Investigating the Impact of Meta-discourse on Task Achievement of IELTS General Reading Modules

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of Meta-discourse on task achievement of IELTS general reading module. The inquirer analyzed and interpreted the collected data to find out if meta-discourse markers have positively affected the participants, Iraqi EFL learners, to improve their reading comprehension ability. The researcher recruited and finally selected 160 undergraduate students (80 experimental groups and 80 control groups) majoring in English from 7 classes in Baghdad University with different language proficiency levels, i.e., elementary, lower-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate. Employing One-way and Two-way ANOVA analyses, the inquirer found out that the use of Meta-discourse markers in experimental groups left a positive impact on the students of different language proficiency levels in their approach to IELTS general reading comprehension tasks. In a parallel analysis, the researcher administered SORS questionnaire to investigate the reading strategies and found that all the students in different proficiency levels performed in SORS significantly better in the treatment group as compared to the performance of the EFL learners in control groups.

Keywords: meta-discourse, task achievement, IELTS general module, IELTS reading skills, reading strategies, EFL learners

1. Introduction

1.1 The Problem

During the last couple of decades, EFL learners in Iraq have had serious problems with reading comprehension skills, IELTS General Reading Modules in particular, partly due to the faulty language teaching system in Iraq; since the prominent English teaching method in schools and university is still the Grammar Translation method (Hadad Narafshan and Yamini, 2011; Jamali 2008; Rahimi 2007; Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh, 2004). Teachers spend most of the class time translating the reading texts into Arabic and do not instruct the students on the skills and strategies needed for effective reading comprehension, IELTS General Reading Modules in particular. The fact of the matter is that, in most EFL settings, language instructors mainly focus on the content and materials to be taught instead of looking for effective ways to awaken the meta-conscious of the learners. The use of meta-discourse, as a psychologically effective tool, is not a commonly used approach in EFL classes. Considering the fact that English is a foreign language in Iraq with no or very little use in the everyday lives of EFL learners, English texts for university students majoring in English are the main source of language input. Thus, reading comprehension ability is of great importance for them to progress in their academic achievement. However, because of some shortcomings they have not acquired this ability in school and most of them suffer from poor reading ability.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study intended to examine the effects of teaching meta-discourse on the reading comprehension skills of Iraqi EFL learners in dealing with IELTS General Reading Module. It is hoped that the findings of this study broaden our view of how teaching meta-discourse may affect the reading ability of EFL learners' reading comprehension. Making students aware of discourse structuring of different texts may affect their reading abilities as well as their academic achievement. Knowing that certain reading strategies readers employ while reading English text may help them to benefit from meta-discourse features would be of great importance for instructors as well as students. Students can benefit from strategic reading instruction provided by teacher to not

only achieve higher academic progress but to also increase their language abilities in general. They can save a lot of time and energy by changing their reading behavior and employing strategies that help them to get the meaning of a given text by getting help from metadiscoursal features of a test. TEFL instructors at university (including the researcher) may also find the results of great importance. They may need to modify their instruction toward a more strategic reading instruction and help their students to read for a better comprehension and retention of materials by making them aware of specific rhetorical features of different text types. They can help less strategic readers by introducing certain strategies that strategic readers use in dealing with different texts and by making them aware of structural features of English texts. The results of this study may be of interest for material developers. They may change the outline of material of different text types and include activities to promote strategic reading instruction.

1.3 Relevant Scholarship

Meta-discourse has increasingly been the subject of many studies in different fields and different genres. Researchers in educational settings conducted studies to examine the contribution of meta-discourse in instructional contexts (Crismore, 1989; Intraprawat and Steffensen, 1995; Hyland, 2000; Bunton, 1999; Hyland, 1999, 1998, 2010; Noble 2010; Burneikaitė, 2008; Dahl, 2004; Jones, 2011; Camiciottoli, 2003; Yang, 2008;). However, the majority of these studies explored the contribution of meta-discourse to writing skills rather than to reading. Considering the importance of reading in educational setting especially ESL/EFL setting and the crucial role reading plays in the academic achievement of the learners (Koda and Zehler, 2008), more studies should be conducted on the effect of meta-discourse on readers' comprehension especially EFL/ESL learners' reading comprehension. In the context of Iraq, meta-discourse has also been examined and it has been known that knowledge of meta-discourse features improve students' writing (Abdi, 2000; Beigmohammadi, 2003; Simin, 2009; Dastjerdi and Shirzad, 2010; Jalilifar, 2010; Tavakoli and Amirian 2012). However, very few studies (Daftaryfard, 2003; Jalilifar and Alipour, 2007; Tavakoli, Dabaghi, and Khorvash, 2010) have been conducted to examine the effect of meta-discursive features on students' reading comprehension of English texts.

Although studies have acknowledged the facilitating role of meta-discourse in reading comprehension, there exist some intriguing results requiring the issue to be studied more in order to come up with a clearer role meta-discourse plays in the reading comprehension of EFL readers. Considering the importance of reading English texts as the main source of language input in an educational setting like in Iraq, and considering the importance of meta-discourse as a means of facilitating the social interaction between the reader and the writer, this study aims to investigate the effect of teaching meta-discourse on Iraqian EFL learners' reading comprehension. Through discourse analysis of different passages during one semester the students are going to be taught different meta-discourse forms and their functions. Different strategies are going to be introduced, taught, and practiced to give students metacognitive awareness of meta-discourse as an indication of writer's attitudes towards the reader and the text.

Although the importance of meta-discourse in academic context has been acknowledged, limited experimental work has been done on the role of meta-discourse in reading comprehension especially IELTS General Reading Modules. Research conducted on the role of meta-discourse on ESL/EFL reading comprehension (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2003; Jalilifar & Alipour, 2007; Yang 2008; Parvaresh & Nemati, 2008; Tavakoli et al., 2010) yield a general consensus on the facilitating role of meta-discourse on reading comprehension with some variations. In some studies, proficient readers benefited more than poor readers from the instruction of meta-discourse (Yang, 2008). In other studies, it was the low proficiency group who benefited more from the presence of meta-discourse markers Parvaresh and Nemati's (2008). Still in some other studies students were homogeneous regarding their language proficiency (Khorvash, 2008). Some studies conducted on the effect of meta-discourse instruction on reading comprehension focused on the cohesive function of these features (Jalilifar and Alipour, 2007). Some experimental studies showed explicit instruction of textual meta-discourse improved learners' comprehension better than interpersonal meta-discourse (Tavakoli, Dabaghi, and Khorvash, 2010). Some studies just examined the effect of textual meta-discourse/discourse markers on reading comprehension (Khatib and Safari, 2011). Thus, there is a need to investigate the issue further to come up with a better picture of the roles meta-discourse play in EFL readers' comprehension. The results of research conducted to investigate Iraqi EFL learners' reading comprehension problems indicate that introducing effective reading strategies and modeling the correct way of applying them enhance reading ability of the students (Soleimani. M. M. 2008; Aghaie and Pillaie 2011; Takallou 2011). Meta-discourse as an important rhetorical feature of discourse has been widely studied in different genres including academic discipline (Intaraparawat & Steffensen, 1995; Zarei & Mansoori, 2007; Simin & Tavangar, 2009; Kuhi & Behnam, 2011; Hyland 1998, 2004, 2010) and has been recognized as a means of engaging and influencing readers in ways that conform to a discipline's norms,

expressing textual and interpersonal meaning that their readers accept as credible and convincing (Hyland, 2005). Reading is one of the essential skills for academic and professional success and a key component of lifelong learning (Dreyer & Nel, 2003). It is a complex cognitive activity that enables people to communicate and receive information through written media in modern society (Alfassi, 2004). Reading plays a crucial role in the design of EFL as it acts as the primary source of understandable information and thus becomes a means to an end in the language acquisition process. (Eskey, 2005). There are specific reasons why it is important for students to read texts in English. Since learning is the natural by-product of reading (Pearson, 2011), "extensive exposure to understandable written texts can enhance Language acquisition process" (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 273) and lead to a better learning result. In addition, reading provides a good model and material for writing; it can serve as a motivator for oral discussion on a particular topic and provides a meaningful context for the introduction of new vocabulary and grammatical structures (Cunningsworth, 1998). The Development of psycholinguistic theories in recent decades has led to the development of different perspectives on how the written text of readers is processed. In partially oriented or bottom-up approaches, reading is viewed as a fully passive and receptive skill, involving only grapheme-to-phoneme decoding (Wallace, 2001). From this perspective, emphasis is placed on the linguistic features of the text, and the complete meaningful text is formed by combining the individual smaller parts span (Anderson , 2003). In contrast, in meaningful or top-down approaches reading is viewed as a more active process, with readers extracting meaning from the text. These approaches "emphasize the general construction of meaning from connected or complete texts and are based on the reader's personal schemas and experiences" (Ediger, 2001, p.157). In recent years, however, reading has been viewed more as an interactive skill than just as an active ability of the reader constantly trying to construct the meaning of the text by activating their individual knowledge of linguistic pathways, (meta-) cognitive skills and world knowledge (Hadley, 2003). Research supports this claim, showing that dynamic interaction with text and strategic processing in reading have a positive impact on reading comprehension and help students become more competent readers (Grabe, 2009). It is known that learning strategies can be taught and learned, and strategy classes "can be effective in providing students with a repertoire of strategies that promote monitor understanding and promote understanding" (Dreyer & Nel, 2003, p. 350). The effect of teaching strategies on learning has been examined since the mid-1970s. While some types of strategic instruction place an emphasis on teaching strategies in isolation, some researchers have focused on how language learning strategies work together in combination (e.g., Brown et al., 1996; Guthrie et al., 2004; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Spörer, Brunstein, & Kieschke, 2009).

1.4 Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study is intended to investigate the following questions:

What are the reading strategies used by proficient and less proficient Iraqi EFL learners while reading academic texts in English? How does the instruction of meta-discourse affect students' reading strategies use? How does the instruction of meta-discourse affect students with different reading strategies use? How does the instruction of meta-discourse affect IELTS reading comprehension of EFL learners of different language proficiency levels, namely, elementary, lower-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate? How does the instruction of meta-discourse affect IELTS reading comprehension of EFL learners of different proficiency levels, namely, elementary, lower-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate? It is worth mentioning here some spectacular points of the problem: In academic environments in particular and in teacher-learner's in general, little if any attention is paid to online learning which is at hand and accessible to acquire L2. Conventional methods have been taught for many years in Dubai which embraces English as a foreign language. The combination of these two factors casts light upon proposing hypothesis of different values, comprising both null and directional ones. To answer the posed research questions, the following hypotheses are put forward:

(1) There is NO statistically significant difference in the pretest and post-test of IELTS Reading Comprehension of students who were exposed to meta-discourse features.

(2) There is NO statistically significant difference in the students' reported reading strategies before and after the instruction of strategies of using meta-discourse features.

(3) There is no statistically significant difference in the pretest and post-test of IELTS Reading Comprehension of students of different language proficiency (elementary, lower-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate) who were taught meta-discourse features.

(4) There is no statistically significant difference in the pretest and post-test of Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) of students of different language proficiency ((elementary, lower-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate) who were taught meta-discourse features.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

In order to examine the effect of teaching meta-discourse on IELTS Reading Comprehension of Iraqi EFL learners, 198 undergraduate students majoring in English from 7 classes in Baghdad University were recruited to participate in this study. Students' age range was from 19-25 and all were in the fourth semester. For the purpose of this study the 7 classes were randomly divided into two groups of experimental and control. The final data was collected from 170 students and included in the final analysis: 85 students in treatment group and 85 students in control group. There were two reasons why data from other participants was not included: first, there were students who could not participate in all tests or students who did not complete the tests and left a large part unanswered thus this incomplete data which was mainly from control group was not included in the final analysis. Second, to have an equal number of students in each group a few other data were also omitted.

2.2 Instruments and Materials

This section elaborates on the three instruments which were employed to achieve the objectives of this study: Oxford Placement Test (OPT), a IELTS Reading Comprehension test (IRCT), a Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS), and a five item questionnaire.

2.3 Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

Oxford Placement Test (OPT henceforth) was used in this study to measure participants' proficiency in English and to divide them into different proficiency groups. OPT consists of 60 items on vocabulary, grammatical points, and IELTS Reading Comprehension. The first five questions of OPT ask students to read a notice and then decide where they can see the notice. They should choose the right answer from three choices. Next part is a close test measuring some grammatical points followed by five multiple choice questions. Here again students should choose the right answer from three choices. To answer questions 11-20 students should read a close test of IELTS Reading Comprehension and choose the right answer from four choices. Questions 21-40 are 20 sentences from which a word is omitted and students should choose the right answer from four choices followed by each sentence. This part measures students' grammatical knowledge. Question 41-50 measure vocabulary knowledge in the form of two close tests. For each empty space students should choose the right answer from four choices. Questions 51-60 consist of ten sentences with an empty place and each followed by four choices. This part measures some other structural points. Based on their score on OPT students in both experimental and control group were divided into three groups of language proficiency namely: low, intermediate, and high.

2.4 IELTS Reading Comprehension Test

The next instrument is a IELTS Reading Comprehension test (IRCT) developed for the purpose of this study. The IRCT consists of four expository texts on general knowledge. Each text is followed by five multiple choice questions. To choose the appropriate texts a large sample of expository texts from different reading textbooks, used in universities, and from internet was reviewed. Texts were meticulously reviewed to ensure that they include all interactional and interactive meta-discourse resources. Other criteria in selecting texts included: text types, number of paragraphs, readability index, and text length.

2.5 Survey of Reading Strategy (SORS)

The second instrument used in this study is the Survey of Reading Strategies, developed by Mokhtari and Shoerey (2002). They state that SORS "…is intended to measure adolescent and adult ESL students' metacognitive awareness and perceived use of reading strategies while reading academic materials in English" (Mokhtari & Shoerey, 2002: 2). They believe that SORS is an effective tool that helps students to become more aware of the strategies they use while reading academic materials. It also helps teachers to assess such awareness. For the purpose of this study, SORS was translated into Arabic and the translated version was checked by some experts.

2.6 Questionnaire

A five-point Likert-scale questionnaire was developed for the purpose of the present study to ask students' opinion in treatment group about their knowledge of meta-discourse before and after treatment. The questionnaire was reviewed by three lecturers and after doing some changes according to their suggestions especially in wording, it was judged as suitable for the intended purpose. Every item in the questionnaire follows with four choices beginning with "very much so" to "not at all".

2.6.1 Research Design

Griffee (2012) defines design of a research as a set of instructions for data collection and analysis. He states that a research design acts as a blueprint for a research project which accounts for internal and external reasoning and

stipulates the parts of the research project, their arrangement, and their functions. The present study is a quantitative research employing survey and experimental design which reflect post positivist philosophical assumptions. As Creswell (2009: 7) states "the problems studied by post positivists reflect the need to identify and asses the causes that influence outcomes, such as found in experiments" In experimental design the effect of a systematic manipulation of one or more variables are examined. The variable which is manipulated is called experimental treatment or independent variable and the variable which is observed and measured is called the dependent variable (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen & Razavieh, 2010). The study utilized static group design which already exists in the research site.   It is also called quasi-experimental design in which experimental research is conducted in situations which cannot be completely controlled or manipulated. Quasi-experimental design was employed in this study since administrative constraint imposed by the university where the research was conducted would not permit the reassignment of students to groups different from their current assignment or rearrangements of schedules or reassignment of teachers. However, to make groups more comparable Selinger and Shohamy (1989) recommend that in quasi-experimental design the experimenter match subjects in groups. To increase the subjects' comparability in this study, the researcher administered Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Selinger and Shohamy (1989:149) believe that "quasi-experimental research is more likely to have external validity since it is conducted under conditions closer to those normally found in educational contexts".

Experimental designs usually deal with two variables one is called independent variable and the other is called dependent variable.   Independent variable is the one that causes or influences the outcomes. Dependent variables are those that are dependent on independent variables. They are the results or outcomes of the influence of the independent variables (Creswell, 2009). This study was conducted with two groups of subjects: one as experimental group (EG) the other as control group (CG). The EG received instruction in interactive and interactional meta-discourse as reading strategies that is believed to help the EFL readers in their IELTS Reading Comprehension. The instruction followed a modified model of Hyland's (2005) model of interpersonal meta-discourse. In this study IELTS Reading Comprehension comprised the dependent variable and instruction of metadiscoursal features comprised the independent variable.

2.7 Procedure

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the population for this study consisted of all 198 students studying English as their major in Baghdad Universality, Iraq. According to the university class timetable, they were divided to 7 classes. Of these seven classes, three classes were randomly selected as treatment group (N= 85) and the other four classes (N= 113) as control group. All students were undergraduate students majoring in TEFL. They were pursuing a three-unit course called advance reading which is offered as a compulsory subject to TEFL learners in bachelor's degree. The procedures of data collection began from the first session of the second semester of academic year 2022-2023 and lasted for 16 weeks.

The first week of the semester Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to both groups. The second week of the semester the reading comprehension was administered to both groups as pretest. After administering reading comprehension test, students in both groups were told to sit for a short questionnaire on reading strategies, Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS). The researcher first explained the questionnaire to students and asked them to be honest in their answers by ensuring them that their responses had nothing to do with the marks on their exams. Eighty-five students in treatment group received instruction in meta-discourse from the second session of the second week of the semester, while students in control group received conventional method of teaching reading. The main course books consisted of two books Reader's Choice and Active Reading. Although the readings in the books contain sufficient meta-discourse markers, the researchers provided the instructor with twenty passages on general topics which were meticulously chosen for including different example of each category of interactive and interactional meta-discourse defined by the model. These passages were used as in class activities or as homework.

In the first session of the instruction the instructor introduced the concept of meta-discourse and its function as a comprehension strategy that can help students improve their reading. The purpose of this general information on meta-discourse was to help students to have an overall picture of meta-discourse. Teaching meta-discourse markers or actual process of teaching reading would begin with having a student read a paragraph of a reading text and then the teacher would call the students' attention to especial meta-discourse marker/s included in the text, and ask students to guess its meaning and function. After hearing student's answers, the teacher would provide the students with related information of the marker such as its meaning and function in that context and that to which category it belongs. In every session, students were introduced at least one or two categories. Different examples of meta-discourse markers of each category once introduced were practiced continually. As their homework students should recognize meta-discourse markers in the texts provided by the teacher. In the last week of the semester the same reading comprehension was administered to control group as posttest. Students in treatment

group had the post reading comprehension test as a part of their final exam. Survey of Reading Strategies was also administered in the same session after the reading comprehension test for both groups. A five item questionnaire asking students' opinion about meta-discourse knowledge were also given to students in treatment group. The purpose of the questionnaire was to know students' opinion about how they think meta-discourse helped them in reading comprehending English texts, how they consider it is necessary that meta-discourse should be taught in reading classes, and how it improved their overall IELTS reading comprehension.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Statistics (Results)

Table 1 indicates numerically the case processing summary of the data derived from the administration of the Oxford Placement Tests (OPT).

Table 1. Case Processing Summary of the homogenized sample for the proficiency test

		Cases					
	OPT_Levels	Valid		Missing		Total	
		N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
OPT	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	17	100.0%	0	.0%	17	100.0%
	Intermediate (40-47)	20	100.0%	0	.0%	20	100.0%
	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	46	100.0%	0	.0%	46	100.0%
	Elementary (18-29)	19	100.0%	0	.0%	19	100.0%

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for the pretest of the whole homogenized sample.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the pretests of the IELTS Reading Comprehension tests and the SORS questionnaire

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
IELTS Reading_pre	102	4	18	11.44	3.364	11.318	-.304	.239
SORS_pre	102	57	135	101.99	14.580	212.584	-.166	.239
Valid N (list wise)	102							

3.2 Inferential Statistics (Results)

In order to check the performance of the students in the IELTS General Reading comprehension pretest, the researcher employed and consulted two-way ANOVA to analyze and interpret the data obtained out of the administration of IELTS General reading pre-test. The results are presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5., as well as Figure 1.
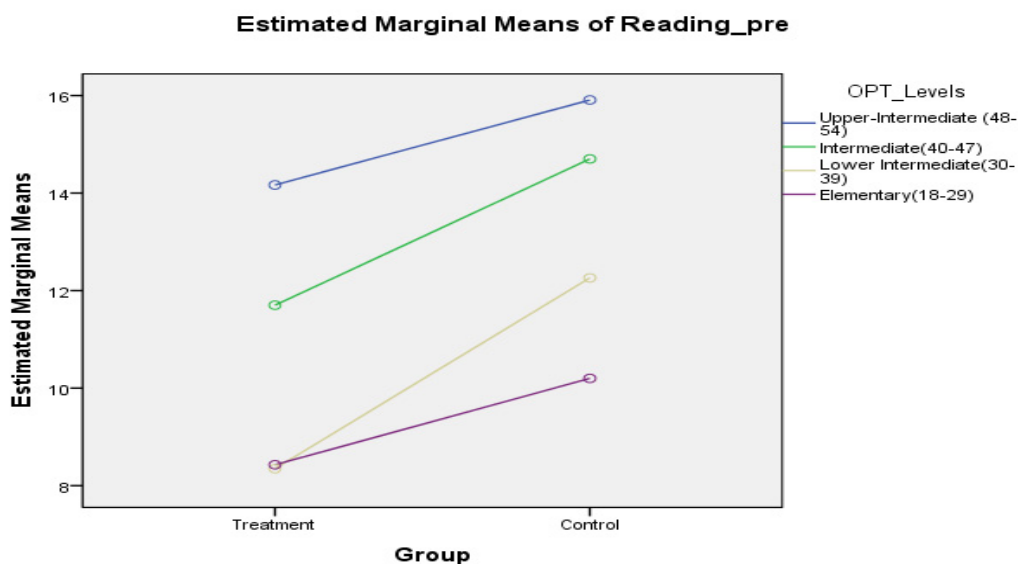
Figure 1.

3.3 IELTS Reading Comprehension Pretest

Table 3. Between-Subjects Factors for IELTS Reading Comprehension (IRCT) pretest

		Value Label	N
Group	1	Treatment	53
	2	Control	49
IRCT_Levels	1	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	17
	2	Intermediate (40-47)	20
	3	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	46
	4	Elementary (18-29)	19

Table 4 shows the number of students in experimental (treatment) and control groups, and also the number of the students in each of the proficiency level groups. Table 5 shows the means, standard deviations, and the number of students in experimental and control groups as well as in each proficiency level within these two groups.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for IELTS reading comprehension pretest in experimental and control groups

Dependent Variable: IELTS Reading Pretest				
Group	IRCT_Levels	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Treatment	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	14.17	1.169	6
	Intermediate (40-47)	11.70	1.337	10
	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	8.35	2.208	23
	Elementary (18-29)	8.43	2.623	14
	Total	9.66	2.922	53
Control	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	15.91	.831	11
	Intermediate (40-47)	14.70	2.003	10
	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	12.26	2.240	23
	Elementary (18-29)	10.20	2.683	5
	Total	13.37	2.698	49
Total	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	15.29	1.263	17
	Intermediate (40-47)	13.20	2.262	20
	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	10.30	2.958	46
	Elementary (18-29)	8.89	2.685	19
	Total	11.44	3.364	102

Table 5. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for IELTS General Reading Comprehension pretest

Dependent Variable: IELTS reading Pretest

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	741.324[a]	7	105.903	24.774	.000	.648
Intercept	11227.234	1	11227.234	2626.429	.000	.965
Group	133.242	1	133.242	31.170	.000	.249
IRCT_Levels	388.308	3	129.436	30.279	.000	.491
Group * IRCT_Levels	21.238	3	7.079	1.656	.182	.050
Error	401.823	94	4.275			
Total	14495.000	102				
Corrected Total	1143.147	101				

a. R Squared = .648 (Adjusted R Squared = .622)

Table 5 above shows the results of the two-way ANOVA. The GROUP statistics shows that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups at the beginning of the study, i.e., the F-value of 30.279. Referring to Table 4, 6 indicates that the control group with the total mean of 13.37 outperformed the experimental group with the total mean of 9.66. The IRCT LEVEL statistics shows that the performances of different proficiency levels were different. (It was as it is expected). The GROUP*IRCT LEVEL statistics shows that there is no significant interaction between the two independent variables (groups and the proficiency levels).

Figure 2 Plot for the IELTS General reading comprehension of students in the two groups and with different proficiency levels in pretest. Figure 3 shows graphically that even after homogenizing, the performance of the students in control group in all proficiency levels was better than the experimental groups.
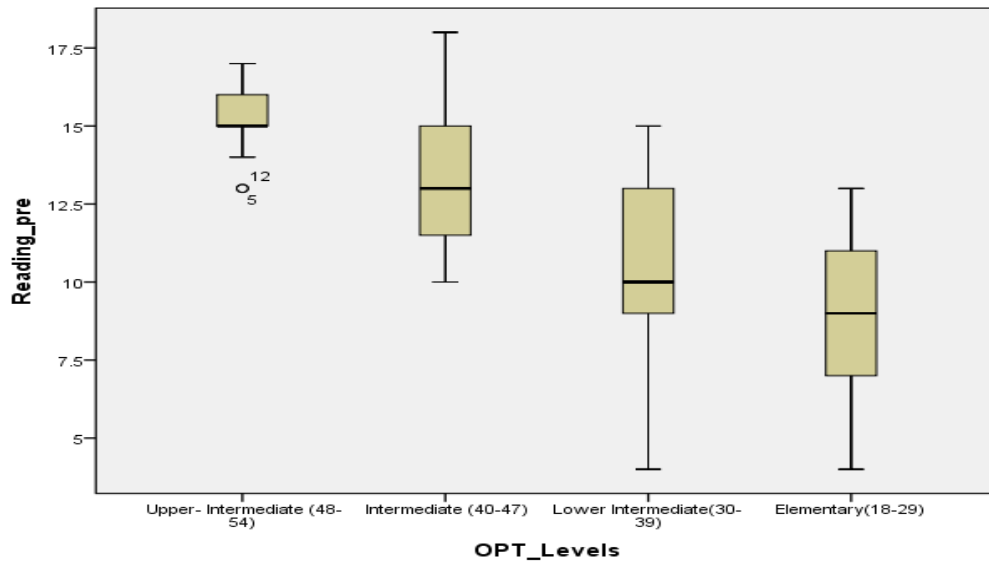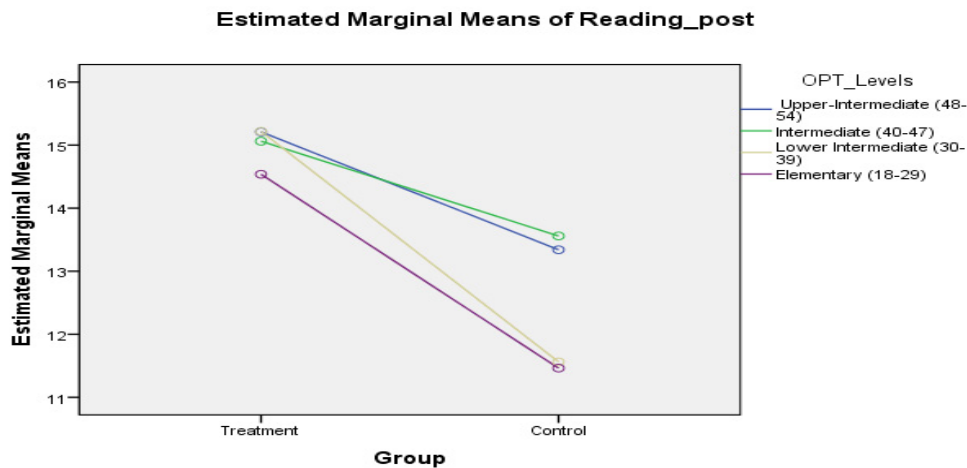

Figure 2.

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Reading_pre = 11.44

Figure 3.

3.4 IELTS General Reading Comprehension (IRCT) Post-test

Since there was an initial difference between treatment groups and the control groups in the IELTS General reading comprehension pretest, the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) has been consulted at this stage.

Table 6. Between-Subjects Factors for IELTS reading comprehension post test

		Value Label	N
Group	1	Treatment	53
	2	Control	49
IRCT_Levels	1	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	17
	2	Intermediate (40-47)	20
	3	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	46
	4	Elementary (18-29)	19

Table 6 shows the number of students in experimental and control groups, and also the number of the students in each of the proficiency level groups for the reading comprehension posttest. Table 7 shows the means, standard deviations, and the number of students in experimental and control groups as well as in each proficiency level within these two groups in IELTS general reading comprehension post-test.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for IELTS General reading comprehension post-test in experimental and control groups

Group	IRCT_Levels	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Treatment	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	16.67	1.033	6
	Intermediate (40-47)	15.20	2.486	10
	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	13.57	1.376	23
	Elementary (18-29)	12.93	2.369	14
	Total	14.06	2.205	53
Control	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	15.73	1.009	11
	Intermediate (40-47)	15.30	2.497	10
	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	12.00	2.892	23
	Elementary (18-29)	10.80	1.643	5
	Total	13.39	3.013	49
Total	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	16.06	1.088	17
	Intermediate (40-47)	15.25	2.425	20
	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	12.78	2.375	46
	Elementary (18-29)	12.37	2.362	19
	Total	13.74	2.632	102

Table 8. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for IELTS general reading post-test

Dependent Variable: IELTS General Reading Post-Test

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	377.940[a]	8	47.242	13.648	.000	.540
Intercept	157.855	1	157.855	45.604	.000	.329
IRCT_pre	114.683	1	114.683	33.132	.000	.263
Group	93.953	1	93.953	27.143	.000	.226
IRCT_Levels	13.389	3	4.463	1.289	.283	.040
Group * IRCT_Levels	20.092	3	6.697	1.935	.129	.059
Error	321.913	93	3.461			
Total	19943.000	102				
Corrected Total	699.853	101				

a. R Squared = .540 (Adjusted R Squared = .500)

Table 8 shows that students significantly perform differently in the IELTS general reading comprehension posttest. Generally speaking, students performed better on IELTS general reading comprehension posttest in the treatment group. Therefore, the related null hypothesis (H03) can be rejected. Although the upper intermediate group in

treatment group showed a lower mean than that of the control group (Table 4, 9), incorporating the initial difference that existed between the two groups by the ANCOVA reveals that the Upper intermediate students in treatment group performed significantly better than the student in the control group at the same level of proficiency. However, the treatment has affected all groups almost similarly because the difference for IRCT-LEVELS is not significant ($p = 0.283$). The Figure 4 shows the results graphically.
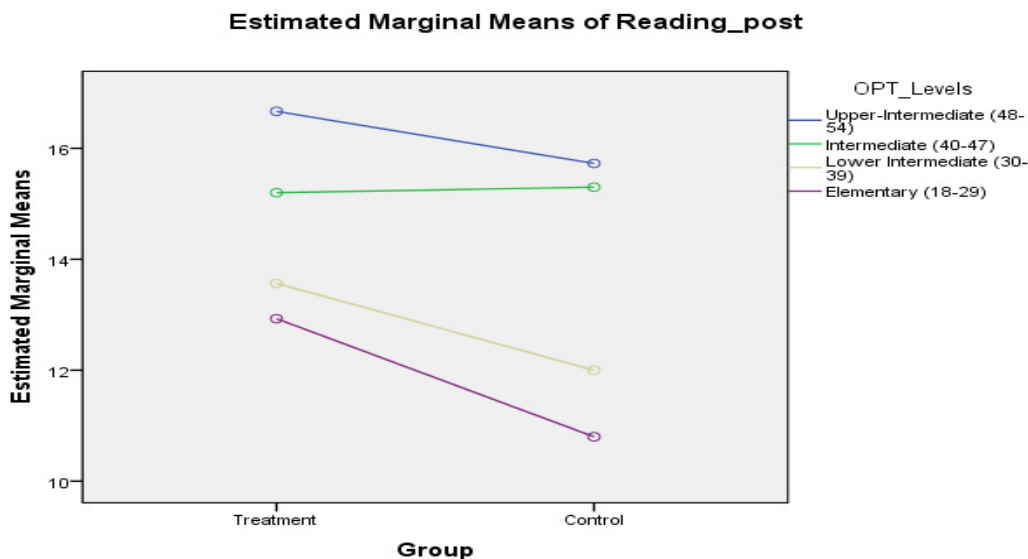

Figure 4.

Figure 4 Plot for the IELTS reading comprehension of students in the two groups and with different proficiency levels in posttest. As shown graphically in Figure 5 all the students in different proficiency levels performed significantly better in the treatment group as compared to the performance of the EFL learners in Control groups.

3.5 The Results of Pretest and Post-test for SORS Questionnaire

The same above statistical procedure was performed to see if the instruction of meta discourse affect IELTS general reading strategies. The following tables show the results of SORS pretest.

Table 9. Between-Subjects Factors for SORS pretest

		Value Label	N
Group	1	Treatment	85
	2	Control	85
OPT_Levels	1	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	26
	2	Intermediate (40-47)	27
	3	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	75
	4	Elementary (18-29)	42

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics for SORS pretest

Dependent Variable: SORS_pre				
Group	OPT_Levels	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	89.33	21.202	12
	Intermediate (40-47)	101.67	10.272	12
Treatment	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	98.94	13.522	36
	Elementary (18-29)	100.12	14.830	25
	Total	98.32	15.033	85
	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	102.14	15.296	14
	Intermediate (40-47)	109.80	11.040	15
Control	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	105.21	13.221	39
	Elementary (18-29)	96.59	10.943	17
	Total	103.79	13.294	85
	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	96.23	19.023	26
	Intermediate (40-47)	106.19	11.280	27
Total	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	102.20	13.644	75
	Elementary (18-29)	98.69	13.363	42
	Total	101.05	14.412	170

Table 11. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for SORS pretest

Dependent Variable: SORS_pre						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	4010.070[a]	7	572.867	2.985	.006	.114
Intercept	1413762.622	1	1413762.622	7366.555	.000	.978
Group	1226.144	1	1226.144	6.389	.012	.038
OPT_Levels	1675.041	3	558.347	2.909	.036	.051
Group * OPT_Levels	1224.091	3	408.030	2.126	.099	.038
Error	31090.453	162	191.916			
Total	1771089.000	170				
Corrected Total	35100.524	169				

a. R Squared = .114 (Adjusted R Squared = .076)

As Table 11 shows, there is an initial difference between the control and treatment groups in SORS pretest. In addition, there is no interaction between instruction of meta discourse markers and the proficiency level of learners. The Figure 5 shows the results graphically.
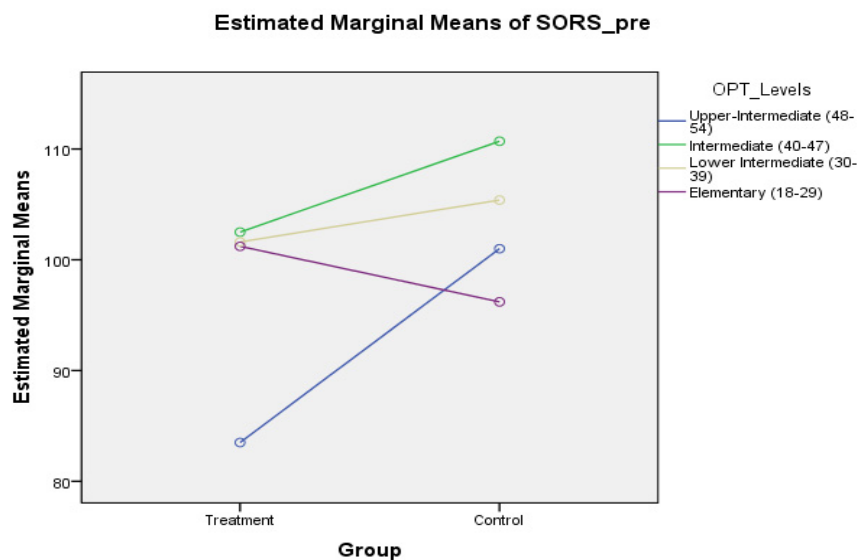
Figure 5. the plot for SORS pretest

As shown in Figure 5 graphically, the students' performance in SORS in control group in all proficiency levels was better than the experimental groups in pretest.

3.6 SORS Post Test

To answer the second research question, ANCOVA was consulted to see if there is significant difference between the groups in SORS posttest.

Table 12. Between-Subjects Factors for SORS post test

		Value Label	N
Group	1	Treatment	85
	2	Control	85
OPT_Levels	1	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	26
	2	Intermediate (40-47)	27
	3	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	75
	4	Elementary (18-29)	42

Table 13. Descriptive Statistics for SORS post test

Dependent Variable: SORS_post				
Group	OPT_Levels	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	100.67	21.781	12
	Intermediate (40-47)	112.08	10.264	12
Treatment	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	108.75	12.180	36
	Elementary (18-29)	113.00	13.197	25
	Total	109.33	14.264	85
	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	102.00	15.782	14
	Intermediate (40-47)	109.40	11.636	15
Control	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	106.85	11.320	39
	Elementary (18-29)	98.47	12.253	17
	Total	104.82	12.760	85
	Upper Intermediate (48-54)	101.38	18.405	26
	Intermediate (40-47)	110.59	10.924	27
Total	Lower Intermediate (30-39)	107.76	11.700	75
	Elementary (18-29)	107.12	14.582	42
	Total	107.08	13.681	170

Table 14. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for SORS post test

Dependent Variable: SORS_post

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	26648.663[a]	8	3331.083	107.663	.000	.843
Intercept	1164.399	1	1164.399	37.634	.000	.189
SORS_pre	23173.903	1	23173.903	748.995	.000	.823
Group	3075.163	1	3075.163	99.391	.000	.382
OPT_Levels	78.884	3	26.295	.850	.469	.016
Group * OPT_Levels	121.029	3	40.343	1.304	.275	.024
Error	4981.343	161	30.940			
Total	1980743.000	170				
Corrected Total	31630.006	169				

a. R Squared = .843 (Adjusted R Squared = .835)

Table 14 shows that there is a significant difference between the treatment and control groups regarding the result of the SORS posttest. So the related null hypothesis is rejected (H03). There is also no significant difference between the proficiency levels regarding the use of reading strategies (p= 0.469). Figure 6 shows the results graphically.
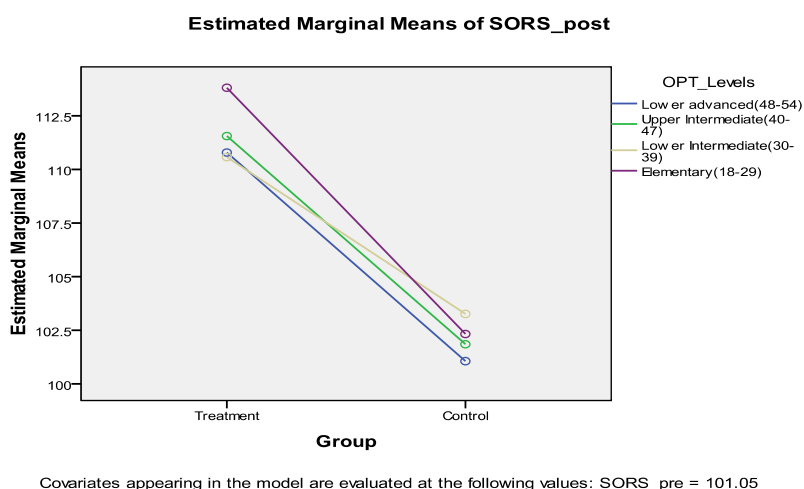
Figure 6. Plot for SORS posttest

As Figure 6 shows graphically all the students in different proficiency levels performed in SORS significantly better in the treatment group as compared to the performance of the EFL learners in Control groups. This is the blatant rejection of the 4th null hypothesis which holds that "There is no statistically significant difference in the pretest and post-test of Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) of students of different language proficiency (elementary, intermediate, upper-intermediate, lower advanced) who were taught meta-discourse features".

4. Discussion

By a closer look at the results obtained in this chapter after revealing the data analysis procedure, the researcher has come up with the general concept that Iraqi EFL learners with different proficiency levels (elementary, intermediate, upper-intermediate, lower-advanced) have demonstrated a positive reaction to the treatment of meta-discourse features and markers in their IELTS general reading comprehension tasks. This is not only true with the nature of the IELTS General Reading Comprehension tasks, but also with the strategies they use in approaching reading tasks, as reflected in the results obtained via ANCOVA analysis of the SORS questionnaires being administered as pretest and posttest. Although different techniques and strategies have been used to improve reading comprehension, few of them foster a meta-discourse markers learning environment and reduce anxiety towards IELTS General reading comprehension tasks. As a result, this study attempted to show the effect of meta-discourse markers on the ways on how Iraqi EFL students deal with IELTS General Reading Comprehension passages. The main concern of this study was to study this assumption whether or not using meta-discourse markers can bring about any positive effect on the ability of students in dealing with the IELTS General reading comprehension passages of Iraqi College EFL Students.

To assure and determine any significant changes in the task achievement of IELTS General reading comprehension of our groups of participants, the results of performance of each group at the pretest were compared with the results of its performance at the post-test stage through applying ANOVA analysis. Employing ANCOVA analysis of the data elicited out of the administration of SORS questionnaire, the researcher found that the strategies used by the Iraqi EFL learners at different levels of language proficiency, i.e., elementary, lower-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate, have been positively and highly improved the learners' approach to IELTS General Reading tasks. The obtained statistical results revealed a significant increase in the performance of participants in experimental group; that means the students in experimental group benefited highly from the treatment conducted. In addition, the results of the t test enabled the researcher to reject the null hypotheses and therefore, the research questions were answered appropriately.

5. Conclusions and Findings

This study aimed at investigating the effects of instruction of metadiscoursal features of English texts on the reading comprehension skills of Iraqi EFL university students, IELTS General Reading Modules in particular. Specifically, the study examined whether making students aware of meta-discourse features by introducing certain metacognitive strategies will improve their IELTS General Reading abilities. The study has proposed specific

strategies that students can use to understand metadiscoursal features of English texts and in this way help make the process of reading and comprehending more effective and efficient.

The treatment of meta-discourse markers and features in reading comprehension classes, IELTS general reading in this context, DID play a reliably positive role in uplifting the IELTS reading comprehension skills and strategies of Iraqi EFL University students. The ANOVA indices of pretest and post-test data indicate that all participants in the four groups of elementary, pre-intermediate, Intermediate, and Upper-intermediate levels have significantly and reliably performed differently in the IELTS general reading comprehension post-test as being compared with the performance in pre-test. Using meta-discourse markers and features DID play a significantly positive role in promoting the reading comprehension strategies used by the Iraqi EFL learners in 80 university students (treatment groups) recruited and invited to take part in the study. The indices of SORS questionnaire analysis are the clear-cut proof for such a huge change.

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