

## **Impacts of Combined Reading Strategy Instruction on Ethiopian Students' Strategy Use and Perception**

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### **Authors' contribution**

Desta Wendaferew a PhD student, designed this quasi-experimental study and conducted the analysis and interpretation of the data including the write-up. Abebe Damtew, the supervisor of the current research work, contributed a lot to the write-up of the paper providing invaluable and constructive comments.

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### **Abstract**

*The aim of this study was to explore the effectiveness of combined reading strategy instruction on reading strategy use and perception of Ethiopian secondary school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Using a quasi-experimental pre-test-post control group design, eighty-seven students were selected from two intact classes that were assigned to the control and experimental groups. Questionnaires and interviews were used to collect the data. After identifying students' level of reading strategies, students in the experimental group were explicitly taught a combination of reading strategies. The training took four months and at the end of which, a questionnaire was administered to both groups, whereas the interview was conducted only with the experimental group. ANCOVA and interview findings indicated that students in the treatment group greatly benefited from the training. Hence, it was concluded that combined reading strategy instruction is vital for EFL students to increase their reading strategy use and awareness which in turn helps them to improve their reading comprehension problems. Finally, it was recommended that EFL teachers should consider the role of combined reading strategies during teaching reading.*

*Keywords:* combined strategy instruction, EFL reading difficulty, reading strategy use

To communicate successfully, EFL learners need to improve their vocabulary, speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills (Al-khresheh & Ali, 2023). In Ethiopia where the present study was conducted, English is taught as a subject starting from early grades and serves as a medium of instruction at secondary and higher education levels (Getachew et al., 2018; Mulatu & Regassa, 2022; Yadetta et al., 2017). Since students are expected to read and understand English and other non-English subjects, reading is regarded as an important skill for Ethiopian EFL learners' overall academic success (Getachew et al., 2018). On the other hand, reading is a challenging task for EFL learners (Shen, 2003).

In Ethiopia, technology-based instruction (for example, plasma and web-based instruction) has recently been introduced to improve education quality. Plasma, for example, was introduced to increase secondary school students' academic success. However, using plasma to teach English in general and reading skills in particular discourages students from being "active" readers and makes them "passive" readers (Damtew, 2012). Plasma is almost interrupted since it was unable to fulfil its intended purpose of enhancing the quality of education. In fact, in this connected world, we cannot deny the role of technology in our lives including social, economic, educational and political aspects. However, the feasibility and effectiveness of technology-based instruction for educational purposes in Ethiopia seem implausible. Weak and intermittent internet access, as well as fluctuations of electricity, are among the problematic situations impeding the implementation of technology-based instruction in the Ethiopian context. On the other hand, recently, Biresaw and Bogale (2023) acknowledged the benefit of technology-based instruction for Ethiopian learners, but the participants were university students where technology access is much better than in secondary and elementary schools.

According to Bouchard (2005), reading does not mean simply the identification and interpretation of letters and the creation of phonics, but it involves comprehension, which requires the use of a variety of reading strategies. Reading strategies (hereafter RSs) are seen as ways, activities, and processes that learners use to improve their reading comprehension (Kavani & Amjadiparvar, 2018). It has been suggested that teaching RSs should be a part of English language curricula since they are crucial to assist EFL learners with challenging features of reading (Bedle, 2017) According to Kavani and Amjadiparvar (2018), teachers can help their students by providing them with efficient strategies to reduce or resolve comprehension challenges. Students who actively apply their reading comprehension strategies can comprehend and remember more of what they read and develop higher-level language proficiency (Habók & Magyar, 2019). On the other hand, Aghaie and Zhang (2012) pointed out that textbook expertise in the context of EFL provides insufficient details about learning strategies indicating a need to include and emphasize RSs.

### **The Notion of RSs**

The researchers' and experts' shift in focus from the teacher and the teaching product to the learner and the learning process was one of the most

significant areas in foreign language education that led to the emergence of learning strategies research in the 1970s (Sarafianou & Gavriilidou, 2015). As a result, the foundations of second language learning strategy go back to the time of Rubin (Rubin, 1975). Through strategy training, students can better understand how they learn and as a result, they can select their strategic response to given contextualized activities (Sarafianou & Gavriilidou, 2015). Experts underlined that the crucial belief of learning strategy research is that strategies can be taught so that students can adopt more effective strategic behaviour (O'malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975). According to O'malley and Chamot (1990), strategy training can help students develop their metacognitive knowledge and become autonomous strategy users while performing challenging tasks. Oxford (1990) claimed that strategy instruction should be a crucial component of the language learning process because it aids learners in advancing their proficiency, confidence, and self-awareness.

As a result, students need to be trained on how and where to use learning strategies in order to enhance their foreign language skills (Taheri et al., 2020). Since RSs are emanated from general language learning strategies (LLSs), they have a common conceptual background. According to Grabe and Stoller (2019), RSs are the most obvious and important when readers are looking for ways to solve problems or specific goals, and when they are usually reading a more advanced and difficult text. RSs are deliberate activities taken to accomplish a certain reading task, and they can be applied in a variety of ways depending on the situation and the learner (Bedle, 2017). Wu et al. (2021) stated that RSs offer readers a direction to text comprehension, and reading strategy training can be an effective method to support struggling readers.

There have been overlaps concerning the classification of RSs among scholars. Bedle (2017) noted that the strategy classification made by O'malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) have been frequently utilized and overlap each other. O'malley and Chamot (1990) classified strategies into three broad categories: cognitive, metacognitive and social / affective strategies. On the other hand, Oxford (1990) discussed social and affective strategies independently and added two strategies (memory and compensation). She classified RSs into memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive social and affective strategies. Another classification was made by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) as global, problem-solving and support strategies. However, unlike O'malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990), Mokhtari and Sheorey's division presupposes a metacognitive strategy (Bedle, 2017).

For the purpose of the current study, a combination of memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social were adopted from Oxford (1990). Although each strategy category involves a plethora of RSs, the current study selected: semantic mapping, placing new words into context, imagery, practicing, getting ideas quickly (i.e. skimming and scanning), taking notes, summarizing, highlighting, guessing intelligibly; setting goals and objectives, self-monitoring and self-evaluating, self-encouragement and cooperating. These

strategies were selected because they have been under research with related studies in different contexts with positive outcomes (Kavani & Amjadiparvar, 2018; Manoli et al., 2016; Sarafianou & Gavriilidou, 2015) and were recommended for EFL contexts.

Although strategy instruction supports EFL learners with reading difficulties, there has been no consensus among scholars and researchers about the best ways to teach strategies, including whether instruction should be combined, detached, or embedded (Yan & Kim, 2023). Rubin (1975) claimed that ‘good learners’ can use a repertoire of strategies and suggested that students who fail to learn new languages can be taught the strategies employed by successful language learners to advance their language. Furthermore, Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) argue that reading an academic text and understanding its meaning involves a variety of reading strategies. The notion of implicit and explicit teaching has been another source of debate among researchers. Studies indicated that explicit strategy instruction is effective for EFL learners (Shen, 2003); if EFL students are explicitly taught a collection of strategies, they can approach challenging tasks (Khellab et al., 2022). Explicit strategy instruction does not mean merely informing learners to use strategies, but it comprises discussing with students, what strategies are, why and when they can be employed (Chinpakdee & Gu, 2021). In summary, Yan and Kim (2023) suggested that a lack of adequate strategy training and practice in the EFL context may contribute to students' reading difficulties. Thus, the present study presupposes that if Ethiopian EFL learners are explicitly taught a combination of RSs, their strategy usage and their perception towards the training would be increased which in turn would help them to be autonomous readers.

Despite the importance of reading skills for overall academic achievement of Ethiopian learners, various up-to-date local evidence revealed that secondary school students have low reading performance (Dugasa et al., 2022; Mulatu & Regassa, 2022; Tefera, 2013). Based on our observation in different public secondary schools in Addis Ababa, many students scored low results in grade twelve national exams during the 2023 academic year. Furthermore, from the informal talk with grade eleven students in Tesfa Birhan Secondary School, we realized that reading skills have been given little attention and that students were not motivated to practice strategies when they read, which could be a cause for the students' poor reading habits.

In fact, some local researchers have investigated the effect of strategy instruction on students' reading comprehension (Dugasa et al., 2022; Getachew et al., 2018; Yadetta et al., 2017). However, after a brief review of the literature, we understood that the impact of combined reading strategy instructions on students' reading strategy use (hereafter RSU) and perception has not been investigated in the local context. Furthermore, we could not find a study that evaluated the level of RSU of the students using closed and open-ended questions prior to training. Furthermore, the previous empirical evidence failed to check the treatment fidelity during the training which can be a source of threat to the

reliability of the results. Therefore, the current study identified the current level of student RSU prior to the experiment using both closed and open-ended items. Treatment fidelity was also implemented to attend to how well the training was implemented, which in turn increases the reliability of the study findings.

### **Study Objectives, Questions and Hypothesis**

The purpose of this study was to explore whether explicit instruction in memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social RSs contributes to students' RSU and to find out their views about the training. Specifically, the study has the following objectives.

Specific objectives of the study included:

1. To assess the level of RSU of grade eleven students before experimental treatment.
2. To evaluate the impact of combined reading strategy instruction on students' overall RSU.
3. To analyse how the reading strategies sub scales are being affected by the treatment.
4. To examine the learners' views about the role of RSU training in learning reading skills.

The research questions included:

1. What is the level of RSU of grade eleven students before the treatment?
2. What is the impact of combined reading strategy instruction on students' overall RSU?
3. How are the reading strategy sub scales being affected by the treatment?
4. What are learners' views about the role of RSU training in learning reading skills?

The hypothesis was:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control and experimental group in their overall reading strategy use on the post-test.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted the quasi-experimental pre- and post-test research design because a random assignment of participants was not possible (Creswell, 2014). The mixed method paradigm was used to collect and analyse both qualitative and quantitative data. The participants of the study were grade eleven students of Tesfa Birhan Secondary School in Addis Ababa. The school was selected because out of 300 students, only seven students passed the grade 12 national exams and joined higher institutions in 2023. Thus, the researchers felt that since reading is vital for students' academic success, the low national exam results could be attributed to students' poor reading comprehension ability highlighting actions needed to improve students' reading. In the selected school,

there were seven classes of grade eleven students from which two intact classes were randomly assigned as the control group (CG) and experimental group (EG). The sample size of the study was eighty-seven.

Data were collected via questionnaire and interview. A questionnaire was administered to address the first three research questions related to the target students' current level of RSU before the treatment and to evaluate the impact of the training on students' RSU after the treatment. The RSU questionnaire (hereafter RSUQ) was adapted from Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) version 7.0. The SILL was used because its utility, reliability, and validity have been recognized in various studies, (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). Accordingly, the RSUQ containing 27 items relevant to reading were adapted; for example, "I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English" was further improved as *I think of relationships between what I already know and new things that I read in English*. Furthermore, in Oxford's inventory, the five-point Likert scales were originally designed as follows: 1 = 'Never True of Me', 2 = 'Rarely True of Me', 3 = 'Sometimes True of Me' 4= 'Frequently True of Me' 5= 'Always True of Me'), but in the current study, these five-point Likert scales that participants rated were further improved as: 1= Never, 2= Rarely, 3= Sometimes, 4= Usually, and 5= Always. In addition, open-ended items were administered together with the close-ended items during the pre-test thinking that students could portray RSs that were not included in the close-ended questionnaire.

A semi-structured and in-depth one-to-one interview was conducted with students in the EG at the end of the training. Ten students were randomly selected from the EG so as to get their views and feedback about the training. The data obtained from six interviewees were considered during the analysis because there was a repetition of ideas and the data was saturated when it came to the interview of the seventh student. The interview was done based on the students' interests, and they used both English and Amharic (the local language) interchangeably. The interview lasted between 12 and 15 minutes. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed to get the complete impression of the interviewees during the transcription. For the sake of confidentiality, participants were given pseudonyms.

The study was conducted during the second semester of the 2023 academic year. During the preparation of the teaching manual, the selected RSs were integrated with the reading activities in grade eleven students' English textbook. The teaching manual was prepared by the researchers specifically for the school where the current study was conducted. It was comprised of what RSs are, their classification, how, why, and when to use them during EFL reading. Prior to the intervention, the researchers were granted permission from the administrators of Tesfa Birhan Secondary School. Then, having his consent, training was given to a recruited EFL teacher who taught both the experimental and the control groups. The purpose of the study was briefly explained to the trainee teacher. Then, with the help of the trained teacher, the RSUQ was

administered as a pre-test to both groups. One day after the pre-test, the treatment was started. During the treatment, unlike students in the CG who did not receive RSs instruction, the students in the EG were taught a combination of RSs that were integrated with different reading activities. The training included 32 instructional sessions for two periods per week and took approximately four months. A weekly fidelity checklist sheet was provided to the teacher to help maintain the faithfulness of the intervention process. The fidelity checklist was prepared in accordance with the contents of the teaching material. The teacher was informed to put a tick mark on the box for each day of the week to indicate that he had implemented each item listed in the table. The treatment was carried out under the supervision of the researchers who sometimes went to the school to discuss with the trained teacher about the experiment process.

Several measures were taken to attain the validity and reliability of the instruments. To achieve face and content validity, the adapted version of RSUQ was checked by two professional instructors at Addis Ababa University (AAU) and one EFL teacher at the research site, and some amendments were made based on the comments. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested with 42 participants who had similar backgrounds to the participants in the main study but were not in the same school. Accordingly, the overall Cronbach alpha reliability of the RSUQ was .805, indicating a good reliability. The interview questions and teaching material were validated by two experts from AAU. According to Creswell (2014), the quasi-experimental design is exposed to internal validity threats such as selection history, maturation, selection bias, instrumentation and testing. In this study, an attempt was made to control such validity threats. For example, to minimize threats related to teacher history, both groups were taught by the same teacher. The treatment was conducted by the trained teacher to minimize potential bias of the researchers' expectations of the outcome. The same reading activities and the same period of time were employed for both groups. The treatment fidelity check sheets were also vital to minimize unnecessary influence from the researchers. The questionnaire was distributed and collected by the recruited teacher in collaboration with the researchers.

Quantitative data obtained from the close-ended RSUQ were entered into SPSS version 24, and the overall RSU mean scores were calculated. The results were also organized based on their sub-strategy categories: memory, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social RSs. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. The five-point Likert scales of the mean of strategy use set by Oxford (1990), (Low = 1.0 – 2.49, Medium = 2.5 – 3.49, and High = 3.5 – 5.0) were used to interpret the quantitative data. Using the pre-test as a covariate, ANCOVA was employed to analyse the post-test. The data obtained through open-ended items and interviews were qualitatively analysed.

### Data Analysis and Findings

#### The Students' RSU Levels

The aim of the first research question was to assess the target students' current level of RSU. For this purpose, the pre-RSUQ of each reading strategy subcategory and the overall strategy mean scores of the CG and EG, were computed. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics result of the pre-RSUQ for both groups in the six categories.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for the Six RSUQ before the Intervention*

Group		Pre-memory total	Pre-cognitive total	Pre-compensation	Pre-Meta Total	Pre-affective total	Pre Social total
CG	Mean	2.6919	2.7641	2.6589	2.5023	2.4791	2.3798
	N	43	43	43	43	43	43
	SD	.29296	.22455	.32925	.24445	.22314	.27776
EG	Mean	2.5625	2.5909	2.5833	2.6000	2.6091	2.5530
	N	44	44	44	44	44	44
	SD	.30559	.30592	.29749	.24778	.21111	.27790

As presented in Table 1, the pre-RSUQ results in all six strategy categories indicated that students in the EG were medium strategy users. Students whose mean score lies between 2.5 and 3.49 are categorized under medium strategy users (Oxford, 1990). The CG also scored medium RSU in memory, cognitive, compensation, and metacognitive whereas they had low mean scores for affective (M=2.4791) and social (M=2.3798) strategies. Therefore, most students in both groups were medium strategy users. The next table reveals the results of the control and experimental group pre-overall RSUQ.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for the Pre-overall RSUQ*

Pre Overall Strategy Mean			
Group	Mean	N	Standard Deviation
CG	2.5978	43	.14561
EG	2.5867	44	.13994

As shown in Table 2, the pre-overall RSU mean score of the CG (M=2.5978) and the mean of EG (M=2.5867) indicated that students in both groups had nearly similar means and they were medium strategy users before the training.

The students' RSU level was triangulated through open-ended items. The items enabled students to mention RSs (other than strategies included in the close-ended questionnaire) that they have been using to resolve difficulties in reading English. Consequently, only three students from the EG wrote using a dictionary; nine students in both groups indicated scanning and only three students mentioned skimming. Five students from both groups stated that they apply guessing in their reading, and three students reported that they use references



while reading. However, the rest of the students in both groups did not fill the space which implies that the majority of the target students had little awareness about various RSs, which contributed to students' poor reading ability. The overall findings call for the need for training. As a result, students in the EG were exposed to explicit instruction in a combination of RSs.

### The Impact of Reading Strategy Instruction on Students' RSU

The second research question examined the impact of reading strategy instruction on students' RSU. To answer this research question, the post-RSUQ of the control and experimental group was analysed using ANCOVA. First, descriptive statistics analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistical for the Post-overall RSUQ between the CG and EG*

Post Overall RSU			
Groups	Mean	N	Standard. Deviation
CG	2.5452	43	.12398
EG	3.5362	44	.19865

As can be seen in Table 3, the overall post-RSU mean score ( $M=3.5362$ ) of the EG is higher than the post-overall RSU mean score ( $M=2.5452$ ) of the CG. To check whether the observed difference was statistically significant or not, ANCOVA was performed. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4

*Analysis of ANCOVA for the CG and EG Post-overall RSUQ*

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: Post Overall Reading Strategy						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
<b>Corrected Model</b>	21.403 <sup>a</sup>	2	10.701	391.537	.000	.903
<b>Intercept</b>	1.759	1	1.759	64.359	.000	.434
<b>Pre overall RSU Mean</b>	.047	1	.047	1.703	.195	.020
<b>Group</b>	21.402	1	21.402	783.030	.000	.903
<b>Error</b>	2.296	84	.027			
<b>Total</b>	831.108	87				
<b>Corrected Total</b>	23.699	86				

The result in Table 4 ( $F=783.030$ ,  $P=.000$ ) disclosed that the EG performed better than the CG in terms of post-overall RSUQ. In other words, a statistically significant difference was found between the two groups in the post-overall RSUQ means, suggesting that explicit combined RSs instruction had a positive impact on students' RSU. According to Muijs (2022), if the effect size is

> 0.5, the relationship is very strong. In this study, the result of Partial Eta Squared (.903) indicated that the improvement was very strong.

The third research question examined the reading strategy categories that were mostly affected by the training. To answer this question, the post-RSUQ of EG for the six reading strategy categories was analysed. The result is displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

*Descriptive Statistics for the EG's Six Reading Strategy Categories in the Post-questionnaires*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Memory Reading Strategy</b>	44	3.25	4.75	3.6989	.44323
<b>Cognitive Reading Strategy</b>	44	3.00	4.14	3.5325	.30401
<b>Compensation Reading Strategy</b>	44	3.00	4.67	3.4545	.37417
<b>Metacognitive Reading Strategy</b>	44	3.00	4.20	3.4909	.28433
<b>Affective Reading Strategy</b>	44	3.00	4.40	3.5455	.33512
<b>Social Reading Strategy</b>	44	2.67	4.67	3.4697	.44500
<b>Valid N (listwise)</b>	44				

As can be seen in Table 5, from the six subcategories of RSU, the post-RSUQ disclosed that memory reading strategy (Mean=3.6989) was mostly affected by the intervention followed by affective (M=3.5455) and cognitive (M=3.5325) RS. The rest (compensation, metacognitive and social) strategy categories were affected almost equally. Hence, depending on the results, students' RSU was affected because of explicit instruction in a combination of RSs.

### **Students' Perceptions about the Role of RSs Training on EFL Reading**

To answer the last research question, an interview was conducted with students in the EG. The participants were interviewed about their experiences of the role of the RSU training in improving EFL reading comprehension difficulties. The finding indicated that all the six students who were taught RSs and participated in the interview confirmed the efficacy of the training in enhancing their reading comprehension. For instance, one of the interviewees (Sara) acknowledged the benefits of the training in helping her to comprehend English text. She underlined that semantic mapping and note-taking were very important RSs to increase her reading ability. She was very excited about the strategy of semantic mapping, and said, "Semantic mapping is the new strategy to me which helps me to comprehend passages easily by creating a kind of picture in my mind and to remember the keyword words surrounding the text". Sara pointed out that if students do not understand or know what they are reading, they

will not be motivated to read, so if they use the strategies they have learned, they can be motivated to read more and understand what they are reading. She finished her speech by uttering, “I wish I had known semantic mapping before so that I could use it in all my reading to be successful”. This finding is supported by the result of the post-test questionnaire of memory strategy that was typically affected by the intervention.

The other respondent (Abinet) was very positive about the training, especially the strategies of skimming, scanning, and highlighting which were very important for him in reducing his reading comprehension difficulties. He underlined that “After the training, I like skimming, scanning and highlighting because this is exam time and if we use these strategies when we study, we can understand easily and we can remember what we read during examinations”. Another student (Bahir) had a positive impression with the training. She noted;

*...the training was very interesting. I tried to use some strategies unconsciously before, but now after the training, I am very much aware of several reading strategies and how to use them while doing different reading activities. If we implement what we have learned during the training, it could be very helpful for all of us.*

Another participant of the interview, Hana, found the self-monitoring strategy and prediction very important strategies. She pointed out that after the training, self-monitoring helps her to think or plan about her reading, and prediction is important to her to guess the idea of a passage by looking at the picture or other clue without detail reading. In general, students benefit from the training. They claimed that they developed positive experiences of RSU training hoping that training would support them to read difficult reading texts and easily comprehend. They become motivated to employ different RSs they have learned through reading activities. It is worth mentioning that since the interview was conducted a week before starting the final exam, some participants pointed out that the training helped them to get ready for exams not only for English but also for other subject areas.

### **Discussions**

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of explicit combined RSs instruction on grade eleven students' RSU and their perception about the training. Prior to the intervention, student's current level of RSU was assessed via pre-test. Then, the students in the EG were explicitly taught a variety of RSs from all categories. RSUQ and interview were used to collect the data. The interview was conducted with students in the EG to provoke their opinions on the role of the treatment in reading difficulties.

The overall pre-RSU mean scores of the CG and the EG indicated that the students in both groups were medium-reading strategy users before the intervention. According to Taheri et al. (2020), students need to be trained on how and where to use learning strategies in order to improve their foreign language skills. Based on the finding of the present study, after receiving

instruction with a combination of RSs, students in the EG significantly improved their RSU and became high strategy users. This implies that the training had a strong impact on the target students' RSU. In line with this, Khellab et al. (2022) and Manoli et al. (2016) noted that multiple-strategy instruction is important for EFL learners to overcome their reading comprehension difficulties. The result was substantiated by the findings of the post-interview because participants were very positive during the reflection of the training. Based on the findings of the interview, all the interviewees who participated during training were positive about the intervention and were motivated to use RSs while reading. The participants acknowledged the benefit of the training in improving their reading comprehension ability. In fact, one of the interviewees did not hide that he had been using a few strategies unconsciously while reading before the training. However, after the training, he understood the importance of RSs and was motivated to apply the strategies intentionally while reading difficult English texts. The findings of the interview also indicated that the RSU training would play a vital role for students in comprehending different subject areas other than English during exams.

The present findings are in agreement with Aghaie and Zhang (2012), who underlined that learners need awareness about strategies and that they should be trained in strategy use to be independent readers. However, the finding of the current study that students in the EG significantly outperformed their counterparts in RSU contradicts the previous findings of Li et al. (2022) who reported that after six weeks of strategy instruction, students in the EG didn't significantly improve their RSU. In fact, in the present study, the training took about 32 weeks, which was a relatively long duration. As a result, students in the EG significantly improved their RSU after they received training in RSU. In brief, the finding of the current study supports the belief of the pioneer researchers who claimed that learning strategies are teachable and learners can benefit from being trained in acquiring relevant strategies (O'malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975; Sarafianou & Gavriilidou, 2015).

### **Conclusions**

The findings of the study indicated that the target students were medium strategy users before the training, but unlike the CG, students in the EG became high-reading strategy users after they received reading strategy training. The post-RSUQ result revealed that students in the EG significantly outperformed their counterparts (CG). Almost all reading strategy subcategories (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies) were affected by the intervention. Memory strategy was mostly affected by the intervention. Furthermore, the findings of the interview revealed an increment in students' RSU awareness and initiation of using RSs while reading and performing EFL texts. Therefore, it is likely to conclude that explicit instruction of combined RSs is better than the conventional method in the teaching of EFL reading, which in turn encourages students to tackle reading comprehension difficulties.

### Recommendations

Based on the conclusions the following recommendations are made.

1. Curriculum designers in Ethiopia should consider incorporating and integrating RSs with reading activities in students' textbook.
2. Ethiopian EFL teachers should be informed about the role of RSs for students' success in reading and be encouraged to apply them while teaching reading.

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