Chapter Two:

Review of Literature

Reading Comprehension
2.1. Preview

This chapter reviews some of the relevant existing literature on reading comprehension. The first section introduces the concept of reading comprehension. The next section presents an outline of types of reading passages, followed by a description of various learning strategies and learning styles along with their implications for improving reading comprehension. The other sections of the chapter are devoted to the effect of tasks as pedagogical classroom activities in accelerating language learning.

2.2. Reading Comprehension

In many second or foreign language-teaching situations, reading comprehension receives a special focus for several reasons. It is considered as an important language ability because it enhances the process of language acquisition and helps students to read for a variety of purposes. Besides, written texts serve various pedagogical purposes. Therefore, extensive exposure to linguistically comprehensible written texts can enhance the process of language acquisition. In addition, suitable reading texts serve as good models for writing, and provide opportunities for introducing new topics, stimulating discussions, and studying the features of language. Many foreign language students often have reading as one of their most important goals. In fact, in most EFL academic situations, the ability to read in a foreign language is all that students ever want to acquire. Reading, then, is highly valued by students and teachers alike.

The ability to read, no matter what the purpose of reading is, requires that readers extract information from the text and combine it with information and expectations they already have. Therefore, reading is a meaning-construction process which involves an interaction between text and reader. During reading, readers subconsciously try to interact with the passage in order to understand the text. However, since in this interaction readers approach a text with differing background knowledge, interests, motivations, skills, and strategies, they arrive at different interpretations of the same text.

Reading is also a problem-solving behavior that actively involves the reader in the process of deriving and assigning meaning. During this problem-solving activity, readers have to draw on contextual information that contains syntactic, semantic, and discourse constraints which affect their interpretation of the passage (Rivers, 1988,
Syntactic constraints are provided by the word order and the syntactic rules of the language. Semantic constraints include the distribution of meaning within a specific language and culture. Discourse constraints are those provided by the topic of the text and its development. According to Chastain (1988, p.26) these constrains make reading comprehension a highly cognitively demanding skill which involves careful attention, memory, perceptual processes, and comprehension processes. It also includes understanding words, sentences, or even texts, along with a complex integration of the prior knowledge, language proficiency, and metacognitive strategies.

Language learners may have various problems in reading comprehension. Some may have specific difficulties with phonological skills, others with word recognition. Most, however, have some difficulties in more than one area. Of course, reading difficulties can be the result of many factors such as cognitive, affective, and so forth and it is never easy to find the causes. Developing reading abilities assists students in overcoming their reading problems and in becoming competent readers. Another important factor that contributes to students' reading ability is the extent of their knowledge about various reading strategies (see Chastain, 1988; Rivers & Temperley, 1978). Beginners have fewer strategies at their disposal and are less skilled than more experienced readers. Good readers try to create a structure on what they are reading and this stimulates further expectations about what is to come next.

According to Rivers (1990, p. 30), students can progress in reading if the knowledge of the language in the oral form precedes reading, as this is the order of learning the mother tongue. Therefore, it becomes easier for readers to recognize what they already know orally, in its graphic form. Oral reading fluency has attracted considerable attention as a potentially reliable indictor of reading competence (Kame’enui & Simmons, 2001, p. 208). Practice in reading aloud can be considered as a primary step to both reading and writing. Before students can do either well, the connection between the sound and its written symbol(s) needs to be recognized because competent reading requires adequate attention to the meaning of the word while focusing on its sound. As a result, when a word is misread, good readers tend to recognize the error, because it does not make sense in context. Without this knowledge, students are not likely to be successful in the typical language class in which all language skills are stressed.
Many reading specialists (e.g., Chodkieiwicz, 2001; Hadley, 2003; Rivers, 1990; Wallace, 2001) emphasize the importance of selecting authentic materials for the purpose of both teaching and testing reading comprehension without having to worry about unfamiliar structures and vocabulary. During working on reading comprehension tasks that preserve authenticity, students should be encouraged to use their knowledge of the syntax by paraphrasing, simplifying, avoiding, and even inferring from rules they know in the new language. Simplifying an authentic reading passage can improve understanding of the passage if it is performed by the readers themselves. However, simplifying texts for the purpose of publication reduces the texts' natural redundancy which might actually make them more difficult to read. Therefore, authentic materials should be presented to students, if possible, in their original form, to allow them to use non-linguistic cues to interpret meaning. Authenticity is also important in testing reading comprehension. Reading comprehension tests ought to be constructed in relation to the ways people read texts in normal life. “Since most test methods are unusual in real-life reading, the purpose for which readers on tests read, or possibly the manner in which they read, may not correspond to the ways they normally read such texts” (Alderson, 2000, p. 248). In other words, the danger is that the test may not reflect how students would understand the passage in the real world. One resolution to this problem may be employing test methods that most probably reflect the ways in which readers read in the real world.

Reading comprehension skills are also improved if learners are exposed to reading materials that are at the right difficulty level. This has been emphasized by many reading experts (e.g., Nassaji, 2003; Nunan, 1989; Soranastapon & Chuedoung, 1999; Widdowson 1990; Willis & Willis, 2001). The difficulty level of a reading passage depends on the degree of structural and lexical complexity of the language used. It should be in accordance with the readers’ current level of competence and permit students to decode the passage’s structure and its lexicon in other to understand it. Decoding a passage consists of both syntactic and semantic processes. Fluent readers rely more on semantic than syntactic information except when the meaning is not clear (Rivers, 1988, p.73). During syntactic processing, readers have to recognize meaningful structural relationships within the sentences. During semantic processing, they should be able to identify the lexical meaning of words and try to create a broader meaning for these words within the contexts of phrase, sentence, and discourse. However, sometimes this semantic processing becomes more complicated because of the existence of
difficult words. One criterion for deciding about the difficulty level of the words is their length. According to Bernhardt (1984, p. 39), longer or multi-syllable words in a passage are considered as difficult because they do require considerable processing attention.

To be good readers, language learners should develop and improve three distinctive reading abilities that contribute to competent reading: (a) recognizing familiar written words, (b) using phonic skills to pronounce unfamiliar words, and (c) understanding what is being read (Funnel & Morgan, 1995, p. 46). Since these three abilities are, to a considerable degree, independent of each other, readers may rely mostly on one skill and rarely make use of the others. One way of helping these students to apply all these skills is preparing suitable materials in the form of reading comprehension tasks and passages that are interesting, relevant, and at an appropriate level of complexity (Dobrenow, 1981, p. www). Materials should also match the learners' objectives, put them in control of their learning, be socio-culturally appropriate, be based on the norms of the society, be gender sensitive, be age appropriate, match the ability of the students, be up to date and authentic, be well organized and easy to use, and facilitate interaction among learners. Appropriate reading materials can noticeably help readers to improve their comprehension of textbook assignments, directions on exams, homework assignments, job applications, or questionnaires. They can also assist students in comprehending the discourse structure and the organization of the reading passage, if they clarify the passage's function, its general argumentative organization, its rhetorical structure, the use of cohesive devices, and the understanding of intersentential relationships (Hadley, 2003, p. 198). Comprehension is also enhanced if students are familiar with various types of reading materials and if such materials are related to understanding the plain facts as well as the implications, suppositions, and evaluations of the text (Grabe & Stoller, 2001, p.193).

### 2.3. Types of Reading Passages

Familiarity with the construction of various types of reading passages can be considered as another key factor in improving reading comprehension skills. Five types of reading passages, viz., narratives, expository, descriptive, argumentative, and explanatory are briefly described below. They vary in terms of their topics and their genres.
**Narrative:** Narrative passages are those instances in which the writer tells a story or writes about an event. They share many characteristics with face-to-face oral communication. Since these texts appeal to the readers’ shared knowledge of the world, they are easier to understand and recall than other types of passages such as expository ones. Empirical studies (e.g., Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Stein & Glenn, 1979) have shown that even preschool children face not much difficulty grasping event sequences described in stories and folktales. Other studies (e.g., Freedle & Halle, 1979; Graesser, 1981) have shown that even among adult readers, the recall capability is generally far superior in narratives than in other types of texts.

**Expository:** Expository is defined as ‘serving to explain’ or ‘tending to illustrate’ by the new Webster dictionary (Thatcher & McQueen, 1984). Expository passages are informational in nature and are intended to induce new insights. Understanding the structural properties of such passages requires considerable formal training. However, much of the early research (e.g., Kintsch, 1974; Kintsch & VanDijik, 1978; Meyer, 1975; Miller & Kintsch, 1980) focused on formalizing the structural properties of expositions, and in doing so, it highlighted the specific ways these variables affect comprehension.

**Descriptive:** In descriptive passages, the authors try to describe people, events, objects, sceneries, etc. based on their interpretations of them. This description is generally presented in the form of a personal impression or a purely imaginary one. Therefore, such descriptions may be either valid or invalid. Descriptive writers may describe the same entity differently because their viewpoints vary.

**Argumentative:** Argumentative passages are texts whose writers are concerned almost entirely with ideas. They just discuss particular problems without presenting any personal interpretation about the subjects. Such texts argue and offer reasons to support or overthrow a proposition, opinion, or measure. The passages may reason, dispute or discuss an idea. According to (Alexander, 1967, p. 16), the important requirement of any argumentative passages is reasoning along with the arrangement of the ideas in logical order.

**Explanatory:** In explanatory passages, the writers try to explain the existing interrelations in a passage by giving information about something or by describing how something works in order to make it easier to understand. Abraham (1970, p. 109)
defines explanation as “the detailed analysis of the complex interrelation and multiple meaning of the component elements existing within a written work”.

2.4. Learning Strategies

Reading materials that trigger general learning strategies (guessing, attending to meaning, self-monitoring, etc.) that are related to successful language learning as well as more specific strategies in particular skill areas considerably improve EFL learners’ comprehension and prevent them from excessive reference to bilingual dictionaries (Cobb & Stevens, 1992, p. www). Learning strategies are some operations (i.e., actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques) that are deliberately employed by learners to achieve particular goals, for example to assist acquisition or to learn a second/foreign language (see Oxford, 2001a, p. 166). In his words, Rubin (1987, p.19) describes reading strategies as “sets of operations, steps, plans, or routines used by the learners to facilitate obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information”. These specific operations that are often intentionally taken up by learners, make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations. They also help students enhance their own learning, be more autonomous in their learning, and improve their progress in developing second language skills.

According to Long & Crookes (1992, p. 42) formal instruction on strategies has a positive effect on students’ use of strategies and improves the rate of learning. However, strategies should be contextualized for the purpose of the formal training. De-contextualized teaching of individual strategies for a short time will not have a long-term effect on students nor will it help them to develop as strategic readers. Strategy use develops over a long term, perhaps several years. In this regard, Janzen (2002, p.288) introduces the following factors in the formal instruction of strategies to help develop learners into strategic readers:

- Inserting strategies in the content area of students’ regular course
- Teaching strategies through direct explanation, teacher modeling, and feedback
- Recycling the strategies over new texts and tasks

Teaching strategies become more useful if it is related to the reading task at hand, if it fits the particular student’s learning style preferences to one degree or another and if students employ the strategy effectively and link it with other relevant strategies.
(Oxford, 2001b, p. 362). Strategies that fulfill these conditions make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations. Application of learning strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, or retrieval of the new information. The ability to employ strategies during reading, distinguishes good readers from poor ones. Good readers use strategies in a systematic way whereas poor ones use them in a random, unconnected, and uncontrolled manner. Good readers are also able to shift between alternative strategies, as needed, so that they can progress in reading as efficiently as possible (Vann & Abraham, 1990). Strategic readers are more successful because …

They understand the goals of a reading activity, have a range of well-practiced reading strategies at their disposal, apply them in efficient combinations, monitor comprehension appropriately, recognize miscomprehension, and repair comprehension problems effectively. They use a wide repertoire of strategies in combination rather than in isolated application. (Grabe & Stoller, 2001, p. 195)

Strategy training can be generally included in academic courses. Therefore, by creating proper situations, students can have opportunities to use, adapt, evaluate, and transfer a strategy to new situations and in reading tasks. Besides, providing suitable contexts for strategy instruction can encourage teachers to model reading skills and strategies overtly, facilitating students’ performances of these abilities. However, strategies should be learned in an organized way. The organized, reasoned use of learning strategies is more important than the sheer; frequent use of them. Successful application of strategies help readers to process a text actively, to monitor their comprehension, and to connect what they are reading to their own existing knowledge and to other parts of the text. Learning strategies included six major categories: cognitive, metacognitive, mnemonic, affective, social. They are discussed in the coming sections.

2.4.1. Cognitive Strategies

These strategies help learners make and/or strengthen associations between existing knowledge and the new information they receive. Although various researchers describe cognitive strategies differently, they all refer to one common phenomenon, i.e. improving cognition (see Dougherty, 1985; Masny, 1984; Oxford, 2001a). For example, Weinstein and Mayer (1986) describe cognitive strategies as a broad array of actions that help govern behavior, emotion, motivation, communication, attention, and
comprehension. Similarly, Anderson, (1991, p. 460) designates cognitive strategies as deliberate cognitive steps that learners can take to assist in acquiring, storing, and retrieving new information. A much broader definition is adapted by Chamot and El-Dinary (1999, p. 319) stating that cognitive strategies are “mental procedures that assist learning and that occasionally can be accompanied by overt activities”.

Cognitive strategies usually involve the identification and retrieval of language elements, for example the use of memory-enhancing strategies to improve remembering new words (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 121). They also include hypothesis testing (such as searching for clues in surrounding materials and in one’s own background knowledge) and hypothesizing the meaning of unknown words and determining if this meaning makes sense and, if not, repeating at least part of the process (Oxford, 2001a, p.167). These strategies can be used for accomplishing specific cognitive tasks during reading to facilitate the mental restructuring of information. Richards (1990, p.90), for example, believes that when dealing with various kinds of reading problems, readers perform the reading tasks and verbalize their thought processes by reflecting upon the cognitive strategies and upon the heuristics they employ. Varieties of cognitive strategies are discussed in the following sections.

2.4.1.1. Rapid Recognition of Words

It is of great advantage for second language readers to recognize automatically the words (in isolation) and common phrases containing them. These words that readers can recognize quickly and effortlessly are called ‘sight vocabularies’. This rapid and automatic process of word recognition, i.e., the process of extracting lexical information from graphic display of words, is extremely crucial for reading comprehension. Readers who are not able to recognize words easily face difficulty in getting information from the text. Because poor word recognition is directly related to poor reading comprehension. In the absence of adequate reading practice, this skill remains underdeveloped and poor comprehension continues.

Funnel and Morgan (1995, p. 96) describe sight vocabulary as memory for whole words. They further explain that at the early stages, learners use partial clues of the words to remember whole words. Yet, the visual memory they form for words in their sight vocabulary is not the same as complete records of the properties of each word. This incomplete data of the basic sight words is the source of their errors and
causes confusion of words about which they have similar clues in their mind. At the
later stages, when students improve in forming detailed representation of printed words,
their sight vocabulary expands and they will be able to memorize complete records of
the words. Thus, successful comprehension during reading is heavily dependant on
knowledge of individual word meaning.

Some studies (e.g., Alderson & Urquhart, 1985; Anderson & Freeboy, 1983;
Carrell, 1988; Carroll, 1971; Davis, 1968; Koda, 1988, & 1990) indicate that there is a
widely recognized relationship between the knowledge of vocabulary and reading
comprehension which attests to the crucial role word knowledge plays in text
understanding among both L1 and L2 readers. According to (Grabe, 2002, p. 276), if
students are given ample opportunities to encounter words and to read predictable texts
for several times to develop word-recognition skills, they would be able to process a
text completely and read more words on a single page.

Some reading specialists (e.g., Brown & Haynes, 1985; Ryan & Meara 1991)
believe that developing automatic word-recognizing skills leads to reading fluency.
Reading fluency involves the effortless recognition of words in a connected text, the
ability to recognize basic grammatical information, and the rapid combination of word
meaning and structural meaning to create larger meaning units (see Good, Simmons, &
in reading rates by practicing with a combination of timed reading, paced reading, rapid
recognition exercises, and rereading techniques. Studies emphasizing the primacy of
repeated practice in reading (e.g., Faulkner & Levy, 1999; Lemoine, Levy &
Hutchinson, 1993; Stoddard, Valcante, Sindlear, O'Shea, & Algozzine, 1993) have
yielded a consistent and positive impact on both word recognition and comprehension
of the practiced items. Other studies (e.g., Gass & Selinker, 1983; Green & Meara,
1987; Kellerman & Sharwood, 1986) have also indicated that the first language
experiences can affect students’ word recognition abilities. These studies have shown
that L2 learners use identifiable L1 processing devices during L2 word recognition. A
logical assumption would be that readers bring their first language knowledge and its
corresponding processing skills to their L2 word recognition processing.

Knowledge of letter patterns and their linkage to sounds is another factor that
can facilitate rapid and automatic recognition of words (Koda, 2005, p. 46). Good
readers are those who read rapidly for comprehension, recognize words rapidly and automatically without seeming to pay attention to them, integrate text information with their own knowledge, and employ learning strategies to monitor comprehension. As a result, to be good readers, learners need to have a large repertoire of vocabulary. This can be developed by focusing their attention on key vocabularies during extensive reading or vocabulary learning exercises.

2.4.1.2. Using Context to Comprehend a Passage

EFL/ESL readers need to be able to read effectively while tolerating a certain amount of ambiguity and uncertainty. The tendency for many EFL readers while dealing with incomplete information in a passage is to stop and think about each unknown word and ask for help or look it up in a dictionary. This is a typical strategy of poor readers. However, one of the useful strategies readers can resort to when dealing with incomplete information is using the context and contextual clues to comprehend the passage. A context is the combination of vocabulary and grammar that surrounds a word. It can be a sentence, a paragraph, or a passage. Every context includes some clues that assist in understanding the passage. Contextual clues are words that are located elsewhere in a sentence or paragraph which help one to decipher unknown vocabulary words (Han, 2001, p. www). Context helps readers to make a general prediction about meaning. If readers know the general meaning of a sentence, they can also know the general meaning of the words in the sentence. Using context and its clues can help students understand the passage without stopping to look up every unknown word in a dictionary. Practice in reading aloud performed by the teacher and by students (when they have achieved enough proficiency) can also assist students in recognizing contextual clues such as intonation, stress, pause, and mostly those features indicated by commas and periods. During loud reading, the teacher can also attract students’ attention to other contextual clues such as the words, phrases, sentences or even paragraphs surrounding a word or a phrase that can help students guess their general meaning.

2.4.1.3. Decoding: Anticipation, Prediction, & Making Inferences

One of the reading strategies that improve readers' comprehension of the passages is decoding. At one level, decoding involves guessing from content the
meaning of unknown words or phrases which may be needed at the word, intrasentential, intersentential, or discourse levels (Hadley, 2003, p. 200). At a higher level, it involves the recognition of graphics of known words. Skilled readers subconsciously perform decoding when comprehension is impeded by unknown words, complex structure, or unfamiliar concepts. They decode a text through anticipation and prediction to guess how a passage will develop.

Generally, people do not remember things in detail rather they remember a kind of skeleton, to which they attach the flesh of details by a “creative and re-constructive process” (Oiler, 1979, p. 23). This process like all verbal and cognitive activities is governed largely by the readers’ expectations. For this reason, before reading a passage, good readers anticipate or expect to find certain things in it. These may be answers to some questions in their minds about the subject or may be ideas that interest them. However, anticipation of what is in the passage is related to the readers’ own personal background knowledge of the subject. In this process, they anticipate what the message is likely to be and then compare the actual message received with their anticipations.

While reading, readers also use the ability that underlies all their language performances to predict the meanings of unknown words in a passage (see Davis, 1990, p. 67; Hughes, 1971, p. 23; Stern, 1983, p. 349). After a passage begins, they can find some clues that help them to predict what is going to come next. These clues may be in the semantic meaning or in the grammatical structure of a sentence or in its vocabulary. Good readers not only try to guess the meaning of content words, but also they try to interpret the force of connectors, determine the relationships among sentences or sentence elements, and the like. The skill of prediction, like anticipation, makes it easier to understand the sentences that follow and is therefore an essential skill in dealing with reading comprehension.

Another useful decoding strategy that expert readers employ when facing with compression problems is inferencing. Inferences are information that is not directly stated in the passage but are understood from the literal meaning of the passage. In the words of Brown and Yule (1983, p. 266), inferencing is described as...

... connections people make when attempting to reach an interpretation of what they read or hear. Inferencing is a process which is context-dependent, text specific and located in the individual reader (hearer). It is impossible to predict the actual inferences a reader will
make in arriving at an interpretation of a text. We may be able to make predictions regarding particular aspects of individual texts which readers generally have to interpret on the basis of inference.

A good reader is able to understand the inference, to see what is implied. The most understandable help the reader gets is from the context and the whole group of sentences which can direct him toward the answer. Sometimes in a reading passage, a direct statement of fact or evidence is found. At the other times, no direct statement can be located. Then readers have to make an inference which is a logical conclusion based on evidence stated in the passage (Sharp, 1989, p. 264). According to Broukla & Woods (1991, p. 215), the ideal solution to improve this important skill of anticipation, is to provide students with opportunities in which they have extensive reading where they can also increase their level of knowledge in grammar and vocabulary.

2.4.1.4. Top-Down and Bottom-Up Strategies

Top-down and bottom-up processing of information are considered as essential cognitive strategies by different researchers (e.g., Carter & Nunan, 2001; Chastain, 1988; Goodman, 1967; Nunan, 2001a) which help learners more successfully decode the information they receive during reading a passage or during listening to a spoken text. In a bottom-up or data-driven approach, the brain analyses the data and the information it has received to arrive at its final interpretation. In this process, meaning resides in the reading passage and the thought moves from specific pieces of information to more general knowledge. In a top-down or conceptually-driven approach the brain starts processing with a general knowledge of the subject and proceeds to relate the information it already has to the new data it receives. According to (Dobrenow, 1981, p. www), top-down and bottom-up strategies can be successfully combined with each other during reading. Therefore, reading can be considered as an activity in which the top-down processes that utilize background knowledge or the relevant schemata are integrated with bottom-up processes that are primarily text or data driven (Cobb & Stevens, 1992, p. www).

Background knowledge affects almost all the aspects of information processing and since texts do not provide all necessary information for meaning construction, a fair number of gaps, both conceptual and relational, are likely to occur. To close these gaps, prior knowledge, i.e., the relevant schemata for the concept, is necessary. As Kant (1781, p. 182) explained the idea of schematization two centuries ago, "the schema of a
concept signifies a rule according to which [an] imagination can delineate the figure”. A number of studies (e.g., Anderson, Spiro, & Anderson, 1977; Anderson, Pichert, Goetz, Schallert, Stevens, & Trollip 1976; Ausbel, 1968) have indicated that the schemata people already possess are a principle determiner of what they can learn from a text. Since all learning happens through processes of accommodation and assimilation of new ideas or concepts based on current or past knowledge, readers assimilate a text with what they already have in their schema through top-down or bottom-up processing of information (see Piaget, 1959, p. 32). In this process, they select and transform information, construct hypotheses, and make decisions while they fall back on already available cognitive structures. This cognitive structure (that is, the schema or mental modes) provides meaning and organization to experience and allows the individual to go beyond the information given. Some studies (e.g., Dole, Valencia, Greer, & Wardrop, 1991; Pressley, 2000; Spires, Gallini, & Riggsbee, 1992) have reported reaping clear-cut benefits in conscious efforts to link prior knowledge to text content by performing top-down or bottom-up processes, and in so doing, making the text more sensible, and hence more comprehensible and memorable. For example, story preview, where brief bits of forthcoming plot development are orally presented prior to reading to stimulate students’ discussion, has been proved in various studies (e.g., Graves, Cooke, & LaBerge, 1983; Neuman, 1988) to positively affect their comprehension.

Learners with various levels of language proficiency make use of top-down and bottom-up strategies in various ways to understand a text they are reading. Researchers (e.g., Oxford, 2002; Upton 1997; William & Thomas, 1991) have indicated that in this attempt the ESL group rely more on local, text-based, bottom up strategies. The academic group rely equally on the text-based strategies alongside reader-based, top-down strategies, using both about half of the time. Whereas lower proficient L2 learners focus more on decoding text-based elements of a passage because their proficiency is not at a point, as with more fluent learners, where automatic processing of these elements can occur. However, effective learners actively associate new information with existing information in long-term memory, building increasingly intricate and differentiated mental structures or schemata.
2.4.1.5. Quick Reading

One of the important cognitive strategies that accelerate comprehension of a passage is quick reading. During quick reading, readers get a lot of information about the content of a passage and the main idea. In speed-reading practice, students are generally given limited time to read a text. The type of text being read varies according to the purpose of reading and largely determines the speed considered necessary in reading. According to Heaton (1975, p. 134), poor readers generally read below 200 words per minute, a speed of between 200 and 300 words per minute can be considered as an average speed, and a speed of 300 to 500 words per minute can be considered fast. Skimming and scanning are the skills involved in reading quickly that are excellent examples of reading with incomplete information which can be used in advanced levels for organizing information.

*Skimming* helps readers to become familiar with the gist of the content of the passage. To skim, readers glide over the surface of a text and read selected important parts rapidly in order to get an overview of content and organization. It is not reading for specific information, but for an impression of the topic. It also helps readers get the general idea of what they are reading. During skimming, readers go through the passage, move their eyes quickly over the text, jump over parts of it, and look at the important parts of the passage, i.e., the title, the beginning, the end, and the first sentence in each paragraph. Interested readers generally decide to investigate the contents further, and they may proceed in a variety of ways. If they are not entirely convinced that the contents are valuable or interesting, they may skim the article or the first few pages of a novel to make sure whether their initial reaction was correct. They may also skim the materials if they are short of time. They may choose not to continue reading or they may decide that the materials justify a more complete reading. Skilled readers do some scanning too while attempting to skim a text.

*Scanning* skill helps readers locate specific information in a passage. Scanning is rapid reading which is done at a speed faster than the average speed with which one usually reads a text of average difficulty. When scanning, readers do not need to read the whole passage carefully. They just move their eyes quickly over the passage until they find specific information, a data, a figure, or a name that they need. Readers in the real world read what they need or want to read. To make their personal choices, they
spend a great deal of time scanning reading material. They may check the back of a paperback novel, leaf through a magazine, or glance at the headlines in a newspaper before buying a copy. Scanning provides the important purpose of giving the reader a content preview. It also serves other useful purposes such as perspective, evaluation, and review (Bowen, Madson, & Hilfer, 1985, p.133). Perspective is an advanced organizing to equip the reader for a later, more thorough reading of a passage. Evaluation helps the reader decide whether the text is worth reading further. Review allows a quick survey of some thing read earlier.

**2.4.1.6. Extensive and Intensive Reading**

Generally, there are two different kinds of reading activities to which students are exposed, intensive and extensive reading. If students are reading for information, they are likely to read much more slowly or at a rate that permits intensive reading. It is reading for information in which students need to understand linguistic as well as semantic details and pay close attention to the text. In EFL situations, students practice intensive reading by normally working with short texts and spend a lot of time analyzing and dissecting short difficult texts under close guidance and supervision of the teacher. The aim of intensive reading is to help EFL students to obtain detailed meanings from the text, to develop reading skills (such as identifying main ideas and recognizing text connectors), and to enhance vocabulary and grammar knowledge.

If students are reading for pleasure, they are likely to read toward the top of their reading speed, or at a rate that permits extensive reading. In extensive reading learners read large quantities of books and other materials in an environment that promotes a lifelong reading habit. The aim of extensive reading is to read for pleasure wherein students need not necessarily comprehend all the details of the text. Extensive reading helps students to develop a large sight vocabulary, a sizeable general vocabulary, and the knowledge of the target language and the world. It also provides students with opportunities to expand their prior knowledge of syntax, text structure, and the subject of reading. Not only can extensive reading improve reading ability, it can also enhance learners’ overall language proficiency (e.g., spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and writing). In his words, Krashen, (1993, p. 23) asserts that “through extensive reading people can develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammar, and … become good spellers”.

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Regarding selecting suitable materials for the purpose of extensive and extensive reading, Heaton (1975, p. 106) suggests that short reading extracts of a moderate degree of difficulty which contain the features that are worth detailed study, form a good basis for intensive reading practice. On the other hand, whole articles, chapters, and books (usually simplified readers) are good sources for extensive reading practice. In the latter case however, the material selected is generally slightly below the language attainment level of the students using it. Unlike intensive reading where the materials are usually above students’ linguistic level, in extensive reading materials are usually near or even below their current level. In other words, “students should be reading texts at an i+1, or i-1 level, with ‘i’ being their current proficiency level” (Renandya & Jacobs, 2002, p. 297). It is better that they start with reading easier texts than more challenging ones.

In a successful extensive reading program students read large amounts of materials, choose what they want to read, and usually participate in post-reading activities. Teachers also read with their students to model enthusiasm for reading and to keep track of students’ progress. In such programs, reading materials are within students’ level of comprehension and vary in terms of topic and genre, which help them be accustomed to various types of reading (see section 2.3.) for different purposes. According to Rivers (1968, p. 157), Mass reading helps learners improve their knowledge of syntax which enables them “to chunk the language”, that is, to group elements into coherent segments which consequently reduces the processing load.

2.4.2. Metacognitive Strategies

One of the necessary elements for many cognitive learning tasks is people’s understanding and control of their own thinking process known as metacognition. It is the knowledge about cognition and the self-regulation of cognition (Soranastapon & Chuedoung, 1999, p. www). In other words, metacognition is the learners’ knowledge about their own cognition processes enabling them to use that knowledge to choose the most useful strategies for problem solving. This indicates that readers derive and create meanings stored in their memory. During reading, they relate what has been stored to incoming information and readjust interpretations as required. Prabhu (1990, p. 191) describes metacognitive strategies as “higher order processes or self-regulatory skills”. These strategies are used to regulate cognitive processing and deal with planning, comprehension monitoring, repairing, and evaluation of language strategies (see
Richards & Renandya, 2002, p.121; Koda, 2005, p.207). For example, students may develop a plan for monitoring their progress by constantly comparing their current level of proficiency with the course goals outlined in the curriculum.

There are various groups of metacognitive strategies. One group of metacognitive strategies helps students to know themselves and manage themselves as learners. Such strategies include identifying one’s own interests, needs, and learning styles. Learning style is a key determiner of L2 strategy choice (see section 2.5). According to Oxford (2002, p. 127) students often use strategies that directly reflect their preferred learning styles. The next group of metacognitive strategies assists learners in managing their learning processes. These include identifying available recourses, planning for an L2 task, deciding which resources are available for a given task, arranging a study place and a schedule, finding a good place to study, and so forth. Other sets of metacognitive strategies help learners to deal with a specific learning task. These strategies include deciding on task-related goals for language learning, paying attention to and planning for the steps in the task at hand, reviewing relevant grammar and vocabularies, finding and organizing materials that are related to the task, monitoring mistakes and comprehension, evaluating task success and evaluating the success of any type of learning strategy.

Some reading specialists (e.g., Prabhu, 1990; Koda, 1989) tend to concur that comprehension monitoring is a decisive metacognitive capability which distinguishes good readers from poor ones. They generally conclude that, compared with their less-competent counterparts, good readers evaluate their comprehension accurately (Myers & Paris, 1978), initiate self-correction during oral reading (Clay, 1973), and eliminate more of the meaning-distorting, rather than grammatical, errors (Kavale & Schreiner, 1979). Besides, eye-movement studies (e.g., Gibson & Levin, 1975) also suggest that, when confronted with challenging passages, good readers make many of eye-movement adjustments, for example, increased fixation frequency and duration as well as backtracking. However, metacognitive capability becomes operative only in reading tasks perceived as hard but attainable. According to Koda (2005, p. 212), when the task offers minimal challenge, or is interpreted as unworkable, there is little incentive for readers to make extra efforts to manipulate their cognitive resources because nothing will be gained.
Developing *compensatory strategies* (also called communicative strategies) constitutes yet another metacognitive issue in reading (Baker & Brown, 1984). The logic is straightforward. If readers are metacognitive capable, they should have a clear sense of their own cognitive limitations. Knowing what they can and cannot do, metacognitive skillful readers are likely to develop their own sophisticated strategies to compensate their shortcomings. Compensatory strategies help learners to make up for missing knowledge when using English in oral or written communication. They include using synonyms, using circumlocution, guessing from context in listening or reading, talking around the missing word to aid speaking and writing, gesturing, or pausing words in speaking to suggest the meaning. When learners use compensatory strategies for language use, they simultaneously support their own language learning processes. That is, each instance of language use provides opportunity for incidental learning (Oxford, 2001a, p. 168).

The last word in this section goes to a suggestion by Oxford (2002, p. 125) which states that if cognitive strategies are used along with metacognitive ones, language learning will truly be effective (also see MaCombs, 1988). However, more recent research comparing the effectiveness of cognitive and metacognitive strategy training (e.g., Carrell, 1998; Tang & Moore, 1992; Zhicheng, 1992) show that explicit instruction on cognitive strategies yields small, short-term improvements in reading performances, whereas training on metacognitive strategies results in more stable, long-term comprehension gains.

### 2.4.3. Mnemonic Strategies

There are some strategies that can help learners to link a new item or concept with something unknown. These strategies are referred to as mnemonic strategies, memory-related strategies, or associative memory. Many researchers (e.g., Ellis & Beaton, 1993; Hulstijn, 1997; Levin, Levin, Glashman, & Nordwall, 1992; Wang, Thomas, & Ouellette, 1992) believe that the method accelerates learning and boosts immediate recall of newly learned vocabulary. In these strategies, a key word is a familiar, concrete term that bears a phonological resemblance to a salient part of the target word to be memorized. For example, the English word *Caroline*, whose meaning is *old woman*, can be encoded in memory by using the keyword *car* together with an associative image, an *old woman* driving a *car* (Pressley, Levin, & McDaniel, 1987).
Another useful application of mnemonic strategies is mapping phonological information onto graphic symbols which enables students to read new words through analogy and inference rather than by rote memory, thus promoting analytic approaches to word learning and processing (Koda, 2005, p. 254). However, there are various memory-related strategies which enable learners to learn and retrieve information more easily. Some of them are presented below.

- Memorizing information in an orderly string such as acronyms (words made up from the first letters of the name of something): For example NATO is an acronym for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.
- Learning and retrieving information via sounds such as rhyming (words that rhyme with each other): For example nursery rhymes (short traditional poem or songs for children).
- Using imagination (creating a mental picture of the word/concept itself or the meaning of the word): See the example of learning the word Caroline above.
- Learning through body movement such as in the ‘Total Physical Response’ method, first introduced by Asher (1977): In this method of language teaching the teacher gives an order in English and students follow it physically.
- Using mechanical means for teaching and learning: For example using flashcards (cards with words or pictures on them).
- Learning through locating techniques (to try to locate something on a page or blackboard): For example finding the location of a place on a map.

Mnemonic strategies differ from cognitive ones based on theoretical and empirical justifications. Contrary to cognitive strategies, mnemonic strategies do not involve deep understanding and do not promote deep association between things but instead relate one thing to another in a simplistic, stimulus-response manner (see Oxford, 2001a, p. 167). Although mnemonic strategies have some limitations, they are primary steps to learning vocabulary items or grammar rules.

2.4.4. Affective and Social Strategies

There are other groups of strategies which are concerned with the emotional and social side of language learning. They deal with learners’ internal behaviors (e.g., their personal feelings and emotions) or their social relationships. They are referred to as affective and social strategies. Some studies (e.g., Dansereau, 1985; McCombs, 1988)
have revealed that the most successful learners are those who use both affective and social strategies to control their emotions, to stay motivated, to cooperate, and to get help. They know how to select various learning strategies that fit their particular learning style preferences to one degree or another and can effectively link those strategies with other relevant ones.

**Affective strategies:** They help learners to identify their own feelings—such as language learning anxiety level, fear, stress, mood, and so forth and become aware of the learning circumstances and tasks that evoke them. These strategies serve to regulate emotions, attitudes, and motivation. For example, students may read linguistically simplified books to develop a positive attitude towards reading materials. Affective strategies are sometimes mistakenly not considered as real strategies. Unfortunately, these powerful strategies have also been ignored even by many L2 training studies in favor of a concentration on metacognitive and cognitive strategies (Oxford, 2002, p. 126). Affective strategies considerably help learners overcome some of the existing learning barriers. For example, language learning anxiety is one of the obstacles in the process of learning. It refers to fear of communication when a judgement of performance is anticipated. In some learners, this anxiety sabotages the language learning process. Some strategies help learners to cope with this anxiety. They may be deep breathing, laughing, positive self-talk, praising oneself for performance, visualizing success, and so forth. Negative attitude is another affective factor that can reduce learners' motivation and impede language learning while positive attitude does reverse.

*Motivation* is one of the most important affective factors that influence language learning. According to Grabe & Stoller (2001, p.199), motivation is complex with many associated notions, such as involvement, interest, self-concept, and self-efficiency. It is an individual characteristic which is related to a person’s goals and beliefs. More motivated students typically use more language strategies than less motivated one. There may be some differences to students’ attitudes toward learning English and/or reading in English. As a result, learners with dissimilar motives perform the same task differently. However, learners bring some motivation to the learning situation which is one of the key factors of success in language learning. Learners vary in the type of motivation they have, i.e., whether their motivation is integrative or instrumental. Integrative motivation associates desire to learn with learners’ attraction to the target
culture or language, whereas instrumental motivation associates their desire with their recognition of more practical merits of learning the target language such as job advancement or course credit (see Mori, 1998; Oxford, 1999). Integrative motivation is believed to be more effective than instrumental motivation in promoting language-learning success. However, different studies (e.g., Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Macnamara, 1973; Oller, Baca, & Vigil, 1977) have revealed that both types of motivation are equally effective in promoting language-learning. Gardner and Lambert (1972) contend, in view of their own findings, that in settings where there is urgency about mastering a target language, the instrumental approach to language study can be very effective. In fact, one might even carry this argument one step further, in the light of data offered by Macnamara (1973) and Oller et al. (1977), and conclude that a language can be learned well despite the presence of anti-integrative motives. In this regards Alptekin (1981, p.277) states:

Given the fact that the instrumental motives of foreign students in the target culture are often accompanied by an [urgency] to master the target language in order to proceed with their academic studies, there is no reason why educators should not treat these orientations as effective determinants in target language achievement rather than indulging in attempts at the inculcation of integrative motives with a view about behavior modification toward assimilation or adaptation.

Motivation can even be strengthened by reminding students about the jobs waiting for fluent language speakers (see Lewis, 2002, pp. 40-43; Brown, 1994, pp. 33-46). In addition, materials, tasks, or exercises that are selected for the purpose of language learning should be motivating and interesting to create a positive affective factor. According to Cook (1998, p. 15), selected materials should be adapted to the average characteristics of a particular group in terms of motivation, gender, and so on because students manage to progress in language learning differently. For example, Willis (2000, p.83) believes that reading tasks which are based on spoken or written texts can motivate learners to read or listen for a particular purpose. However, the more students see the task of reading as difficult, the less they think it is useful to study English in order to understand novels or movies.

Social strategies: Social strategies refer to actions learners take to interact with users of the language they are learning. For example, they may intentionally look for opportunities to use the target language with native speakers of the language. Social strategies facilitate learning with communication and help learners understand the
culture of the language they are learning. These strategies are used when interacting cooperatively with others during reading, such as seeking outside assistance. They are essential for communication and language development. In fact, social interaction is often considered the first stage of L2 acquisition. Students could develop strategies for making and maintaining relationships in order to receive the necessary input. These include initiating interaction with others, establishing and maintaining relationships, providing others with encouragement, and counting on others for help (see Scarcella, 1978). Other examples of social strategies are asking questions for verification or confirmation, asking for help, asking for clarification of a confusing task, talking with a native-speaker of the language being learnt, learning about cultural, social norms and values, positive self-talk, self-reward, cooperative learning, or studying together outside the classroom.

Several studies have been performed to examine the role of social strategies in the improvement of language learning. For example, investigating learners’ use of different strategies, Green & Oxford (1998, p.290) discovered that the affective strategies appeared to be playing a powerful role in supporting social strategies that involve asking for help, especially in conversational situations. In another research study, Peacock & Ho (2003, p.193-194) observed that for most L2 learners active learning strategies of paying close attention when someone is speaking English, seeking exposure to English outside the classroom for pleasure, and focusing on progress in English were most useful and important in L2 language acquisition than affective and social factors. However, the results of their investigation revealed that older students were reasonably stronger in the affective and social areas of L2 learning. They seemed to be better than younger learners were at seeing connections, relationships, and patterns in English. They were also better at thinking about their progress and were less afraid of making mistakes than the younger students. Peacock & Ho concluded that more mature L2 learners perhaps needed less help from the teacher in affective and social areas.

2.5. Learning Styles

Learning styles are the general approaches that students use in acquiring a new language or in any other subject. They are sets of characteristics and overall patterns that give direction to learning behavior. How much individuals learn has more to do with whether the educational experience is geared toward their particular style of
learning than whether or not they are smart or the teaching method is good. In other words, there are methods which fail with individual learners, not through flaws in the method, but through inappropriateness for an individual's style of learning. Talking about the efficiency of the teaching methods, Prabhu (1990, pp. 137, 161) states that there is no good or bad method in any objective sense. Different methods are best for different teaching contexts.

Learners have a tendency to both perceive and process information differently as a result of heredity, upbringing, and current environmental demands. However, when there is harmony between the students (in terms of style and strategy preferences) and the instructional methodology and material, students perform better, feel confident, and experience low anxiety. In contrast, when there is a lack of harmony or a clash between students' learning style and methodology, students often perform poorly, lack confidence, and experience more anxiety. Four main categories of learning styles, viz., sensory preferences, personality types, desired degree of generality, and biological differences are described below.

**Sensory preferences:** These learning styles refer to physical and perceptual learning channels with which students are most comfortable. They can be broken down into three areas: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile.

a) *Visual* learners like to read and obtain a great deal from visual stimulation. For them lectures and oral instructions without visual backup can be very confusing.
b) *Auditory* learners on the other hand, are comfortable without visual input and therefore enjoy from unembellished lectures, oral instructions, and conversations.
c) *Kinesthetic* learners like movements and enjoy working with tangible objects, flashcards, and collages. They do not feel comfortable sitting at desks for long.
d) A *tactile* person likes to touch people, for example when talking to them (see Fox, Manning, Murphy, Urbom, & Marwick, 2003).

**Personality types:** Students' learning styles usually match with their personality and character. There are four categories of personality types (Oxford, 2001b, p. 360):

a) *Extroverted vs. introverted:* Extroverted students get their energy from the outside world. They want to interact with others and have many friends. Introverted students, on the other hand, gain energy from the internal world, seeking solitude
and tend to have few friends which are often close ones.

b) **Intuitive-random vs. sensing-sequential:** Intuitive-random students think in abstract and futuristic ways. They like to create theories, and prefer to guide their own learning. Conversely, sensing-sequential learners are at present time. They like facts rather than theories, look for consistency, and want instruction and guidelines from the teacher.

c) **Thinking vs. feeling:** Thinking learners like absolute truth, even if it hurts others' feelings. They want to be viewed as competent and do not offer praise easily. In comparison, feeling learners value other people in very personal ways. They show empathy and compassion through words and say what ever necessary to smooth over difficult situations. They want to be respected for the work they do.

d) **Closure-oriented vs. open:** Closure-oriented or judging students want to reach judgments or completion quickly. They want clarity as soon as possible. They are serious, hard working, and enjoy specific tasks with deadlines. Sometimes their desire for closure hampers the development of fluency. In contrast, open learners want to stay available for contiguously new perceptions and therefore sometimes are called perceiving. They take L2 learning seriously, dislike deadlines, and know how to have a good time and fun. They sometimes do better than closure-oriented in developing fluency.

**Desired degree of generality:** Desired degree of generality is another category of learning styles. It refers to two types of learners: Global/holistic and analytic learners. There is a contrast between learners who focus on the main ideas and those who concentrate on details. Global students like communicative events in which they can emphasis the main ideas and avoid analysis of grammatical details. They are comfortable even when not having all the information, and feel free to guess from the context. On the contrary, analytic students tend to concentrate on the grammatical details. Because of their precision, analytic students typically do not take the necessary risk for guessing from the context unless they are fairly sure about the accuracy of their guesses.

**Biological differences:** Differences in learning styles can also be due to biological factors such as biorhythms, sustenance, and location (Oxford, 2001b, p. 361). Biorhythm shows the time of the day when students feel good and perform their best. Some learners are morning people, others are evening, and some are afternoon people.
Sustenance refers to the need for drink or food while learning. Some learners like to drink or eat while learning, whereas others may lose concentration by drinking or eating. Location refers to the nature of the environment, such as temperature, lighting, sound, and even firmness of the chairs. L2 learners differ widely with regard to these environmental factors. For example, some learners need a very quiet place to study, while others may even listen to music during studying.

2.6. Classroom Tasks

Classroom tasks are used to force attention to or to practice a particular structure, function, or sub-skill. They provide a purpose for the activity which goes beyond the practice of language for its own sake. A major concern in language teaching is defining the characteristics of a classroom task. Task is both a means for eliciting samples of learner language for the purpose of research (Corder, 1981) and a device for organizing the content and methodology of language teaching (Prabhu, 1987). The conceptual basis of tasks is supported by a strong empirical tradition which according to Nunan (1991, p. 283), “distinguishes tasks from most methods and approaches to pedagogy which is relatively data-free”. In this regard, Ellis (1997, p. 38) conceptualizes a task in terms of input for students to work on, condition under which the task is to be performed (e.g., to be worked on in a small group or a big one), procedure for carrying out a task, and output or outcome (i.e. what is achieved on completion of a task).

Still, the definition of a task varies from research to research. For example, Long (1985a, p. 77) defines a task, in a general sense, as a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Therefore, to him, tasks are things people do in everyday life, for example, painting a fence or writing a cheque. Quite the reverse, Nunan (1989, p.13) considers a task as a classroom activity which should have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right. Adding to this statement, Prabhu (1987, p.27) emphasizes that a language-learning task also requires learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some processes of thought which allows the teachers to control and regulate that process. Under a similar rubric, Skehan (1998, p. 268) also considers the outcome of a task as an important factor though he places more stress on the ‘meaning’ conveyed...
through the tasks. For him, a task is an activity in which meaning is primary and is related to the real world.

Since, the overall goal of a language-learning task is to elicit successful language use, an activity cannot be considered as a language-learning task unless it comprises certain dimensions. These dimensions are classified as the scope of a task, the perspective from which a task is viewed, the authenticity of a task, the language skills required to perform a task, the psychological processes involved in task performance, and the outcome of a task.

a) **Scope of a task:** In both research and language teaching, the overall goal of a task is to elicit successful language use which is mainly focused on message conveyance. Therefore, there is no sense to extend its scope to language-free activities, such as those proposed by Long (1985a) stated above, i.e., things people do in everyday life, for example, doing the dishes or paying the bills.

b) **Task perspective:** Task perspective refers to whether a task is seen from the designers’ or the participants’ point of view. A task designer may view a constructed task as meaning-focused but, when performed by the participants, it may result in display rather than communicative language use (see Ellis, 2003, p. 5). In this regard, a task may have both successful and unsuccessful outcomes. However, any activity that successfully engages the learners in meaning-focus language use can be considered as a task.

c) **Authenticity of a task:** Authenticity concerns whether a task needs to correspond to some real-world activities to achieve situational authenticity. In other words, authentic tasks are those activities that people are likely to carry out in their lives, for example, borrowing a library book or filling out a form. Thus, a language-learning task should have a focal attention on real-world activities. Although, most of the tasks carried out in a classroom, e.g., picture-drawing tasks, lack situational authenticity, they do require students to negotiate their way to a shared understanding by asking questions and clarifying meaning which are aspects of interactional authenticity. Therefore, language-learning tasks should be both situationally authentic and/or seek to achieve interactional authenticity.

d) **Language skills involved in doing a task:** Language-learning tasks are the activities that may involve any of the four language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Some examples are making an airline reservation (an oral activity),
filling out a form (written activities), listening to a weather forecast and deciding what to wear (listening activity), or consulting a user manual of an instrument (reading activity).

e) Cognitive processes: There is a cognitive as well as a linguistic dimension to language-learning tasks. They definitely involve cognitive processes such as selecting, classifying, sequencing information, or transforming information from one form of presentation to another one. While working on the tasks, learners are actively engaged in comprehending, manipulating, producing, reasoning (i.e., making connections between pieces of information, deducing new information, and evaluating information), or interacting in the target language, while their attention is focused on meaning rather than on form (see Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 1992; Prabhu, 1987).

f) Outcome and aim of a task: There is a distinction between ‘aim’ and ‘outcome’. Outcome refers to what learners arrive at when they complete the task, for example, a list of differences. On the other hand, aim refers to the pedagogic purpose of the task which is to elicit meaning-focused language use. It is possible to achieve the outcome without achieving the aim of a task. However arriving at the outcome of a task is not the real purpose of the task. For example, identifying the differences between two pictures is not crucial for language learning. What matters, is the cognitive and linguistic processes involved in achieving that outcome. Thus, the decisions about whether a task can accomplish a certain goal and about the assessment of a task performance must lie in whether learners manifest the kind of language use believed to promote language learning (Ellis, 2003, p. 8).

2.7. Assessment of Task Performance

The emphasis on task assessment is not a new phenomenon, dating at least to concerns with communicative language testing (see Carroll, 1980; Morrow, 1979) and language performance assessment (see Hauptman, LeBlanc, & Wesche, 1985; McNamara, 1996). In language education, there persists an apparent need for task-based assessment that can inform warranted inferences about learners and whether they can utilize language in order to accomplish specific target communication tasks (Norris, Brown, Hudson, & Bonk, 2002, p. 396). However, tasks should require examinees to engage in meaningful language communication. Reading comprehension tests are considered as ‘task-based’ if they require examinees to engage in the kinds of activities

For various reasons, according to Norris (2002, p. 343), test-users may want to make interpretations about whether or to what extent a learner can use the target language to engage in and accomplish a given task. For example, in occupational assessment, it may be necessary to observe and judge examinees engaging in the specific communication tasks they will be expected to perform on the job (see, Breen, 1989; Rea, 1987; Stansfield, Wu, & VanDerHeide, 2000). Still, other occasions may call for interpretations about task success based on criteria specific to a given genre, setting or audience, in addition to interpretations about other features of the performance or associated abilities (see Douglas & Myers, 2000; Jacoby & McNama, 1999; Norton & Stewart, 1999; Norton, 2000). In their words, Long and Norris (2000, p. 60) distinguish task-based from other forms of language performance assessment as follows:

Task-based language assessment takes the task itself as the fundamental unit of analysis motivating item selection, test instrument construction, and the rating of task performance. Task-based assessment does not simply utilize the real-world task as a means for eliciting particular components of the language system which are then measured or evaluated; instead, the construct of interest is performance of the task itself.

There are different criteria that distinguish tasks from other forms of activities specifically exercises. These are discussed in the next section.

2.8. Tasks vs. Exercises

Tasks and exercises are two types of activities that are employed in the classroom to achieve certain pedagogical purposes. Tasks are activities that call for meaning-focused language use, while exercises are activities that call for form-focused language use. A task requires learners to participate in the activity as language users and to give focal attention to meaning conveyance. Thus, learners ought to employ the same communicative processes that are involved in real-world activities. In that case, any language learning that happens is incidental. In contrast, an exercise requires learners to function as learners where learning is intentional. Exercises have purely language-related outcomes, for example, reading a passage and answering the true/false questions,
while tasks have non-language outcomes as well as language outcomes, for example, reading a menu and deciding what to order in a restaurant. However, what distinguishes a task from an exercise is not form as opposed to meaning; but rather, it is the kind of meaning that is involved (Nunan, 2001b, p 62). According to Widdowson (1998, pp. 327-328), task is concerned with ‘pragmatic meaning’, i.e. the use of language in context, but exercise is concerned with ‘semantic meaning’, i.e. the systematic meaning that forms can suggest irrespective of context. As a result, exercises and tasks differ with regard to the kind of meaning, goal, and outcome they are directed towards. Thus, an exercise is premised on the need to develop linguistic skills as a prerequisite for the learning of communicative abilities, while a task is based on the assumption that linguistic abilities are developed through communicative activity. However, it is not easy to distinguish between task and exercise and making decisions has usually been intuitive and judgmental. Some of the critical features that provide a way of assessing with some rigor to what extent an activity is a task are discussed below.

a) A task is a work plan. It should constitute a plan for learner activity, i.e. a work plan for teaching materials and for activities. It as a good practice to have a workplan which is related to the decisions to be made during classroom language learning (see Ellis, 2003, p. 9; Colarke, 1989, p.21).

b) A focus on meaning is the key feature of a task. It means that a task should engage learners in using language pragmatically rather than displaying language. The purpose of a communicative task is to encourage learners to develop towards the creation of a meaning system. Nevertheless, ignoring the emphasis on form may yield some negative results. Learners may develop more strategies for achieving communicative goals without a supplementary development of their language system unless a focus on form is encouraged (Willis & Willis, 2001, p.174). Consequently, they may develop a classroom dialect that enables them to exchange meaning in spite of the shortcomings of their language. As a result, they may fossilize* at a low level of language development. Thus, in any teaching project, some time should be reserved for a focus on form which can be introduced before and after students’ performance on any task.

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* ‘Provoked fossilization’ is described as the fossilization of incorrect lexicalized language which is acquired relatively early in the process of acquiring productive language skills (Beglar & Hunt, 2002, p. 102)
c) The participants should be free to select the linguistic and non-linguistic recourses needed to complete the task. The work plan of the task does not specify the language required to fulfill the task.
d) A task involves real-world processes of language use. It should engage students in language activities such as that found in real world (e.g., completing a bank form).
e) It involves any of the four language skills, i.e., reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
f) It requires learners to employ cognitive processes such as selecting, classifying, ordering, reasoning, evaluating information in order to carry out the task.
g) It has a clearly defined communicative outcome.

However, some language-teaching activities cannot easily be classified as tasks or exercises because they manifest the features of both (see examples in Ellis 2003, pp. 11-15). Recognizing an activity as an exercise does not denigrate its worth as a language-learning activity. Indeed, it is quite a widely favored teaching strategy to include ‘exercises’ alongside ‘tasks’. One important factor is using ‘pedagogic’ tasks and other activities to draw students’ attention to aspects of the target language code. Proper pedagogic tasks are constructed in such ways that are intellectually challenging enough to maintain students’ interest. Some thing that sustains their effort at task completion, focuses their attention on meaning, and engages them in confronting the task’s linguistic demands. For this reason, it is necessary to focus on both the meaning and the form in preparing tasks.

2.9. Designing Focused Tasks

The general role of language learning is the fluent, accurate, and pragmatically effective use of the target language. One way of achieving these goals is designing tasks that are related to learners’ output which affect such aspects as the overall fluency, accuracy, and complexity of the language that learners produce. By design, tasks are classified into two general types: unfocused and focused. Both types of tasks are useful in improving learners’ language abilities. Unfocused tasks are designed to encourage the comprehension and production of language for purposes of commutation. However, they are not designed to elicit attention to any specific linguistic feature. They may influence learners to choose from a range of forms but they are designed with the use of a specific form in mind. On the other hand, focused tasks aim to encourage learners to
process, receptively or productively, some particular linguistic features. They can be used to elicit use of specific linguistic features, either by design or by the use of methodological procedures that focus attention on form in the implementation of a task. According to Ellis (2003, p. 16) focused tasks are constructed for two purposes: (a) to stimulate communicative language use (as with unfocused tasks) and (b) to target the use of a particular, predetermined target structure. Nevertheless, there is a danger that if students are told what form they are required to practice, they may give priority to producing the form accurately and thus the tasks turn into situational exercises (i.e., exercises that are designed to provide contextualized practice or a specific linguistic feature) and end up practicing structure rather than behaviors. Ellis (2003, pp. 151-167) introduces three principal ways to set about designing focused tasks: a) structure based production tasks, b) comprehension tasks, and c) consciousness-raising tasks. These are discussed below.

**Structure-based production tasks:** They mainly focus on various aspects of language structure which require students to produce the target structure. These tasks can be designed to incorporate a specific target language feature in two ways. The first is 'task-naturalness'. In this case, the target structure may not be necessary for completion of a task but can be expected to arise naturally and frequently in performing the task. In such tasks, students naturally use the target feature to perform the task, for example, the use of simple tense to exchange information about a travel itinerary. The second way is 'task utility'. Here, even though a target feature is not essential for completing the task, it is very useful to use it. For example, in reading tasks where students are asked to locate the place of objects, the use of prepositions helps them to do the task easily.

**Comprehension tasks:** These tasks are more successful in eliciting attention to a targeted feature than production-based tasks because learners cannot avoid processing them. Two types of comprehension tasks are recognized: input-enrichment and input processing. 'Input enrichment' involves designing tasks in such a way that the target feature is frequent and/or salient. Such tasks may contain numerous samples of the target feature, for instance, to present a reading passage, which contains numerous examples of the present tense. Alternatively, they may make the target feature graphically highlighted to attract students’ attention. They may also provide students with questions that can only be answered if they have successfully processed the target
feature. ‘Input processing’ tasks aim to alter the processing strategies that learners take to the task of comprehension and to encourage them to make better form-making connections than they would if left to their own devices. These tasks encompass three key components. (a) An explanation of the form-meaning relationship is given in which the use of some special form, e.g. the use of passive to topicalize the agent of a sentence, is explained. (b) Information about processing-strategies is given as well, for example, how to determine the agent of a passive sentence. (c) Structured-input activities are also provided. In such activities, learners have the opportunities to process the targeted feature in a controlled manner. Of course, the practice stage is input- rather than output-based.

**Consciousness-Raising (C-R) Tasks:** They are different from the other focused tasks. While, structure-based production tasks, enriched input tasks, and interpretation tasks described above are intended to cater primarily to ‘implicit learning’, C-R tasks are designed to cater primarily to ‘explicit learning’, i.e., they are intended to develop awareness at understanding level rather than at noticing level (see Ellis, 2003, pp. 162-167). They are problem solving in nature and aim at demonstrating how some linguistic features work. Consciousness-raising tasks have certain characteristics. They make the language itself the content of the task. In C-R reading tasks, a specific linguistic feature is isolated. Students receive the task in which they are provided with data that illustrates that isolated target feature along with explicit rules describing it. They are then expected to use intellectual effort to understand the targeted feature and may be optionally required to verbalize a rule for describing the grammatical structure. For example, students may be given a reading text containing various prepositions which they should recognize, put them in a column, describe the use of each preposition, and/or try to work out a rule for each.

**2.10. Task Variation**

Task variation provides various conditions for students to improve their language. Task types affect the quantity and quality of negotiated interaction and learners’ language input. Moreover, the same task can result in very different kinds of activities when performed by various learners. It can also result in different activities when performed by the same learner at different times. The reason is that whenever learners perform a task they construct the activity in terms of their motives and goals.
through orientation and intersubjectivity which can vary. Orientation refers to the ways learners view a task, the nature of the goals they set in order to perform it, and the operations they use to carry it out (Ellis, 2003, p. 187). The particular orientation learners adopt determines the kind of activity that results. For example, learners may use metatalk to orient themselves to how they can accomplish the task. Intersubjectivity is achieved when learners can develop a shared understanding or perspectives on the task, set a common motive and goal, and negotiate a positive cooperative tone to the activity (see Roehler & Cantlon, 1996; Rommetveit, 1985; Swain & Lopkin, 2000; Wertsch, 1985). However, some task types may be more appropriate than other types for learners at particular levels of proficiency. Therefore, selecting a mixed collection of tasks can reflect the goals of the curriculum, i.e., the entire range of educational practice, learning experience or the entire learning situation (see Griffin, 1978; Lawton, 1973; Taba, 1962). Some of the varieties of the tasks are described below.

**One-way vs. two-way tasks:** These tasks involve students in a one-way or two-way exchange of information. In two-way tasks, all students in a group have unique information to contribute (e.g., group discussion in a subject) whereas in one-way tasks only one member of the group possesses all the relevant information (e.g., a 20 questions maze or an IQ test). One-way tasks are information-gap tasks where one person holds all the information to be communicated and other participants hold none (i.e., a transfer of given information from one person to another), while in two-way tasks the information to be exchanged is split between two or more participants. Two-way tasks that require information exchange in both directions for task completion involve more negotiation than one-way tasks with unidirectional information flow. However, two-way tasks significantly stimulate more modified* interaction than one-way tasks (Tsui, 2001, p.112).

**Convergent vs. divergent tasks:** Both of these tasks are opinion-gap type. Opinion-gap activities involve identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation (Prabhu, 1987, p.46). In convergent tasks, students achieve a common goal or several different goals, upon which they agree

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*Modified interactions are those instances in which speakers modify their language in order to be correctly understood. They result from an indication of non-comprehension, usually on the part of listener. Modified interactions are theoretically motivated by Krashen’s (1985) input hypothesis, which claims comprehensible input is a necessary condition for second language acquisition.*
(e.g. deciding what items to take to a desert island, or creating the final form of a questionnaire). They require participants to come to a single solution which generates more discourse between them. These tasks require students to agree to a solution to a problem. On the other hand, in divergent tasks students are asked to achieve several different goals (e.g. discussing the pros and cons of television). In these tasks, students are assigned different viewpoints on an issue and have to define their position and refute their partners’.

**Collaborative vs. competitive tasks:** In collaborative tasks, students cooperate with each other to carry out a task (e.g., students’ cooperation in preparing a group discussion report). Each student has a share in the activity. They work together to fulfill the task while they exchange information about a problem or a topic which they have explored freely during the task itself. On the other hand, students’ competition with each other on a task is the main characteristic of the competitive tasks. In these tasks, students compete with each other to achieve their own certain goals (e.g., students’ competition to solve a puzzle).

**Open-tasks vs. closed tasks:** Open tasks are those in which participants know there is no predetermined solution for a problem, or there is no single correct answer. Many opinion-gap tasks are open. Closed tasks on the other hand, require students to reach a single correct solution or one of a small finite set of solutions for a problem. They require learners to exchange opinions on some issues. Many information-gap tasks are closed. These tasks typically involve controversial issues about which the participants are likely to hold different views.

**Reality-based or target tasks vs. pedagogic tasks:** Reality-based or target tasks are found in the real world. These tasks mirror real-world activities, i.e., the activities learners may face in real world (filling out a bank form, making a theater booking, filling in a cheque, etc.). On the other hand, pedagogic tasks reflect activities not found in the real world (e.g. spotting the differences in some pictures). They are designed to elicit communicative language use in the classroom. Pedagogic tasks do not necessarily bear any resemblance to real-world tasks although they are intended to lead to patterns of language use similar to those found in real world. They are usually focused ones that emphasize some certain linguistic features and may include consciousness-raising tasks.
Most EFL learners are at much lower levels of language proficiency and have diffuse and heterogeneous needs. For such learners it is necessary to devise tasks that build up gradually to reflect more directly the complexity of the real world. In addition, if tasks are to be seen as units of syllabus design, they should be sequenced based on their difficulty. This calls for certain criteria to sequence tasks. However, sequencing tasks faces several problems, in particular the grading criteria to be used. There is no sufficient well-defined model of cognitive complexity to establish such criteria. This has encouraged many researchers (e.g., Brindley, 1989; Robinson, 2001; Skehan, 1998; Widdowson, 1990) to search for potential criteria for grading and sequencing tasks. Such criteria should take account of both linguistic and cognitive complexity. For example, a task will be easier if students are permitted to rehearse some of the linguistic and cognitive complexity prior to being asked to carry out a particular task, if they first work through parallel tasks under teacher guidance, or if they are first given a chance to practice the mental operations involved into achieving a successful outcome (Willis & Willis, 2001, p. 177).

It is also likely that tasks vary in terms of the ease with which participants can achieve communicative effectiveness and that this may serve as a way of measuring task complexity. For example, native speakers of English find it easier to perform a task that requires the participants to simply utilize an interpretation than a task where the participants have to construct an interpretation, as in a storytelling or in a reading task involving events that were capable of more than one interpretation (Brown, 1995). However, easier tasks tend to result in more fluency, since cognitive and processing demands are low, whereas, tasks that are more complex force learners to attend to the language used on task, resulting in less fluent but more complex and accurate production. Therefore, tasks can foster both fluency and accuracy.

Equally important, the grading and sequencing criteria of the tasks should also have a focal attention on code complexity, communicative stress, and cognitive complexity for analyzing different kinds of tasks (see Beglar & Hunt, 2001, pp. 103-104). Code complexity includes such factors as linguistic complexity and variety, vocabulary load and variety, and redundancy and information density. High degrees of code complexity may pose severe processing problems for lower-level students. This
can be dealt with by encouraging them to use different types of support, for example, to ask them to be prepared for in-class discussions and use notes during discussion, or by providing them with details of upcoming tasks that help them have less severe language processing. Therefore, tasks of appropriate difficulty are likely to be more interesting and motivating to learners since they will feel that they are being asked to respond to a reasonable challenge. *Communicative stress* refers to different factors. These may be time limits and time pressure, the type of responses expected, the speed of presentation, the length of the reading or listening texts, the number of participants involved in the task (lower proficiency students can be placed in groups of two or three), and the opportunities the learners have to control the interaction. *Cognitive complexity* involves the type of thinking required for accomplishing the task which involves cognitive familiarity and cognitive processing. Cognitive familiarity refers to familiarity with the subject, the discourse genre, the task, and topic predictability. While, cognitive processing includes the organization of the information, clarity and sufficiency of the information provided, amount of computation necessary, and the type of information provided. The following factors introduced by Robinson (2001) may be incorporated into the cognitive complexity of the tasks.

- Planning time (tasks with planning time are easier than those without planning time)
- Single versus dual tasks (tasks making only one demand, such as describing a route marked on a map to another person, are easier than tasks with two demands, such as thinking up the route and describing it at the same time)
- Prior knowledge (tasks in a domain the learner has prior knowledge of are easier than tasks in a domain the learner has no prior knowledge of)
- Number of elements (tasks involving few elements are easier than tasks involving more elements)

A number of studies (e.g., Candlin, 1987; Ellis, 2003; Robinson, 1995) have emphasized considering some factors that are believed to influence task complexity, making them more or less difficult. These factors also affect learners' participation in a task. Some of them are decreasing or increasing the number of participants, the type of the reading passage being used for the task, the explicitness and sufficiency of the information, and the use of more/less familiar and abstract/concrete information. The next factor is the way information is organized. For example, tasks containing narrative passages that are organized in order of events are easier than those in which the events...
are presented out of sequence. Familiarity with the topic and the content constitutes another factor that influences task complexity. This familiarity is more significant than grammatical complexity in determining the difficulty of reading texts (Nunan, 1991, p. 258). Yet another proposed factor is the type of referring expression. For example, for young children pronominal references are more difficult to comprehend than full noun phrase referents.

Prabhu (1987, pp. 88-98) devises various criteria for squeezing tasks. In one criterion, he considers the distance between the information provided and the information arrived at as an outcome (i.e., the number of steps involved in the deduction, inference, or calculation) as a measure of the relative difficulty of tasks. For this reason, he considers opinion-gap tasks as the most difficult ones and information-gap tasks as the easiest ones. He gives as an example two tasks based on class timetables. In one task, students are asked to use the information in the timetables to work out the teachers' personal timetables. In the other task, they are asked to use the same information to identify when the teachers are not teaching. This latter task involves an additional processing step and thus is considered more complex. In another criterion, Prabhu (1987) proposes that doing at least half of the task by at least half of the class can be a good indication of task difficulty. However, Long & Crookes (1992, pp. 36-37) argue that such criterion is not a satisfactory solution for defining the difficulty of the tasks. Because it makes task achievement a norm-referenced issue, reveals nothing of what makes one task easier than the other makes, and therefore precludes any generalization to new materials. Further, Long & Crookes (1992, pp. 45-46) outline the problems that exist in providing task-based syllabi:

a) Identifying valid, user-friendly sequencing criteria is one of the oldest unsolved problems in teaching of all kinds specifically in teaching reading.

b) Finiteness is another problem. Finiteness refers to the difficulty of differentiating tasks, especially tasks and subtasks nested within them. Sometimes tasks overlap each other. A task can also be broken down into subtasks. Some tasks (for example,

* In a norm-referenced test, each student’s score is interpreted relative to the scores of all other students who took the test. Such interpretations are typically done with reference to the statistical concept of normal distribution (familiarly known as the bell curve) of scores dispersed around a mean, or average (see Bachman, 1990; Brown, 1989; Farhady, Jafarpoor, & Birjandi, 1997).
doing shopping) involve other tasks (for example, choosing purchases, paying for them, and so forth). All of these create finiteness problem.

c) Next problem is structuring tasks in the sense of being preplanned and guided. This structuring procedure produces lesser degree of learner autonomy.

d) Another problem is the lack of controlled evaluation and assessment of task-based syllabi. No complete program has been implemented about this issue yet.

Apart from these problems existing in task syllabi, Long & Crooks (1992, p. 45) believed that considering some potential grading and sequencing criteria may be useful in grading tasks. Some of them are the number of steps involved in the completion of a task, the number of solutions to a problem, the number of parties involved and the saliency of their distinguishing features. Other criteria are the location of a task in displaced time and space, the amount and kind of language required, the number of sources competing for attention, and other aspects of the intellectual challenge a pedagogic task poses.

However, one cannot know very much how the various criteria, some of which discussed above, combine to determine task complexity. As Prabhu (1987, p.89) points out, “no syllabus of generalized tasks can identify or anticipate all the sources of challenge to particular learner”. Thus, grading tasks cannot follow a precise algorithmic procedure but rather can proceed more intuitively in accordance with a general assessment of task complexity informed by the criteria considered above and by the designer’s experience of how particular group of learners respond to various tasks.

2.12. Implementing a Task-Based syllabus

Similar to other teaching program, implementing a task-based syllabus necessitates overcoming some complications that need be considered before the start of the program. Micro- and macro-evaluation* as well as teacher training can play a major role in helping to propagate teaching with tasks. So is the importance of including an introduction to the principles and techniques of task-based teaching in initial teacher-training programs. Additionally, in that introduction, a distinction between task-based and task-supported teaching (or else the latter may be mistaken for the former) should be made, the methodology of task-based teaching should be focused, and an emphasis

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* *Macro evaluation* is the evaluation of a complete language course or program. *Micro-evaluation* is the evaluation of a single task.
According to Robinson (1995), to implement a task-based syllabus, three steps are necessary to be taken. First is conducting a needs analysis to identify the target real-world tasks learners need to perform in the second language. This is a very important step. By analyzing the educational needs of students, the target tasks can be distinguished according to needs of the students to achieve the outcome of the course. Target task is something that the learner might possibly do outside of the classroom. The next step is classifying target tasks into types or subordinate categories, such as passages containing making/changing reservation in a hotel. The last step is to derive pedagogic tasks from the target tasks. Pedagogic tasks are created to push learners into communicating with each other in the target language. They are not set up outside of the classroom. They can be adjusted to such factors as learners' age and proficiency level.

According to Ellis (1997, pp. 37-40), the constructed pedagogic tasks should be submitted to a detailed micro-evaluation. When micro evaluating a task, a teacher chooses a particular task of her interest, and submits it to a detailed evaluation. First, the task is described in terms of objectives, input, conditions, procedures, and intended outcomes. Next, is planning the evaluation to answer a set of questions about the task concerning such as the purpose of the evaluation, for whom the evaluation will be conducted, who the evaluator is, what the content of the task is, the method of evaluation (e.g., using test or interview), and the timing of evaluation (e.g., during the course or after it). The last steps are collecting the required information and analyzing it to reach to the conclusion.

Subsequent to the micro-evaluation of the tasks, they are ready to be used in a syllabus following a certain task procedure. Task procedure refers to the methodological procedure used to teach a task. These procedures can increase or ease the processing burden placed on the learners. They can be classified into pre-task, task-cycle, language focus.

a) **Pre-task:** During this phase, students are introduced to the task and the topic of the reading. It is a preliminary step in which students become familiar with a task and learn how to conduct it. By providing examples or through modeling, the teacher
helps students understand the processes involved in doing a task. Pre-task activities can include learning activities, perhaps including certain aspects of the task made salient (Doughty, 1991), consciousness-raising activities (Willis, 1996), and pre-task planning. Some research studies (e.g., Crookes, 1989; Farrell, 2002; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster, 1999) have indicated that pre-task planning can have beneficial effects upon the nature of task performance, thus leading to greater fluency and complexity, less dependably, and greater accuracy.

b) **Task cycle:** Task cycle includes doing the task, planning, and reporting results (see Willis, 2000, focus 4/7). Students first do the reading task in pairs or small groups during which the teacher monitors and encourages them, stops the task when most pairs have finished, or comments briefly on content. During planning, students prepare themselves to report to the whole class (orally or written) how they did the task. Here, the teacher acts as a linguistic adviser. S/he gives feedback and helps students to correct, rephrase, and/or draft a written report. During the report section, the teacher selects some groups to present their reports of the task to the class orally or in writing, giving feedback on form and content, as required.

c) **Language focus:** The components of language focus are analyses and practice. Analysis component consists of some post-task activities that include reflection and consciousness-raising as well as public performance and analysis-oriented activities (see Willis & Willis, 1987; Skehan & Foster, 1997). These may cause learners to allocate attention differently between form and meaning while they are completing an earlier task. During this phase, students first analyze the reading passages and sets of examples taken from familiar data. Then the teacher reviews the analysis with the class. Next, students practice words, phrases, patterns, and sentences from the analysis activities. This is normally done at the end of each analysis activity.

Despite the psycholinguistic rationale for task-based language teaching, few attempts have been made to adapt this kind of teaching in institutional contexts (such as high schools or universities) and few truly task-based courses published to date. Perhaps the important reason for this lack of interest is the complications, some of which discussed above, that are imposed on the process of preparation and implementation of a task based syllabus.
2.13. Overview

This chapter has presented a bird’s-eye view of the literature which concentrated on the issues as fundamental as the concept of reading comprehension, the effect of applying learning strategies on improving language learning, and the significant role of classroom tasks in accelerating cognitive development.

It was discussed in the chapter that one of the important language skills that learners should develop in the process of learning a new language, is the ability to read and understand information presented in written form. It is considered as an important language ability because it enhances the process of language acquisition and it helps students read for information, pleasure, or for study purposes. It was also stated that familiarity with the learning strategies (see section 2.4) could have positive effects on the improvement of students’ reading comprehension skills. Besides, reading tasks, which activate general learning strategies that are related to successful language learning in addition to more specific reading strategies in particular skill areas, are considered as useful sources of input, which can improve learners’ reading abilities. The most successful readers are those who use cognitive strategies (see section 2.4.1) to comprehend the text better, use metacognitive strategies (see section 2.4.2) to regulate their own cognitive processes, and use affective and social strategies (see section 2.4.4) to control their emotions, to stay motivated, to cooperate, and to get help.

Another issue discussed in the chapter was the important role that classroom tasks (see section 2.6) have in accelerating language learning. It was observed that activities in the form of tasks can improve students’ language learning significantly, if they are prepared and sequenced carefully, if they preserve situational and interactional authenticity, if they engage learners in using language pragmatically rather than displaying language, and if they require learners to employ cognitive processes such as selecting, classifying, ordering, reasoning, or evaluating information in order to carry out the task. Tasks should be constructed in such ways that are intellectually challenging enough to maintain students’ interest in order to sustain their effort at task completion, focus their attention on meaning, and engage them in confronting the task’s linguistic demands.

The chapter also emphasized that teaching materials should be closely related to the type of practice materials (e.g., texts, exercises, and tasks) which teachers use to
develop learners’ reading skills. They should be at the right difficulty level, and if possible, preserve authenticity. Reading comprehension tasks are good sources for these purposes. They can be successfully incorporated into the classroom activities to improve students’ reading comprehension abilities. Varieties of the reading tasks (see section 2.9) provide students with various conditions (similar to those presented in real world) to practice reading and improve their language.