TASK DIFFICULTY OF MACRO-GENRES AND READING STRATEGIES AND READING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

Language learners' comprehension of a text relies more on their use of appropriate reading strategies during the activity and their perceptions of task difficulty. The current study aimed to explore the correlation between task difficulty of macro-genre-based texts and learners' reading comprehension as well as their use of reading strategies in the same reading texts. For this purpose, based on the short reading texts with the same length and readability indices for four macro-genres (i.e., descriptive, narrative, argumentative, and expository), appropriate reading tests with the same number of questions were prepared. Task difficulty and reading strategies questionnaires were then administered to 50 EFL students at Lorestan University in Iran. The task difficulty questionnaire explored the learners' perceptions of task difficulty of the target macro-genres. The results obtained indicated that there was no statistically significant correlation between reading strategies and task difficulty in the descriptive, argumentative, and expository macro-genres. There was, however, a statistically significant correlation between reading strategies and task difficulty in the narrative macro-genre. The results also revealed that there was no significant correlation between reading comprehension and task difficulty in the target macro-genres. The argumentative and expository macro-genres appeared to be more difficult than the descriptive and narrative macro-genres. The findings hold implications for task-oriented language teaching and testing and materials development.

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Keywords: Task difficulty, Macro-genre, Reading strategy, Reading comprehension.

Contribution/ Originality

This study is one of very few studies which have investigated the correlation between task difficulty of the four macro-genres (i.e., descriptive, narrative, argumentative, expository) and

learners' reading comprehension and their use of reading strategies in the same macro-genres. The results can be utilized by language researchers and practitioners.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Given the key role which reading is agreed to play in ELT, scholars have tried to make use of a host of techniques and procedures to enhance effective reading in EFL/ESL learners. Accordingly, task- and genre-based instruction in reading (see (Brown, 2001; Rosa and Leow, 2004; Ellis, 2008)) and studies focused on successful language learners in terms of using reading strategies (see (Anderson, 2003; Akyel and Ercetin, 2009)) have emphasized teaching strategies and genre-based instruction to facilitate foreign language learning. Some researchers (e.g., (Cohen, 1990; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Anderson, 1991; Little, 2004; Malcolm, 2009)) have acknowledged that being strategic helps learners to plan, organize, and assess their learning, and become more autonomous. Moreover, some research studies (see (Brown, 2001; Stevenson *et al.*, 2003; Oxford *et al.*, 2004; Ellis, 2008)) have shown that reading strategies appear to play an important role in tackling reading comprehension problems.

Another factor which is thought to be correlated with the learners' reading comprehension and their use of reading strategies is task difficulty of reading texts. Lexical and textual features of reading texts are supposed to be among the main components affecting task difficulty and reading comprehension of such texts (see (Barrot, 2013)) (Richards *et al.*, 1992). The effect of task difficulty on the reading comprehension of learners has already been investigated (see (Lin *et al.*, 2002; Hudson *et al.*, 2005)). Lin *et al.* (2002), for example, investigated the effect of task difficulty of reading texts on readers' ability to evaluate comprehension. They concluded that a match between reading ability and text difficulty level did not warrant the best calibration accuracy. In a study, Hiebert (2005) investigated the effects of text difficulty on second graders' fluency development and found that the features of texts made a difference on the application of the repeated reading techniques and strategies. These studies have stressed the crucial role played by reading strategies as well as task difficulty of reading texts. Nevertheless, the relationship between task difficulty of macro-genre-based texts, on the one hand, and the learners' use and employment of reading strategies as well as their reading comprehension in the same genre-based reading texts, on the other, have yet to be adequately examined. Accordingly, the main drive behind the current study is to explore such a correlation. A possible additional benefit of the current study, which seems to have been underrepresented in the existing literature, is that it can serve as a starting point for genre analysis and genre-based courses with special emphasis on task difficulty of reading texts employed in English teaching programs. Also, the reading strategies employed in understanding the macro-genre-based texts and their possible correlations with the learners' perceived task difficulty indices of the same genres are the other concern of the current study.

1.2. Task Difficulty

According to Skehan (1998) learners' perceptions of a certain task difficulty are assessed in terms of three different components: code complexity, cognitive complexity, and communicative

stress. Considering the effect of test takers' perceptions on task difficulty, it seems that, in the testing situation, there may be some value in teasing out test-takers' perceptions of task difficulty to indicate how strong these perceptions are in test performance. Moreover, if learners predict what makes a task difficult or easy, it is wise to have their viewpoints during test planning stage to determine whether they correspond to the estimates of test-developers and with existing theories about what makes a task more or less difficult. Test-takers are able to identify additional features of the task, or additional challenges (other than those of task difficulty) involved in performing such tasks other than those visible to the test-developer or to the rater (Elder *et al.*, 2010). This sheds more light on the hidden aspects of factors influential in determining task difficulty.

1.3. Narrative Tasks

Narrative task is a well-established task type in EFL/ESL literature which is frequently researched. Such a task type usually involves creation of a story in response to some kind of stimulus: a picture strip or a short film, for example. As in most of the cases, the stimuli given are purely visual and their verbal representations depend on the storyteller to a great extent, though it is also used in the written mode. This task type, further, seems ideal as far as the manifestation of creativity is concerned (Albert and Kormos, 2004).

It is argued that different task types make learners use a set of specific linguistic features and enforce them to resort to certain reading strategies. Narrative tasks, for example, are more complex both syntactically and lexically in comparison with the argumentative tasks (Albert and Kormos, 2004). Such complexity in structure makes learners use specific reading strategies to overcome the possible comprehension problems. Robinson *et al.* (1995) who studied narrative tasks of varying cognitive complexity, found more lexical variety and accuracy in the cognitively complex narrative tasks. Moreover, grammatical structure of narrative tasks affects learners' performance; that is, L2 performance is affected in predictable ways by design features and the structure of narrative tasks (Tavakoli and Foster, 2008). Structure of a narrative task is defined in terms of either a problem-solution framework or a schematic sequential organization.

Tasks, with no problem-solution structure, without a very clear time line underlying the events, or with an arbitrary sequence of events are considered as less structured. In more structured tasks, however, there is a clear problem-solution story developing and the sequence of events is fixed (Shiau and Adams, 2011). Regarding structure, narrative texts have beginning, middle, and end, and they are usually written based on the authors' imagination and creative power (Shiau and Adams, 2011). A tight narrative structure, for instance, enhances accuracy, whereas the presence of two storylines involves greater syntactic complexity. A narrative of loose structure and only foreground events elicits a performance of relatively low accuracy and low syntactic complexity; performance in a narrative of tight structure and both foreground and background events elicits relatively higher accuracy and complexity (Tavakoli and Foster, 2008).

Cognitive load is another factor affecting the learners' performance in understanding narrative tasks. The low cognitive load of narrative tasks requires the learners to take the narration in the present tense while they read the narrative text. This condition is called the here-and-now condition. High cognitive load, on the other hand, requires them to read the text and perceive the

narration in the past tense which is called the there-and-then condition (Robinson *et al.*, 1995). The evidence gathered from both child first language acquisition and adult SLA research shows that past time reference to events dislocated in time and space like that in a high cognitive load of a task is a more effortful and later developed ability than present tense reference to contextualized events like that of a low cognitive load of a narration task (Robinson *et al.*, 1995). Number of actors involved in narrating a task can also contribute to its difficulty. The tasks which involve more than one actor in an event create a need for careful use of nominal reference. Internal structure of a narrative task can, furthermore, lead to learners' perception of task difficulty. Narrative tasks which require learners to signal time relations, to locate events and actions appropriately may cause the learners to consider the task as difficult. Such reading tasks can lead learners to focus on the internal and textual connections between the elements of a narrative (Bygate, 1999). Such tasks might be expected to place greater demands on learners' imaginative resources and on their ability to develop a fictitious scenario and maintain the discourse single-handedly, which could affect the difficulty of the task used and the number and type of strategies that they use while reading (Bygate, 1999). Accordingly, embedded with complex syntactic structures and lexical items, the narrative macro-genre seems to be perceived as a difficult task which, in turn, may push the learners to use more reading strategies to overcome the reading problems in this macro-genre. It is, therefore, hypothesized that there is a significant correlation between this macro-genre task difficulty and learners' use of reading strategies. Further, since this task is thought to be difficult for the lexical items and grammatical structures it holds, it is hypothesized that there is a negative correlation between the narrative macro-genre task difficulty and the learners' reading comprehension.

1.4. Descriptive Tasks

Describing the characteristics of someone or something is the basic feature of descriptive tasks which can distinguish them from other task types. The language used in the description has ostensible patterns. In producing linear descriptions of figures, for example, learners tend to facilitate the task by sequencing the content in one of a small number of ways, leading to specific patterns in the language (Bax, 2006). The physical characteristics of the intended thing to be described can affect the grammatical structure of the description task. The nature of objects physically related within a room, for instance, whose layout is to be described, can affect the order in which nouns are combined within prepositional phrases, and this can affect the choice of preposition (Hyland, 2008). In other words, not only the discourse structure of genre but also the use of specific grammatical features can be affected by the nature of the descriptive task. In descriptive reading tasks, the reader may perceive the description of what he or she reads in the text using different techniques and strategies for description. Therefore, the reading strategies which are employed for the description task are influenced by the structure of the task. The description can be done from various angles depending on the context and learners' experience, inclinations, and the perceived difficulty of the descriptive task (Bygate, 1999; Zhou, 2011). The understanding of such description can also be interpreted and made in various ways. As stated earlier, lack of physical characteristics in the process of description seems to affect the learners' perceptions of the

descriptive genre task difficulty: the learners may consider the task of description as difficult in which they may use more reading strategies to comprehend the reading text; this, in turn, is hypothesized to be correlated positively with the reading strategies used (with respect to frequency and type); it is, however, hypothesized that there is a negative correlation between the descriptive macro-genre task difficulty and the learners' reading comprehension.

1.5. Argumentative Tasks

Argumentative tasks are defined as the use of a statement in a logical process of argumentation to support or weaken another statement whose validity is questionable or contentious. The purpose of the argumentative task is to resolve a difference in opinion (Nemeth and Kormos, 2001). The argumentative statement may be in verbal or written mode of the language. Argumentation is an interaction that arises in the context of other interactional businesses in which there exists a difference of opinion between two parties (Nemeth and Kormos, 2001). An argumentative task is a type of discourse genre in which efforts of the individuals to build support for their own position, at the same time that they are undermining support for an opponent's position, results in the continual negotiation of referential, social, and expressive meanings. It is not only viewed as a competitive process, but also as a cooperative act, which is an important characteristic of the discourse produced by participants (Nemeth and Kormos, 2001).

A feature of argumentative tasks is the reasoning demand during resolving an argumentation. In a study conducted by Kuiken and Vedder (2008) the role of reasoning demands in such tasks was studied. The study findings partially supported (Robinson, 2001a) cognition hypothesis, in that greater accuracy was elicited in the more complex version than in the less complex version, but no significant effect of task complexity was found on syntactic complexity and lexical complexity. Another characteristic of the argumentative task is that it provides more scaffolding, both in terms of more extensive task input, and in terms of the dialogic nature of the collaborative talk, which can also lead to greater complexity of the task and higher degrees of task difficulty (Bygate, 1999).

Psychological traits may affect the learners' perceptions of task difficulty of argumentative genre which, in turn, may influence the correlation between this variable and the learners' reading comprehension and use of reading strategies. One psychological trait related to running an argumentative task is motivation. Doïnyei and Kormos (2000) analyzed how various components of motivation affected the quantity of the task produced by the parties involved in the argumentation. Those with a positive attitude toward the course of argumentation performed considerably better than those who had negative attitudes. Self-confidence and willingness to communicate in L2 and to argue were also positively related to the quantity of the argumentative task.

Both psychologically and structurally, argumentative tasks are more demanding than descriptive and narrative ones (Doïnyei and Kormos, 2000). The structural and psychological characteristics may affect the learners' perceptions of this macro-genre task difficulty which may consequently influence what the learners do in reading such text types and their use of the reading strategies. As the argumentative reading texts are supposed to be competitive, reasoning-based, psychologically-loaded, they are taken to be more demanding for the learners; this feature may

push the readers to use more reading strategies in order to enhance their performance in understanding such text types. It is, accordingly, hypothesized that the learners' task difficulty perceptions of this macro-genre-based text are positively correlated with their use of reading strategies; their reading comprehension in this macro-genre is, on the other hand, hypothesized to be correlated negatively with their task difficulty perceptions.

1.6. Expository Tasks

The last type of genre-based task used in this study is the expository one which has its own features and structures. Expository texts are written to convey, describe, or explain non-fictional information (Yopp and Yopp, 2006). Such text types include structural organization of the concepts and propositions which differentiate them from the rest of texts. In comparison with the narrative tasks, expository tasks are more difficult for ESL/EFL learners to understand because they have specific text structures, contain technical vocabulary, and require readers to have more background knowledge (Yopp and Yopp, 2006). Moreover, compared to both descriptive and narrative genre types, this task type seems to be more demanding for leaners because of the kind of lexical items and specific structures of the text. It also seems to be more difficult in the assessments provided by the learners based on their perceived difficulty of the task (Yopp and Yopp, 2006). As stated earlier, technical vocabulary and specific grammatical structures are two of the factors which may influence learners' perceptions of task difficulty and their comprehension of reading such texts (see (Skehan, 1998; Robinson, 2005)). Despite the increasing demands and applications of this task type in our daily life, it is downplayed in education. Many early childhood educators ignore teaching of expository texts (Duke, 2000). Such texts include biographies, essays, how-to books, encyclopedias, reference books, experimental books, scientific reports, newspapers, and articles (Duke, 2000). Downplaying teaching of expository texts causes a lot of children to experience difficulties in understanding such macro-genre-based reading texts. Children's reading success, for example, is negatively affected by neglecting the importance of expository genre after the third grade. Providing children with more opportunities to explore expository texts is, accordingly, encouraged (Yopp and Yopp, 2006).

Previous familiarity and background information of expository task type is an asset. Readers who know how an expository text is organized and how it works have a better idea of how to read and understand its content (Storch, 2001). When the learner knows that a text has a cause and effect structure, for instance, they can focus on finding the cause(s) and result(s) that the text is highlighting. Once they know what to focus on while they are reading, they get a clear thought frame of the text, which helps them use more efficient reading strategies and better comprehend the content of the reading material.

Expository texts contain more difficult propositions and concepts than narrative texts. Such texts are harder to comprehend and, hence, are supposed to be perceived more difficult because they explain particular contents unlike fictional texts in which readers can easily follow the plot (Storch, 2001). This causes ESL/EFL learners to feel that it is difficult to read informational texts of this type. Expository reading texts require the readers to infer the text content. These types of reading texts, furthermore, have low cohesion, which means that they have less explicit

explanations (Storch, 2001). Readers who do not already know the subject in general have a hard time understanding the concepts and propositional message embedded in expository texts. Thus, readers should be equipped with three kinds of preparatory devices when reading such texts: activation of their background knowledge, making inferences, and possession of rich experience (Yopp and Yopp, 2006). Difficulty in the assembly of these factors to understand expository reading texts may create problems for the readers. Another important characteristic of expository texts is that there are several ways of organizing the material, resulting in different structures (Graesser *et al.*, 2002). For example, refutation text structure is used primarily to persuade students to change prior beliefs by explicitly identifying misconceptions and explaining the correct ideas (Chambliss, 2002). Students' awareness of different types of structures embedded in expository reading texts may help them infer the information through employing required reading strategies which are necessary to comprehend the content of the intended reading text. Knowledge about how an expository text is structured, however, will not guarantee comprehension. Having a clear understanding of how the expository text is structured may help the reader build a coherent model of the text (Dymock, 2005). Koda (2005) believed that EFL and ESL reading teachers should provide their students with a preview about the expository text type and the topic rather than merely asking the students to read the texts. Having technical words and structures, requiring background information, involving complex propositions along with difficult concepts, being inference-based and low-cohesive as well as having different organizational structures are supposed to influence the learners' task difficulty perceptions of the expository macro-genre positively; therefore, it is hypothesized that the learners' task difficulty perceptions in this macro-genre-based text are correlated with the number of reading strategies employed to understand these passages. The learners' perceptions of the expository macro-genre as being difficult is, therefore, supposed to be correlated negatively with their reading comprehension in this macro-genre. Although the language teaching literature is rich with respect to research studies conducted on different aspects of the related concepts to the current study, the correlation between task difficulty of different macro-genre-based text types (i.e., descriptive, narrative, argumentative, and expository) and learners' reading comprehension as well as their use of reading strategies in the same texts seems to have been underrepresented. Exploring such correlations is likely to have important implications for EFL practitioners in materials development, task-based teaching and testing, and genre-based language instruction.

1.7. Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, three research questions were raised as follows:

1- Is there any significant relationship between task difficulty of macro-genre-based texts and learners' use of reading strategies?

2- Is there a significant correlation between task difficulty of macro-genre-based texts and learners' reading comprehension of those genres?

3- What pattern of task difficulty can be observed in the target macro-genres (descriptive, narrative, expository, or argumentative)?

1.8. Research Hypotheses

On the basis of questions raised in the study, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H_1: There is a significant relationship between task difficulty of macro-genre-based texts and learners' use of reading strategies.

H_2: There is a negative correlation between task difficulty of macro-genre-based texts and learners' reading comprehension of those genres.

H_3: The expository and argumentative macro-genres are more demanding for the learners than the narrative and descriptive macro-genres.

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

Fifty male (n = 21) and female (n = 29) EFL students were randomly (based on systematic randomization) selected from among the second year students studying at English department of Lorestan university as the intended participants for running this study. Their ages ranged from 18 to 25 with an age mean of 19.6. Based on their scores on a proficiency test, the participants were judged to be at the intermediate level. The voluntary participants were informed of the research and its stages. They reported having no special experience in attending formal or informal preparatory classes for genre-based reading texts. They also reported Lacki (a regional language spoken in the north of Lorestan province, Iran) and Lori (the dominant language spoken in the center and some other regions of Lorestan province, Iran) as their first languages and Persian as their second language. In-class and subjective assessments indicated that the participants came from approximately similar socioeconomic families.

2.2. Design

The present study employed a correlational-comparative design in which the task difficulty of macro-genres served as the predictor variable and reading strategies and reading comprehension as the criterion variables. To explore the correlations between variables, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was employed (Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis is used to describe the degree and the direction of correlation between two variables in interval scales of measurements). A comparison of the performance of the involved groups across different macro-genre text types (in terms of their task difficulty, reading strategies, and reading comprehension) were made through running one-way ANOVA (such an analysis is used when the means of more than two groups are compared to see if there exists any statistically significant difference among the means involved).

2.3. Materials

Three main instruments were used in this study: for the task difficulty as the predictor variable, Skehan (1998) checklist (r = .86, v = .74), developed based on his triadic framework of task difficulty, was used. This checklist measured the learners' perceptions of task difficulty in code complexity, cognitive complexity, and communicative stress domains. The reading strategies

questionnaire, developed by Oxford (1990), and the reading comprehension test(r = .80, v = .64), served as the criterion variables. In the case of the reading strategies questionnaire, Cronbach alpha, a measure of internal consistency, was chosen as the most appropriate reliability index [Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient is used on continuous data such as the Likert-type scale in the reading strategies questionnaire (see (Oxford and Burry, 1995)). With the Persian translation of reading strategies questionnaire with 50 participants, the reliability index was .90 and the validity index was .70 (concurrent criterion-related validity was employed to determine the validity of the instrument). The correlation between the reading strategies questionnaire and participants' scores in general English proficiency test was statistically significant, $r = .70$; $p = .030$. Besides, to prepare comparable reading texts, Coh-Metrix Common Core formula as the reading Text Ease and Readability Assessor (TERA), developed by Crossley and Greenfield (2008), were used.

2.4. Procedures

In the first step of the study, some passages were selected for the four macro-genres and their readabilities were computed through the Coh-Metrix formula (see (Crossley and Greenfield, 2008)). Coh-Metrix analysis provided the readability indices for the selected reading texts as one of the criterion variable in the study. In the second step, in the pilot study for the selected reading passages which was administered to 20 EFL majors studying in Payame Noor University, Khoramabad branch, Iran, all the items meeting the item facility value between .25 and .75 and item discriminatory value more than .30 (see (Baker, 1989)) were selected to be used in the final testing stage [in terms of item facility, items which fall below .25 are regarded as too difficult and those which stand above .75 are considered as too easy. Moreover, items whose discrimination powers are more than .30 are regarded as acceptable and discriminative items.]. In the next step, Kuder-Richardson 21 was used to determine the texts reliability figures. The reliability indices were .77, .83, .85, and .75 for the selected descriptive, narrative, argumentative, and expository macro-genres, respectively. Then, texts falling in the intermediate range in each genre – based on the indices taken from applying the Coh-Metrix Common Core: Text Ease and Readability Assessor (see (Crossley and Greenfield, 2008)) – were selected and given to 80 EFL students. Based on Cambridge Guide to TEFL Exams and Levels, the students whose scores fell between 50% and 70% of the total score (taken from TOEFL proficiency Test) were judged to be in the intermediate level. Fifty participants with scores in the intermediate level were, finally, selected as the research sample.

As long reading passages may lead to learners' boredom and consequently reduce the reliability and validity of the test (see (Henning, 2012)) for each macro-genre instead of using one long text, three shorter ones were prepared based on which appropriate reading tests were constructed. For all the four macro-genres, accordingly, 12 short reading tests were prepared for administration, in the next step. Preliminary instructions of how to perform the test were given to the participants and proctors before taking the test. In the first week, descriptive macro-genre reading texts were administered. This was followed by distributing task difficulty questionnaires as the predictor variable to the participants in order to tick the options of interest in the spaces provided. Then, the second questionnaire (i.e., reading strategies questionnaire) as the second

criterion variable was given to the participants. All the steps were taken just for one type of macro-genre in each session. With three days interval, the same steps were followed for the rest of the other three macro-genres (i.e., narrative, argumentative, and expository). Moreover, to obtain more valid and reliable results, both the reading strategies questionnaire (the criterion variable) and task difficulty questionnaire (the predictor variable) were translated into Persian. Correspondences between the original and Persian equivalents of each item in the questionnaires were judged by three experienced English teachers. The translation output was, finally, judged and approved of by an expert in the field. Learners' options in reading strategies and their performances in reading macro-genre texts along with the task difficulty options were, then, compiled for statistical analysis. A summary of the study main procedures in administering the tests is provided in Table 1.

Table-1. A summary of the main procedures of the study

Session	Macro-genre	Test Type
First	Descriptive	Reading Test, Task Difficulty Questionnaire, Reading Strategies Questionnaire
Second	Narrative	Reading Test, Task Difficulty Questionnaire, Reading Strategies Questionnaire
Third	Argumentative	Reading Test, Task Difficulty Questionnaire, Reading Strategies Questionnaire
Fourth	Expository	Reading Test, Task Difficulty Questionnaire, Reading Strategies Questionnaire

3. RESULTS

3.1. Results for Task Difficulty and Reading Strategies

Descriptive as well as comparative results for task difficulty and reading strategies in the four macro-genres (i.e., descriptive, narrative, argumentative, and expository) are presented below. In Table1, descriptive statistics of task difficulty (M = 44.4, SD = 6.89) and reading strategies (M = 97.6, SD = 14.60) of descriptive macro-genre are presented.

Table-2. Descriptive statistics of task difficulty and reading strategies in the descriptive macro-genre

	Mean	SD	N
Task difficulty	44.4	6.89	50
Reading Strategies	97.6	14.60	50

As indicated in Table 3, the correlation between task difficulty of the descriptive macro-genre and reading strategies of the same genre did not reach statistical significance, $r = -.089$, $p = .268$.

Table-3. Correlations between task difficulty and reading strategies in the descriptive macro-genre

	Descriptive macro-genre
Pearson correlation	-.089
Sig. (One-tailed)	.268

The descriptive statistics for the task difficulty (M = 47.86, SD = 7.47) and reading strategies (M = 93.92, SD = 20.19) of the narrative macro-genre are presented in Table 4.

Table-4. Descriptive statistics for task difficulty and reading strategies in the narrative macro-genre

	Mean	SD	N
Task Difficulty	47.86	7.47	50
Reading Strategies	93.92	20.19	50

As shown in Table 5, the correlation between task difficulty and reading strategies in the narrative macro-genre was statistically significant, $r = .297$, $p = .018$.

Table-5. Correlations between task difficulty and reading strategies in the narrative macro-genre

	Narrative macro-genre
Pearson correlation	.297
Sig. (One-tailed)	.018

Descriptive statistics for task difficulty (M = 47.46, SD = 9.58) and reading strategies (M = 96.04, SD = 21.06) in the argumentative macro-genre are presented in Table 6.

Table-6. Descriptive statistics for the argumentative macro-genre

	Mean	SD
Task Difficulty	47.46	9.58
Reading Strategies	96.04	21.06

Note: The number of participants is 50 for all groups involved.

As indicated in Table 7, the correlation between task difficulty and reading strategies in the argumentative macro-genre did not reach statistical significance, $r = .055$, $p = .353$.

Table-7. Correlations between task difficulty and reading strategies in the argumentative macro-genre

	Argumentative macro-genre
Pearson correlation	.055
Sig. (One-tailed)	.353

In the expository macro-genre, the descriptive statistics for task difficulty (M = 49.88, SD = 7.23) and reading strategies (M = 98.14, SD = 21.20) are shown in Table 8.

Table-8. Descriptive statistics for the expository macro-genre

	Mean	SD
Task difficulty	49.88	7.23
Reading Strategies	98.14	21.20

Note: The number of participants is 50 for all the groups involved.

In the expository macro-genre, the correlation between task difficulty and reading strategies did not reach statistical significance, $r = -.007$, $p = .959$. As the results indicate, the correlations

among reading strategies and task difficulty of the macro-genres did not reach statistically significant levels except the one for the narrative macro-genre where a statistically significant correlation was found between the variables involved.

Table-9. Correlations between task difficulty and reading strategies in the expository macro-genre

	Expository macro-genre
Pearson correlation	-.007
Sig. (One-tailed)	.959

Accordingly, research hypothesis 1 expressing a significant correlation between reading strategies employed and task difficulty of macro-genres, cannot be supported for all the genre-based text types except that for the narrative macro-genre. Reading strategies employed in the four types of macro-genres as well as task difficulty of the same texts were compared through running one-way ANOVA. Comparisons made among task difficulty of the target macro-genres revealed that none of the groups involved reached statistical significant level except the one done for the expository macro-genre, $F(3, 46) = 3.91$, $p = .014$. The significant scores in the descriptive, $F(3,46) = .665$, $p = .578$, narrative, $F(3, 46) = .543$, $p = .655$, and argumentative, $F(3, 46) = .389$, $p = .761$, macro-genres did not reach significant level. Moreover, the comparisons made in the reading strategies of the four macro-genres showed that there was no statistically significant difference among the groups compared. The statistically significant scores for the descriptive, $F(3, 46) = .952$, $p = .424$, narrative, $F(3, 46) = .620$, $p = .606$, argumentative, $F(3,46) = .826$, $p = .486$, and expository, $F(3, 46) = .238$, $p = .869$, were more than the alpha level set at .05 (see Table 10) .

Table-10. Comparison among reading strategies and task difficulty in the four macro-genres

Genre		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Descriptive TD	BGs	96.91	3	32.30	.665	.578
	WGs	2233.26	46	48.54		
	Total	2330.18	49			
Narrative TD	BGs	93.60	3	31.20	.543	.655
	WGs	2642.41	46	57.44		
	Total	2736.02	49			
Argumentative TD	BGs	111.55	3	37.18	.389	.761
	WGs	4394.86	46	95.54		
	Total	4506.42	49			
Expository TD	BGs	521.58	3	173.86	3.91	.014
	WGs	2041.69	46	44.38		
	Total	2563.28	49			
Descriptive RS	BGs	610.78	3	203.59	.952	.424
	WGs	9440.73	46	213.92		
	Total	10451.62	49			
Narrative RS	BGs	776.45	3	258.82	.620	.606
	WGs	19209.21	46	417.59		
	Total	19985.68	49			
Argumentative RS	BGs	1112.38	3	370.79	.826	.486
						Continue

	WGs	20637.53	46	448.64		
	Total	21749.92	49			
Expository RS	BGs	337.27	3	112.42	.238	.869
	WGs	21698.74	46	471.71		
	Total	22036.02	49			

Note: TD, RS, BGs, and WGs stand for task difficulty, reading strategies, between groups, and within groups, respectively.

The general finding for the relationship between task difficulty and reading strategies is that there was no statistically significant relationship between task difficulty and reading strategies in the descriptive, argumentative, and expository macro-genres. In the narrative macro-genre, however, there was a statistically significant relationship between task difficulty and reading strategies.

3.2. Results for Task Difficulty and Reading Comprehension

In Table 11, descriptive statistics of task difficulty (M= 44.4, SD = 6.89) and reading comprehension (M = 11.3, SD = 4.08) in the descriptive macro-genre are presented.

Table-11. Descriptive statistics of task difficulty and reading comprehension in the descriptive macro-genre

	Mean	SD	N
Task difficulty	44.4	6.89	50
Reading Comprehension	11.3	4.08	50

Table-12. Correlations between task difficulty and reading comprehension in the descriptive macro-genre

	Descriptive macro-genre
Pearson correlation	-.068
Sig. (One-tailed)	.318

The correlation between task difficulty and reading comprehension in the descriptive macro-genre was not statistically significant, $r = -.068$, $p = .318$ (Table 12). Descriptive statistics for the task difficulty (M = 47.86, SD = 7.47) and reading comprehension (M = 10.80, SD = 4.27) in the narrative macro-genre are shown in Table 13.

Table-13. Descriptive statistics for task difficulty and reading comprehension in the narrative macro-genre

	Mean	SD	N
Task Difficulty	47.86	7.47	50
Reading Comprehension	10.80	4.27	50

Table-14. Correlations between task difficulty and reading comprehension in the narrative macro-genre

	Narrative macro-genre
Pearson correlation	.066
Sig. (One-tailed)	.324

The correlation between task difficulty and reading comprehension did not reach statistical significance in the narrative macro-genre, $r = .066$, $p = .324$ (Table 14).

The descriptive statistics for task difficulty (M = 47.46, SD = 9.58) and reading comprehension (M = 9.60, SD = 5.23) in the argumentative macro-genre are indicated in Table 15.

Table-15. Descriptive statistics for the argumentative macro-genre

	Mean	**SD**
Task Difficulty	47.46	9.58
Reading Comprehension	9.60	5.23

Note: The number of participants is 50 for all groups involved.

As indicated in Table 15, the correlation between task difficulty and reading comprehension in the argumentative macro-genre was not significant, $r = -.104$, $p = .237$. The participants' reading comprehension in the argumentative macro-genre did not correlate with their perceptions of the argumentative macro-genre task difficulty.

Table-16. Correlations between task difficulty and reading comprehension in the argumentative macro-genre

	Argumentative macro-genre
Pearson correlation	-.104
Sig. (One-tailed)	.237

Descriptive statistics of task difficulty (M = 49.88, SD = 7.23) and reading comprehension (M = 6.96, SD = 4.24) in the expository macro-genre are indicated in Table 17.

Table-17. Descriptive statistics for the expository macro-genre

	Mean	**SD**
Task difficulty	49.88	7.23
Reading Comprehension	6.96	4.24

Note: The number of participants is 50 for all the groups involved.

As shown in Table 18, in the expository macro-genre, the correlation between task difficulty and reading comprehension was not statistically significant, $r = .273$, $p = .056$.

Table-18. Correlations between task difficulty and reading performance in the expository macro-genre

	Expository macro-genre
Pearson correlation	.273
Sig. (One-tailed)	.056

The general finding for the relationship between task difficulty and reading comprehension in the four macro-genres is that the correlation between them did not reach statistical significance at the alpha level .05. Accordingly, research hypothesis two expressing a statistically negative

correlation between task difficulty and reading comprehension in the four macro-genres cannot be supported.

3.3. Results for Task Difficulty of the Four Macro-Genres

The biggest task difficulty mean score belonged to the expository macro-genre (M = 49.8) with a standard deviation of 7.2 and the lowest mean score belonged to the descriptive macro-genre (M = 44.4) with a standard deviation of 6.8. The narrative and argumentative macro-genres with 47.8 and 47.4 mean scores and 7.4 and 9.5 standard deviations, respectively, fell between the two extremes.

Table-19. One-way ANOVA comparison among task difficulty of the four macro-genres

Genre		SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Descriptive	BGs	96.00	3	32.00	.00	.00
	WGs	2233.00	46	48.00		
	Total	2330.00	49			
Narrative	BGs	111.00	3	37.00	.00	.00
	WGs	4394.00	46	95.00		
	Total	4506.00	49			
Argumentative	BGs	93.00	3	31.00	.00	.00
	WGs	2642.00	46	57.00		
	Total	2736.02	49			
Expository	BGs	521.00	3	173.00	3.00	.014
	WGs	2041.00	46	44.00		
	Total	2563.00	49			

Note: BGs, WGs, SS, and MS represent between groups, within groups, sum of squares, and mean square, respectively.

One-way ANOVA comparisons conducted among the four macro-genres indicated that the differences reached statistically significant level with alpha level set at .05. The significance indices observed for the descriptive, $F(3, 46) = .00$, $p = .00$, narrative, $F(3, 46) = .00$, $p = .00$, argumentative, $F(3, 46) = .00$, $p = .00$, and expository, $F(3, 46) = 3.00$, $p = .014$, macro-genres were all less than .05 (see Table 19). This showed that all the groups involved did not belong to the same population with respect to task difficulty.

Results of Post Hoc Homogenous test indicated that the expository and argumentative macro-genres, on the one hand, and the narrative and descriptive macro-genres, on the other, were homogenous. The mean score for the expository and argumentative macro-genres was equally 47.00 and that for the narrative and descriptive macro-genres was 52.00 (Table 20). Accordingly, the expository and argumentative macro-genres were more taxing for the learners. Based on the results obtained from conducting one-way ANOVA comparisons among the task difficulty of the four macro-genres, research hypothesis three expressing the argumentative and expository macro-genres to be more demanding for the learners is supported. The general finding regarding the task difficulty of the four macro-genres was that the expository and argumentative macro-genre texts were more taxing and they were perceived as more difficult than the narrative and descriptive macro-genres.

Table-20. Post hoc tests homogeneous subsets

Genre	N	Subset for alpha = .05	
		1	**2**
Expository	20	47.00	
Argumentative	10	47.00	
Descriptive	14		52.00
Narrative	6		52.00
Sig.		.071	.00

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.
a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 10.307.
b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to examine the correlation between task difficulty of the four types of macro-genres (i.e., descriptive, narrative, argumentative, and expository) and the learners' reading comprehension as well as their use of reading strategies in the same macro-genres. It was also intended to explore which of the four types of macro-genres were more demanding for the learners. Results of the study showed that only in the narrative macro-genre there was a statistically significant relationship between reading strategies and task difficulty. The relationship between task difficulty and reading strategies employed in the descriptive, argumentative, and expository texts did not reach the statistical significant level, however. Accordingly, the first research hypothesis is rejected.

Narrating a story by a second party involved in the story may lead to syntactic and lexical complexity which, in turn, increases the code complexity of task difficulty. Furthermore, learners facing a complex task are supposed to use more reading strategies so that they can overcome text understanding problems. The finding of this study is in line with those reported by Albert and Kormos (2004) in which narrating a story by a second party was shown to increase the syntactic and lexical complexity of a text. The current findings may also be attributed to a tight structure in the narrative texts which is supposed to increase the complexity of the narration (see (Tavakoli and Foster, 2008)). This finding is, however, contrary to that reported by Park (2010) in which no statistically significant relationship between task difficulty of the narrative genre and reading strategies in the same genre was indicated. The observed correlation between task difficulty and reading strategies in the narrative macro-genre implies that language practitioners and instructors should devote more time to improving reading strategies use and employment in this macro-genre so that the learners become more versed at employing such strategies in the narrative texts to improve their reading comprehension.

In the descriptive, argumentative, and expository macro-genres, however, there was no statistically significant correlation observed between reading strategies and task difficulty. This may be related to the learners' higher degrees of text concentrations in such macro-genres which, in turn, reduce the time for using more reading strategies. It can also be related to enough within-text clues like syntactic and lexical ones in these macro-genres which can help readers understand the texts without much recourse to reading strategies. Learners' perceptions of task difficulty of the macro-genres do not correlate with the ways in which they employ the required reading strategies to overcome reading comprehension problems of such text types. The finding may also be

attributed to the nature of these texts not being challenging enough for the learners to use the reading strategies in parallel to the increase in task difficulty of these macro-genres. Presenting the learners with more challenging reading tasks may force them to employ more reading strategies to overcome the reading comprehension problems (see (Duke, 2000; Walter, 2007)). The participants in this study were intermediate EFL learners whose performance in the use of reading strategies as well as their comprehension of the four types of macro-genre-based texts seems to vary in the elementary and advanced levels.

The low-challenging quality of the reading texts is also likely to be relevant to the lack of significant relationship between the genres task difficulty and the reading strategies employed as well as the learners' reading comprehension. Constructivism is raising questions about text quality and about reading abilities questions that challenge previously accepted ways of viewing text and reader and it is promoting real changes in pedagogy and a new integrated conception of literacy. However, as in other areas of research in the cognitive revolution, reading research to date has been limited: it has focused on materials, tasks, and contexts which seem to be rather brief texts often read in a controlled setting and do not yet have the richness or complexity of those that people experience in their daily lives (Anderson, 1978).

The current finding corroborates the findings reported by Oxford *et al.* (2004) and Sotoudehnama and Azimfar (2011) where it was indicated that no significant correlation between task difficulty and reading strategies was observed. The researchers argued that learners' use of reading strategies did not depend on task difficulty of texts and it might have been related to other factors influencing a text understanding. The current finding, however, is not consistent with Tabatabaee and Lotfi (2014) who found a strong relationship between reading strategies and task difficulty of critical and argumentative reading texts. Khezrlou (2012) also found a moderate, positive, and significant correlation between task difficulty and reading strategies. Lack of significant correlation between task difficulty and reading strategies in the descriptive, argumentative, and expository macro-genres implies that language teachers should improve the learners' reading comprehension in these macro-genres by recourse to the texts internal structures and within-texts clues to overcome the reading comprehension problems.

The results of the current study, further, indicated that there was no statistical significant relationship between task difficulty of the four macro-genres and the learners' reading comprehension in the descriptive, narrative, argumentative, and expository macro-genres. Accordingly, the second research hypothesis in the study cannot be supported. This finding is congruent with that reported by Yashida (2012) in which no significant relationship between expository text task difficulty and learners' performance in reading the same text was shown. High or low performance of the learners in reading the four macro-genre-based text types did not correlate with their perceptions of the relative degrees of these genres task difficulty. It seems that the participants' reading comprehension in these four text types may have been affected by other factors like the psychological ones, not by the task difficulty of them. This study finding may be related to the participants' previous familiarity with reading such texts in their academic courses. Although the learners might have been unfamiliar with the genre concept, they have already dealt with reading such genres a lot in reading various text types in their academic courses. The tight text

structures in both argumentative and expository macro-genres regarding technical lexical items used and complex grammatical structures might have not been perceived as difficult by the learners in the same way as they had expected. Yamashita and Ichikawa (2010), however, found a positive and significant relationship between descriptive texts and reading performance of learners in an EFL context. The lack of statistically significant correlations among learners' perceptions of the task difficulty of the four macro-genres and their reading comprehension in the same text types used implies that decisions for syllabus design materials and development should not be based on the learners' perceptions in these macro-genres. Other variables like the learners' psychological traits which are more likely to contribute to such correlations should be taken into account.

The third research question posed in this study asked which macro-genre (i.e., descriptive, narrative, expository, or argumentative) was more taxing in terms of task difficulty. Results of the study revealed that the expository and argumentative macro-genres were more taxing than the narrative and descriptive ones in terms of task difficulty for the learners. The third research hypothesis addressed in the current study is, thus, supported. Tight text structures along with the complex syntactic structures and lexical items might account for task difficulty of these genres. The finding may also be related to the number of propositions and concepts as well as the way of presenting them to the readers in the expository and argumentative macro-genres. Tight propositional structures as well as complicated grammatical points and lexical items in the expository and argumentative macro-genres might explain why they appeared to be more taxing than the narrative and descriptive macro-genres. Language practitioners and reading skill teachers should devote more time and energy to develop these two macro-genres among the learners and teach them the ways they may use to tackle the possible problems facing them in comprehending such macro-genre-based texts.

Reading is a skill which is tightly correlated and influenced by the psychological traits and emotions of the learners. The current finding regarding the argumentative and expository macro-genres may also be influenced by such emotional factors in the processes of reading, that is, learners' previous encounters with such reading text types and the possible negative and unsatisfactory results taken from them might have negatively affected their emotions in tackling these reading materials. This finding is not consistent with that indicated by Zhou (2011) where bigger mean scores in reading performances of learners in the argumentative and expository text types (thus lower task difficulty scores) and lower mean scores in the descriptive and narrative ones were observed. Zhou (2011) argued that the learners' interest and previous familiarity with reading such texts might have been the reason for their better performances in the expository and argumentative reading texts than their performances in the descriptive and narrative ones.

In replication studies, it would be of interest to explore learners' perceptions of task difficulty in relation to their psychological traits like motivation and language learning aptitude, specifically their language analytic ability. Previous research studies have found positive correlations between learners' language analytic ability and their L2 learning (Harley and Hart, 1997a; Ranta, 2002; Sheen, 2007a). Following this, it would be of interest to see, for example, whether learners' perceptions of task difficulty vary according to individual differences in their language analytic ability or whether learners' use of certain reading strategies is correlated with their motivation.

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