

The Impact of Consciousness Raising Strategies on Iranian EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension Scores in Online Classes

Sara Hashemi Saeid

Department of English Language Teaching
Islamic Azad University, West Tehran Branch
Tehran, Iran

Email: sarahashemi6014@gmail.com

Shokouh Rashvand Semiyari*

Department of English Language Teaching
Islamic Azad University, East Tehran Branch
Tehran, Iran

Email: Sh.Rashvand@iauet.ac.ir

Email: Sh_Rashvand@yahoo.com

Abstract. Reading comprehension is assumed to bear the most important share in learning a new language. At the same time, consciousness raising strategies in the context of foreign language learning have been the focus of many language specialists to date. These strategies can activate the role of mind in the process of language learning and improve the learners' understanding. A plenty of studies highlight that learners should be encouraged to learn more about different consciousness raising strategies to enhance their own learning. Thus, the main purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of consciousness raising strategies on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension scores. To the end, sixty intermediate learners participated in this study. They were divided into two groups of experimental and control (N=30 for each). Subsequently, activities like noticing, checking, asking questions, analyzing, and producing were used as the treatment under the term of consciousness raising strategies in the experimental group. The control group received traditional way of teaching in online classrooms. The results of the main independent sample t-test on participants' gain scores of reading comprehension from the pretest to posttest indicated that there was a significant difference between the means of gain scores of

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*Corresponding author

experimental group and that of control group. In other words, consciousness raising strategies proved to have significant effect on reading comprehension of EFL learners. Implications and suggestions for further studies were also highlighted.

Keywords: Consciousness raising strategies, reading comprehension, online classrooms

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension seems to have the most important share in learning a new language (Koyama & Takeuchi, 2013). It is a challenging process dealing with construction, inference, comprehension, production, and information processing (Kafipour, 2010). According to Liu, Chen, and Chang (2010), reading comprehension requires learners not only know how to produce specific points of language such as pronunciation or vocabulary (linguistic competence), but also understand when, why, and in what ways to understand language (sociolinguistic competence). At the same time, consciousness raising strategies in the context of foreign language learning are the focus of many language specialists and linguists (Whittier, 2017). These strategies can activate the role of mind in the process of language learning and they can improve the learners' understanding (Ellis, 2016). Recent studies highlight that learners should be encouraged to learn more about different consciousness raising strategies (Whittier, 2017; Soodmand Afshar & Donyaie, 2019). Meanwhile, many studies about foreign language learning have been carried out by means of computer-based technology (Sert, 2019). The internet and computer-based devices can be used to learn a foreign language more easily and they can enhance learners' capabilities and potentials to learn the language. In this regard, English language classrooms can be mobilized with online platforms to create an appropriate context to learn language and provide the opportunities to interact with other people in online ways (Li, 2020; Syakur, 2020).

The main objective of this study was to investigate the impact of consciousness raising strategies on reading comprehension of EFL learners in online classes. It is worth mentioning that reading comprehension embodied comprehension as well as production. To explain it clearly, the

researchers of the study considered both fluency in reading comprehension and understanding them at the same time. Moreover, over the past decades, different strategies and techniques have been introduced by different scholars to teach and enhance learners' reading comprehension skill (Estaji & Saeedian, 2020; Fathi, & Afzali, 2020; Huang, 2020). Accordingly, this study highlighted the consciousness raising strategies as one of the most appropriate strategies to learn English because consciousness raising strategies can have positive impacts on learning in most of cases. Many studies have reported on the effects of traditional classes in education especially in language learning (Darjito, 2019; Li, 2020; Syakur, 2020). However, there has been very little research on online language classrooms specially on reading development even for young learners with online mediations through online platforms. Therefore, the present study was intended to assess the effect of consciousness raising strategies on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension scores in online classrooms.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The concept of consciousness-raising

Smith (1993) asserted that the consciousness-raising approach draws learners' attention and awareness to particular properties of language. In other words, the learners should first become aware or conscious of the new language, then recognize and distinguish it and finally to be able to produce it. Consciousness-raising approach helps the learners draw attention receptively to formal and semantic features of linguistic forms with the goal of implicit knowledge for the inductive learning purposes (Ellis, 2003). In other words, this approach provides learners with successful acquisition and enables them to use the language efficiently. It is a practical way to integrate the teaching of grammar with opportunities for communication and exchange of information in grammar tasks. As Ellis (2003) claims, a consciousness-raising task engages learners in thinking and communicating about language. Consciousness-raising tasks are communicative tasks in which learners use the target language, discuss the meaning of various grammatical forms and try to identify regular patterns. The learners are not required to produce or

practice the forms, they would rather focus on the content of the communicative task. In fact, they develop grammatical knowledge while they are communicating (Fotos, 1994).

2.1.1 Consciousness-raising process based on noticing hypothesis

Schmidt (1990) proposed that the conscious manner of learning is of high importance, although he did not neglect the subconscious processes in second language acquisition. By Noticing Hypothesis, Schmidt (1990) posited that consciousness is important in language learning and recognized that at first learners must consciously notice language forms in the input before processing it. As Ellis (1995) puts forward, acquisition never happens without noticing. This fact manifests the significance of noticing for second language acquisition. Also Bennett (1976) states if we do not notice, we cannot select or perform for ourselves (as cited in Qi & Lapkin, 2001). Moreover, with regard to the significance of noticing, Schmidt (1990) claimed that those who pay attention most, notice most, and those who notice most, learn most. Schmidt's (1990, 1994, 1995, & 2001) Noticing Hypothesis demonstrated that noticing process makes the input convert into intake, and is "regarded as a mainstream of SLA construct" (Yoshika, Frota, & Bergsleithner, 2013, p. 7). Furthermore, Schmidt in one of his studies refers to noticing as the "registration of the occurrence of a stimulus event in conscious awareness and subsequent storage in long term memory" (Schmidt, 1994, p. 179). He ultimately concluded that awareness is essential in second language learning and learners need to have awareness when they are learning (Schmidt, 1995). Also, Schmidt (1990) claimed that in language learning process, the first and necessary step is consciousness as it facilitates other aspects of learning in further steps.

2.2 Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension as a very complex activity is highly valued in industrialized societies. People encounter a plethora of texts throughout their lives and gain access to new and often valuable information about their environments, present and past events, facts, opinions, and emotions. This information may influence their lives and give them an

advantage over those missing capabilities. Indeed, “the possession of literacy skills and the ability to exhibit literate behavior suggests that an individual is in control and has power” (Zwaan, 1993, p.1). Reading comprehension remains a valid goal in modern language classroom. Abraham (2008, p.2) argues that “the more we understand about the reading process by examining how theory and research apply to our practice, the better reading teachers we will become”. Understanding how readers make sense of the printed page can ground us in our daily teaching and inform the choices we make in the classroom (Abraham, 2008). Rivers (1981) holds that reading is the most important activity in any language class, not only as a source of information and a pleasant activity, but also as a means of consolidating and extending one’s knowledge of the language. Reading reinforces the learners’ other language skills. Adams and Collins (1977) view reading as one of the basic ways of acquiring information in the society and in academic settings in particular. They believed that individuals who cannot read well are at a serious disadvantage with respect to educational and, consequently, vocational opportunities.

Troike (2006) states that reading is the most important area of activity for individuals to engage in, develop L2 academic competence, enhance interpersonal functions, and get along in any literature society. Troike (2006) goes on to argue that for many readers, reading is the primary channel for input and a major source of exposure to associated literature and other aspects of L2 culture. In the case of a language that is used for wider communication, reading also provides significant input related to technological developments, world news, and scientific discoveries. Reading ability in general is needed not only for access to printed resources such as books and journals but may also be needed for access to computers and the internet (Troike, 2006).

Aebersold and Field (1997) consider reading as a powerful activity which confers knowledge, insight, and progress of readers. They believe those who grow up in settings where reading is seldom seen, have a very different view of the values of reading. Chastain (1988, p. 218) stated that “all reading activity serves to facilitate communicative fluency in each of the other language skills”. He also adds that reading is the skill in which the students will have the greatest ability at the end of a

course emphasizing the four language skills. Hedge (2003) holds that any reading component of English language course may include a set of learning goals for: the ability to read a wide range of texts in English, build the knowledge of language which will facilitate reading ability, construct schematic knowledge, the ability to adapt the reading style according to reading purposes, the capability to raise an awareness of the structure of written texts in English, and take a critical stance to the contents of the texts. The functions of reading have been listed by Troike (2006) as reading to find information, to get the main ideas and at least some supporting ideas, to understand the main ideas and store meanings, to criticize and evaluate

2.3. Empirical studies

To determine the relative effectiveness of explicit consciousness raising strategies as mental instructions on the reading comprehension of advanced Iranian EFL students, Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh, and Fatahi (2004) investigated the frequency and usage of such speech act clues like requesting, apologizing, and complaining in reading comprehension texts by using consciousness raising strategies. In order to do so, sixty-six Iranian EFL undergraduate students and a group of American students as the baseline participated in the study. Consciousness raising strategies such as teacher-fronted discussions, noticing on main works in cooperative grouping, and other mental oriented tasks were employed in order to find the above-mentioned speech acts in reading comprehension texts. Results showed that consciousness raising strategies were beneficial in pragmatic development to a significant degree. In other words, consciousness raising strategies supplied input enhancement in the L2 classroom, raised awareness of L2 learners in the input features, and engaged students in productive activities and language use. The study indicated that consciousness raising strategies play a vital role in EFL settings.

Barekat and Mehri (2013) compared the effectiveness of two types of instruction (consciousness-raising activities and consciousness-raising activities with feedback) on the Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic competence. The participants of this study were 45 homogenous students at

intermediate level. They were assigned to control group, C-R treatment group, and C-R F treatment group. A pre-test, post-test design and WDCT was implemented to assess the effects of the treatments on the learners' realizations of speech act of request. The results showed that the instruction was beneficial, and both experimental groups outperformed the control group. However, the participants in the C-R with the feedback group performed better than the learners in the C-R group. In another major study, Takimoto (2012) carried out a study to examine the impacts of two types of consciousness-raising instruction (problem-solving tasks with metapragmatic discussion and problem-solving tasks without metapragmatic discussion) on recognition and production of learners about English request downgraders. The participants of the study were forty-five monolingual Japanese speakers learning English as a foreign language and their English proficiency level was at the intermediate level. The two experimental groups took the problem-solving tasks with metapragmatic discussion (PTW) and problem-solving tasks without metapragmatic discussion (PTO). The results confirmed that the recognition and production of English request downgraders were influenced by the problem-solving tasks involving processing of English request downgraders. In addition, it was found that metapragmatic discussion makes the participants be familiar with metapragmatic information about the target pragmatic features, and the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic conventions of English request downgraders.

Birjandi and Derakhshan (2013) identified the relative effect of consciousness-raising video-driven prompts on the comprehension of three speech acts of apology, request, and refusal. Seventy-eight upper-intermediate Persian English learners in four groups (metapragmatic, form-search, role play, and control) participated in the study. The four groups received forty-five video vignettes. The results indicated that all three types of instruction were useful in learners' awareness of apologies, requests, and refusals. Also, it was found that performance of metapragmatic group was better than the other two in gaining more pragmatic knowledge. Moreover, it was indicated that form-search group performed better than the role-play one. Takimoto (2012) identified the effects of three types of consciousness raising strategies (deductive instruction,

inductive instruction with problem-solving tasks, and inductive instruction with structured input tasks) on the acquisition of pragmatic competence. The subjects of the study were sixty Japanese EFL learners. Performance of the treatment group was compared with that of a control group on the pretests, posttests, and follow-up tests. The results showed that the performance of three treatment groups was considerably better than the control group. Also it was mentioned in this study that consciousness raising strategies were beneficial both deductively and inductively for learners' comprehension and production of English polite requests. Tajeddin, and Hosseinpour (2014) determined the effectiveness of deductive, inductive, and L1-based consciousness-raising tasks on the request speech act acquisition of EFL learners. One-hundred and forty undergraduate Iranian university EFL learners in six intact classes participated in this study. They were sixty seven male and seventy three female EFL learners at upper-intermediate level. After instructional sessions, the data were gathered during the first, third, fifth, and seventh weeks by a DCTs. The results showed that, in this period of time, the participants used conventionally indirect strategies instead of direct request strategies in situations consisting of high-status interlocutors and high imposition requests. Moreover, with the passage of time, the learners focused more on pragmatic appropriateness rather than grammatical correctness. It was found that C-R instructional tasks suggest a beneficial means of teaching pragmatics. Eslami, Mirzaei, and Dini (2015) carried out a research to investigate the effect of two types of form-focused instruction (asynchronous computer mediated communication) on the acquisition of requests by Iranian EFL learners. A quasi-experimental, pretest/posttest design with a control group was employed in this study. Three groups of EFL learners, a control and two intervention groups participated in the study. The explicit group was provided with consciousness-raising activities, explicit metapragmatic explanations and corrections of errors of forms and meanings. The implicit group was provided with enhanced input and implicit feedback. A DCT and students' email communications with the graduate students were employed to explore their language development. It was found that both treatment groups outperformed the control group. However, the explicit

group was more successful than the implicit group on both the DCT and email communication measures.

Recent studies on reading comprehension highlighted the importance of consciousness raising strategies (Sengupta, 1999; Shokrpur, 2009). Azizifar, Babaei, Jamalinesari, and Gowhary (2015) carried out a study to show the importance of performing new strategies to teach reading comprehension. They found that performing and using consciousness raising tasks in reading comprehension could improve the learners' attitudes toward learning reading texts. Soler (2007) indicated that EFL learners' reading performance can be improved by consciousness raising strategies. Yang (1999) found that learners' beliefs toward reading comprehension learning could be enhanced through consciousness raising strategies. Fan (2009) found out how metacognitive strategies such as think-aloud, text-structure, and summarization could be employed most effectively by Taiwanese EFL university students to improve their reading comprehension. To this end, 143 university students took part in the study. The results of the study indicated that the experimental group who were engaged in metacognitive strategies use had better gains in reading comprehension than those in the control group. In a similar study, Aghaie and Zhang (2012) investigated the influence of explicit teaching of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies on EFL university students' reading performance and improvement in Iran. After four months of strategy instruction, the experimental group achieved significantly better results compared to the control group supporting the role of explicit instruction of multiple strategies in learners' reading comprehension enhancement. DeBoer (2003) tried to evaluate the influences of explicit teaching on cognitive/metacognitive reading comprehension strategies and indicate the most effective and practical instructional model for teaching reading comprehension strategies to elementary students. To achieve this goal, explicit instruction of four strategies (i.e., predicting, questioning, summarizing, and clarifying) were modeled for students using a think-aloud strategy. The findings indicated that reading comprehension strategies can be applied to elementary levels satisfactorily.

2.4. The current study

The present study was intended to examine whether Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension scores can be enhanced by consciousness raising strategies in online classrooms. To this end, one research question motivated the study: RQ1. Is there any significant relationship between consciousness raising strategies and reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners via online teaching?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

In this part of the study, demographic information of the participants, such as age, gender, education, and nationality were described. In order to investigate the effect of consciousness raising strategies on the mentioned variable, the participants were selected from the students who are learning and mastering English for general purposes with the age range of 14-30 from an English language institute of Tehran, Iran. They were at the intermediate levels. These students were totally 60 female students. All of the students were measured through the Nelson Proficiency Test (NPT) in order to be homogeneous with respect to their English proficiency levels. Due to the scores of this test (from 100 points), students with the scores between 45-70 were selected as the subjects of the study (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine, & Walker, 2018). Based on their scores, all of these students were randomized into two groups of experimental (N=30) and control (N=30). It should be mentioned that the control group didn't receive any special treatments or teaching materials.

3.2 Instruments

In order to answer the proposed research question, the following instruments were applied:

3.2.1 Nelson proficiency test (NPT)

Nelson Proficiency Course was highly commended in the 1990 by Duke of Edinburgh in the English Language Competition. The course places particular emphasis on vocabulary development, grammar and reading comprehension. Moreover, it features new reading materials; deductive grammar approaches, writing assignments with emphasis on a variety of

writing assignments, with direction on content, organization, style, exam technique and summary writing and learners' awareness. In this study, the Nelson test (Flower & Coe, 1976), consisting of 50 multiple-choice items, were applied to the intended group to ensure their homogeneity concerning their proficiency levels. Other researchers have already evaluated the validity and reliability of the Nelson tests several times and it is considered as a highly valid and reliable test of English proficiency (Shahivand & Pazhakh, 2012).

3.2.2 Reading comprehension exam

The Reading Comprehension Exam was performed by the researcher in order to access the learners' reading comprehension skill. The reading comprehension test was applied in this study comprised 27 items to rate the degree of importance of the reading comprehension skills. It is worth mentioning that this reading comprehension exam was selected from the Headway series intermediate level. Respondents were asked to rate each item of the reading comprehension skills as multiple choices. The allocated time to do this exam was 90 minutes and it had 40 points. It should be mentioned that, this reading comprehension exam was administered both as pre-test and post-test. In other words, the researcher used it once before the study in order gain the initial information about the participants' reading comprehension skill. After that, the researcher then administered it once after the treatment. In other words, the researcher gathered the post-test after applying consciousness raising strategies such as attention, noticing, analysis, and checking the reading comprehensions. In other words, by applying the post-test, the improvement in reading comprehension proficiency of the learners were clarified by the researcher.

3.2.3 Consciousness-raising strategies

The following strategies were used by the researchers based on consciousness-raising sequences presented in "consciousness-raising Activities" (Willis & Willis, 1996) as follows:

1. Attention: students were given a text containing enough examples of the target structure to process it for meaning.

2. Noticing: the target structure was highlighted through underlining and italicizing.
3. Analysis: students looked at the examples in the texts and discovered how the target structure works. They were asked to formulate and present a rule for what they have found.
4. Checking: students did an activity to check whether they have understood how to use the given structure.
5. Production: students were given the opportunity to try out the target structure by producing their own sentences or phrases to complete the text.

3.3 Design of the study

Current study was considered as the experimental study with pre-test, treatment, posttest design. The researcher administered NPT for homogenizing the participants and then she selected the participants. The participants were selected based on their scores in the proficiency test. Then, they were divided into two groups of experimental and controlled in order to check the impacts of consciousness raising strategies on reading comprehension scores of EFL learners in online classes.

3.4 Data collection procedure

This study contained various phases: in the first phase, all students were measured through the NPT in order to yield acceptable and appropriate level of English Proficiency. The researcher used this test and then she divided students into two groups of controlled (N=30) and experimental (N=30) by the scores of each students and randomization of their names. In the second phase of the study, all the students in both controlled and experimental group completed a test of reading comprehension based on their level of proficiency which were given to them in a copy. The objective was to assess students' primary proficiency in reading comprehension before assigning them and giving treatment. At the third step, consciousness raising strategies were given to teach reading comprehension in the period of six weeks (2 sessions per week) to the experimental group as a treatment. It should be mentioned that participants of controlled group attended the classes without any instruments

in the period of six weeks (2 sessions per week). In other words, the experimental group received the consciousness raising strategies in online platforms and traditional group continued their learning without any special treatment. The last phase was to give the mentioned test again to the students as post-test to realize if there was any improvement in the experimental group after treatment or not.

3.5 Data analysis

For the purpose of the study, the scores that obtained from the reading comprehension scores, pretest and posttest analyzed by means of SPSS program. Independent samples t-test was selected as a best data analysis method in order to compare the possible improvements of reading comprehension scores from pre-test to posttest of experimental group and control group. In other words, the students' reading comprehension scores of two groups on the pre-test and posttest were compared using independent samples t-test.

4. Results

An independent-sample t-test was employed to investigate the potential effects of consciousness raising strategies on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension scores in online classes. In other words, an independent-sample t-test was run in order to investigate the impacts of consciousness raising strategies on reading comprehension of EFL learners in online classrooms. Having this aim, the gain scores (the deviation score), the difference between the pretest and the posttest of students in both experimental (using consciousness strategies as the treatment) and control groups (traditional way of teaching), were computed. To explain it clear, the researcher examined the improvement (gain scores) of EFL learners from the pretest to the posttest to describe the impacts of consciousness raising strategies. This gain score can be calculated for each participant by subtracting each person's posttest score from his or her pretest score. It should be mentioned that before conducting the tests, the normality assumption was calculated and the skewness and kurtosis of the pretests and posttests in both groups, experimental and control, were between -2 and +2 (Table 4.1 and Table 4.2), therefore, the nor-

mality assumption of independent-samples t-test was tenable and both groups were in the same level of homogeneity.

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Two Times of Testing of Experimental Group (N =30)

	Mea		Std.		Skewness		Kurtosis		
N	Min	Max	n	D	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	
Pre-test	30.00	13.00	28.00	19.77	3.53	0.27	0.43	-0.38	0.83
Post-test	30.00	15.00	34.00	20.43	4.10	1.24	0.43	1.67	0.83

The results of the main independent sample t-test on gain scores of learners' reading comprehension from the pretest to the posttest indicated that there was a significant difference between the means of gain scores of experimental group ($M = 0.67$, $SD = 1.15$) and that of control group ($M = -0.13$, $SD = 0.82$), $t(58) = 3.09$, $p = .00$, equal variance assumed (See Tables 4.3 and 4.4) with Cohen's d effect size of 0.8 which was considered a large effect.

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Two Times of Testing of Control Group (N = 30)

	N	Min	Max	Mea n	Std. D	Skewness	Kurtosis	
Pre-test	30.00	12.00	26.00	19.60	3.56	- 0.11	- 0.43	0.83
Posttest	30.00	14.00	28.00	19.47	3.38	0.63	0.43	0.83

In other words, consciousness raising strategies could have significant effect on reading comprehension of EFL learners. Although both groups show the difference from pre-test to posttest, it can be said that students in experimental group had far more advances from the pretest to the posttest (a 0.67-point increase) in comparison with that of their counterparts in control group (a 0.13-point decrease). Consequently, it can be concluded that consciousness raising strategies had a statistically significant large effect on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension and the null hypothesis was the rejected in this way.

Table 4.3 The Descriptive Statistics of Reading Comprehension Gain Scores of Different Groups from Pretest to Posttest

Group		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Reading	EXP	30	0.67	1.15	0.21
Comprehension	CNT	30	-0.13	0.82	0.15
Gain Score					

Note: EXP = Experimental, CNT = Control

Table 4.4 Independent Samples t-test of Gain Scores from Pretest to Posttest

		Levene's Test		t-test				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	95% CI	
							Lower	Upper
Reading	Equal	0.47	0.50	3.09	58.00	0.00	0.28	1.32
Comprehension	variances							
Gain Score	assumed							
	Equal			3.09	52.30	0.00	0.28	1.32
	variances							
	not							
	assumed							

4.2 Discussion

As the results of the study showed, consciousness raising strategies could influence the level of reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners in online classrooms. In other words, using consciousness raising strategies or more particular activities like making and improving attention, noticing, analyzing, and checking can improve the learners' consciousness to learn and comprehend the reading texts better. More specifically, the results of the study revealed that teachers can improve the reading comprehension of learners through giving examples in target language or highlighting the main grammatical or new words in the texts in online classrooms.

Moreover, giving examples and extracting the rules which are the main rules of consciousness raising strategies could improve the understanding of learners about reading texts. In this way, the results of the study showed that, consciousness raising strategies provide learners with opportunities to produce a new understanding from the reading comprehension texts in classrooms. Subsequently, teachers can use consciousness raising strategies in online classrooms to increase the level of awareness toward learning reading comprehension texts.

Accordingly, the results of the study can be in line and consistent with some of the previous studies in the literature (Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh, & Fatahi, 2004; Soler & Pitarch, 2010; Barekat & Mehri, 2013; Birjandi & Derakhshan, 2013). Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh, and Fatahi (2004) revealed that Consciousness raising strategies such as teacher-fronted discussions, noticing on main works in cooperative grouping, and other mental oriented tasks can supply the input enhancement in the L2 classrooms. Barekat and Mehri (2013) compared the effectiveness of consciousness-raising in Iranian contexts. In this case, findings can be consistent with their results because they showed that consciousness-based group showed better performance in comparison to control group. Moreover, Birjandi and Derakhshan (2013) identified that consciousness-raising strategies can improve the upper-intermediate reading comprehension. Besides, scholars like, Takimoto (2012) identified the effects of three types of consciousness raising strategies (deductive instruction, inductive instruction with problem-solving

tasks, and inductive instruction with structured input tasks) which can be in line with the results of this study because the researcher used almost similar instructions in online classrooms. In addition to the mentioned points, the results of consciousness raising improvement from this study can be in line with Soler and Pitarch (2010) who identified the effects of consciousness raising strategies as instruction on learners' attention and awareness during the performance of refusals.

Moreover, the results of the study can be in line with those of recent studies that are related to the consciousness raising tasks. Mohammad (2004) and Sugiharto (2006) contended that consciousness raising strategies can be used in three stages of task developing such as pre-task, within the task, and post-task and these strategies can be used deductively and inductively as effective tools for raising learners' awareness. As the researcher of the study, used consciousness raising studies as a pre-planned program for improving learners' reading comprehension, the results of the study can be somehow similar with the results of the mentioned studies. Subsequently, consciousness raising strategies can be used as a solution for improving learners' reading comprehension which has been already confirmed by Shokrpour (2009). Some other studies have controversial findings which are not in line with the results of the current study. For instance, Nassaji (2004) maintains that strategic training like performing consciousness raising strategies do not always lead to learners' comprehension and it is often relied on the usage of these strategies by learners independently. Therefore, the results of above research can reject the results of the current study and prove that consciousness raising strategies can be used whether by the leadership of teachers in EFL classrooms. Moreover, the results of the study of Azizifar, Babaei, Jamalinesari, and Gowhary (2015) showed that there is some doubt in the efficiency of consciousness strategies for improving EFL learners' grammatical knowledge. Although the focus of this study was not on grammar knowledge, but the results can be against the current study findings and it can be stated that consciousness raising strategies can be effective in EFL classrooms as multi-dimensional tools. Furthermore, the results of this study displayed that consciousness raising strategies can be used as an effective tool for involving learners

in the process of reading comprehension which is in contrary with the results of Azizifar, Babaei, Jamalinesari, and Gowhary (2015) study. In addition to all mentioned, the results of the study which focused on the improving learners' reading comprehension are inconsistent with the outcomes of Amirian and Sadeghi's (2012) study. They claimed that although consciousness raising strategies can improve the learners' efficiency in a short period of time, learners' awareness would probably go under the influence of other factors like self-confidence or lack of attitude in long term condition.

5. Conclusions, Implications, and Suggestions for Further Research

The present study was carried out to examine whether Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension scores can be enhanced by consciousness raising strategies in online classrooms. More specifically, the main purpose of the present study was to investigate the effects of consciousness raising strategies on the Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension scores. The results of the main independent sample t-test on gain scores of learners on reading comprehension from the pretest to the posttest indicated that there was a significant difference between the means of gain scores of experimental group and that of control group. In other words, consciousness raising strategies could have significant effect on reading comprehension of EFL learners.

Reading comprehension is part of the learning process requiring learners to overcome its challenges and difficulties. Consciousness raising strategies for learning and teaching grammar especially in online classrooms have been successful in this study and students as well as teachers were satisfied from this way of teaching and learning reading comprehension. Therefore, findings of the current study could be advantageous for some stakeholders and beneficiaries. First and foremost, language teachers can benefit from the findings of the present study so as to provide their students with different kinds of consciousness raising strategies. Moreover, the teachers are suggested to run some parts of their classes such as reading comprehension in online context through consciousness raising strategies since these strategies given by

the teacher or other peers can remain in the online context and students can use them in several occasions and learn from them. Also, teacher educators can be the beneficiaries of the present study and draw upon its findings so as to be aware of the advantages of conducting some sessions online because online teaching through consciousness raising strategies can foster the learning especially in reading comprehension parts. In fact, the teacher educators can incorporate the findings of the current study into in-service and pre-service courses and make teachers informed of how using online social networks and consciousness raising strategies can help them to not only save more time but also enhance the efficiency of sessions. Moreover, the teacher educators can refer to the findings of the study to inform teachers about the positive application of consciousness raising strategies in teaching and learning reading comprehension. Textbook developers can also take advantage of the present study so as to ask their users to encourage teachers and learners to benefit social networking sites and teaching methods through consciousness raising strategies. Moreover, they can stimulate teachers to utilize consciousness raising strategies through teacher guides. Last but not the least, the findings of the current study could be beneficial for EFL learners since they can devote some time to working on their essays in online contexts. That is, instead of using traditional methods of teaching, students can take consciousness raising strategies as valuable learning tools which open up precious opportunities for reading comprehension texts. In this way, they can learn not only from their teachers but also from their peers.

The present study delved into the effect of consciousness raising strategies on reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners in online classes. Other studies are suggested to investigate the following line of research so as to investigate the generalizability of the findings and make a contribution to this domain. First and foremost, future studies are suggested to replicate this study with participants at other age groups like teenagers and school students. Second, other researchers are suggested to include students with different proficiency levels such as beginner and elementary ones who require more care and support. Third, the role of context was not investigated by the current study; hence, future stud-

ies are recommended to compare the efficiency of consciousness raising strategies in the context of classrooms and social networks such as Telegram and WhatsApp. Fourth, the present study adopted the interactive approach to consciousness raising strategies; thus, another line of research could be comparing the efficiency of interactive and interventionist approaches to consciousness raising strategies in online context since few, if not studies have examined this issue so far. Fifth, this present study only delved into the effect of consciousness raising strategies on reading comprehension, hence, other studies could examine the role of consciousness raising strategies in fostering other aspects of writing and also other skills such as listening and speaking. Last, the reciprocity of the learners in the current study was not investigated; thus, future studies are suggested to adopt a qualitative approach and examine how learners respond to consciousness raising strategies they are provided in online context.

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