC levels using One-Way ANOVA and the Post-hoc test.
4. The difference between the ERSE factors among the learners' RC levels using One-Way ANOVA and the Post-hoc test.
5. The correlation between ERSs and ERSE using correlation analysis.
6. The effect of ERSs and ERSE on RC using multiple regression analysis.

4. Results

4.1. English reading strategies and English reading self-efficacy

The distribution of ERSs and ERSE factors of the Saudi EFL learners are discussed below. As shown in Table 2, the mean of the ERSs used by the learners in question is 3.23. To go into depth, the learners tend to use the global reading strategy ($M = 3.31$), followed by the memory strategy ($M = 3.22$). The cognitive strategy, however, comes at last in the learners' preference ($M = 3.08$). Furthermore, the mean of the learners' English reading self-efficacy is 3.03. As data in the table shows, the most preferred factor of self-efficacy is confidence ($M = 3.10$), followed by self-regulation ($M = 3.05$) and, finally, task difficulty ($M = 2.88$).

Table 2. Distribution of English reading strategies and self-efficacy factors

	English Reading Strategies			Self-Efficacy		
	Cognitive strategy	Global reading strategy	Memory strategy	Confidence	Self-regulation	Task difficulty
Mean	3.08	3.31	3.22	3.10	3.05	2.88
SD	0.61	0.56	0.61	0.67	0.70	0.71
Mean	3.23			3.03		
SD	0.54			0.66		

4.2. The difference between using ERSs and ERSE

To examine the differences between the reading strategies used by the learners across their levels of reading comprehension, One-way ANOVA and Post-hoc tests were employed. Table 3 shows, as the results appeared, that the difference between the learners' reading strategies is significant as a whole ($p = 0.018$). There are significant differences between the learners of the various reading comprehension levels in using the cognitive strategy ($p = 0.039$) and memory strategy ($p = 0.003$), but difference between the students of the various levels in applying the global reading strategy was not significant.

Table 3. Differences between Learners of the levels of RC in using RSs

		F	Sig.
English reading strategies	Between groups	4.126*	0.018
	Within groups		
	Total		
Cognitive strategies	Between groups	3.313*	0.039
	Within groups		
	Total		
Global reading strategy	Between groups	2.511	0.084
	Within groups		
	Total		
Memory strategy	Between groups	6.107**	0.003
	Within groups		
	Total		

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

4.3. Correlation between ERSs and ERSE

The correlation between the RSs and RSE was investigated using the Spearman correlation test, and the results are shown in Table 4. The results reveal a correlation between the RSs used by learners and RSE (correlation coefficient ($r = 0.502^{**}$), indicating a strong positive relationship. There is a correlation between the RSs and confidence, self-regulation and task difficulty ($r = 0.442^{**}$, 0.563^{**} , 0.482^{**}), indicating moderate, strong, and moderate positive relationships, respectively. At the same time, there is a correlation between SE and cognitive strategy, global reading strategy, and memory strategy ($r = 0.443^{**}$, 0.507^{**} , 0.397^{**}), indicating moderate, strong, and moderate positive relationships, respectively. The results show strong and moderate positive relationships between each reading strategy and each factor of reading self-efficacy.

Table 4. Correlation between English RSs and self-efficacy

	Self- efficacy	Confidence	Self- regulation	Task difficulty
Reading strategies	0.502**	0.442**	0.563**	0.482**
Cognitive strategy	0.443**	0.387**	0.479**	0.445**
Global reading strategy	0.507**	0.450**	0.579**	0.473**

Memory strategy	0.397**	0.345**	0.442**	0.391**
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* p<0.05, ** p<0.01

4.4. The effect of English RSs on RC

The analysis results, shown in Table 5, reveal that the effect is statistically significant of ERSs on RC at the significant level of %5 or less ($t = 2.201^*$), $p = 0.037$, (i.e., <0.05). Reading comprehension is increased by reading strategies by 0.397 points.

Table 5. The effect of ERSs on RC

	Unnormalized Coefficient		Standardization Coefficient (β)	t	p
	B	S.E.			
Reading strategies	0.397	0.157	0.329	2.201*	0.037

*p<0.05

4.5. The effect of RSE on RC

The analysis results, shown in Table 6, reveal that the effect is statistically significant of ERSE on RC at the significant level of %5 or less ($t = 2.198^*$), $p = 0.037$, (i.e., <0.05). Reading comprehension is increased by ERSE by 0.386 points.

Table 6. The effect of ERSE on RC

	Unnormalized Coefficient		Standardization Coefficient (β)	t	p
	B	S.E.			
Reading self-efficacy	0.386	0.149	0.321	2.198*	0.037

*p<0.05

5. Discussion

In this part, the findings of this investigation are discussed and compared with some previous related studies related to the correlation between ERSs and RSE and their effects on reading comprehension. A general finding of this study is the positive attitudes that Saudi EFL students under investigation have towards ERSs ($M = 3.22$). They have a moderate self-efficacy ($M = 3.03$) on reading achievement, indicating that they hold a moderate level of using ERSs and SE. Some previous studies that were conducted on self-efficacy and language learning reported self-efficacy as one of the best predictors of language learning accomplishment (Asakereh & Dehghannezhad, 2015; Pajares, 2003; Rahimi and Abedini, 2009). This implies that the Saudi EFL learners can have higher self-efficacy, but this is subject to their success in language learning. Alrabai (2018) believes that self-efficacy correlates with success and failure in English language learning. That is to say, it grows and declines on the basis of success or failure in learning the target language. As such, the present study affirms that Saudi EFL learners have a moderate level of self-efficacy, a finding that contradicts Alrabai's (2018) study in which the author reported that the learners had a very low level of self-efficacy in language learning attainment.

Based on the mean scores of the reading strategies, the most preferred strategy was the global reading strategy, followed by memory strategy and cognitive strategy. Regarding self-efficacy factors, confidence was the most preferred factor, followed by self-regulation, and lastly, task difficulty. This

implies that the learners tend to use a variety of RSs and they are lively strategic readers. This is in line with the findings revealed in previous studies, viz. Abu-Snoubar (2017), Al-Mekhlafi (2018), Nguyen & Trinh (2011), Poole (2009) and Zhang & Wu (2009). Additionally, the various uses of reading strategies tend to make the learners more confident and self-regulated learners.

The significant positive correlation between RSs and RSE appeared to be another significant finding in this research as it is in line with the study of Chamot et al., (1993) that reported that the use of LSs positively correlates with perceptions of SE. This finding is similar to Li and Wang's (2010) in which they confessed that, "learners with a higher level of reading self-efficacy tend to use reading strategies more frequently" (p. 151). The correlation (r) was 0.502**, indicating a strong positive correlation. The degrees of correlation between RSs and SE factors were different. The RSs (cognitive strategy, global reading strategy, memory strategy) are related to the learners' SE factors (confidence, self-regulation and task difficulty). The greatest influence of the reading strategies was on self-regulation, task difficulty, and confidence respectively. This suggests that English reading self-efficacy factors could be increased by encouraging the learners to use more reading strategies.

This study shows that correlation between learner's RSE and R C is significant. This finding goes in parallel with the findings of Fitri, Sofyan and Jayanti (2019), Shehzad et al., (2019), Hedges and Gable (2016) and Alharbi (2021). In a similar vein, Schunk and Parajes (2002) supports the finding of this study as high self-efficacious students had high reading achievement, and vice versa.

The results of this study also found a significant effect of RSs and RSE on RC. These findings confirm the findings of Raissi and Roustaei (2013). Learners who use various LSs to achieve their learning goals, such as improving their reading skills, generally experience high self-efficacy. In other words, learners with high reading self-efficacy tend to use a variety of RSs. This result is stipulated as well by Ehrman and Oxford (1995) and Brown (2007). The reading strategies are based on the level of English reading comprehension. In other words, the use of the RSs is contingent on the level of English reading comprehension. The learners whose marks are high tend to use the most various reading strategies, and vice-versa. Pedagogically speaking, the teachers can play a crucial role in using more reading strategies to improve their learners' reading self-efficacy, which will, in turn, improve their reading achievement. Figure 1 shows the correlation clearly.

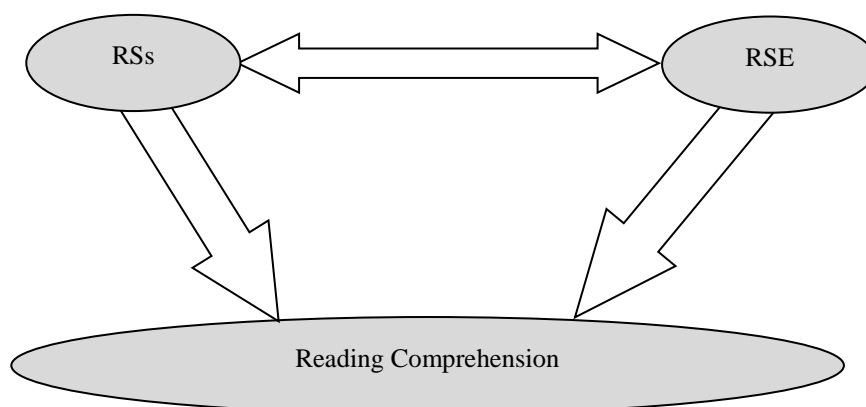


Figure 1. Correlation of RSs, RSE and RC

6. Conclusion

In the main, this study shows that English reading strategies and self-efficacy significantly influence the improvement of reading comprehension. This provides ground for important recommendations for EFL teachers to help their learners improve their RSs and SE. Teachers are

generally advised to find a way, in light of the findings, that helps learners improve their reading skills and promote self-efficacy. More pointedly, the EFL teachers in KSA and other similar contexts in the Arab World are highly recommended to guide their students to use more reading strategies and reading self-efficacy factors that likely enhance the learners' reading skills. The syllabus makers are also recommended to enrich the textbooks with ways that could lead the students to focus on using RSs and RSE factors that play an essential role in enhancing their RC. English learners can also exploit the RSs and RSE factors so as to encourage learners to be more skilful readers. More studies could be conducted on the connection and effects of teaching methods and textbooks on reading strategies, self-efficacy, and reading proficiency.

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