

## **Authenticity and Test Taker's Strategies in Iranian EFL Classes**

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### **Abstract**

The theoretical framework for this study is research in the areas of language testing and reading. and overview of language testing and current developments in language testing research, including factors that affect test performance and authentic assessment. Test type as the task variable, test-taking strategies and gender as the reader variable, and authenticity as the text variable were selected and their interaction is examined. Therefore, the present study sets out to investigate the specific test-taking strategies employed by Iranian EFL students, reading authentic or simplified reading texts and the difference between the two sets of strategies, to explore whether males and females reported different patterns of reading and test-taking strategy use, and whether respondents to multiple-choice and open-ended questions used different test-taking strategies while reading. methodology of the study, including the characteristics of the participants, the structure of the materials, and the description of the procedure which has been used in the present study and finally the details of the statistical measures employed to analyze the data collected.

**KEYWORDS:** Authentic Texts-Test-taking Strategies- Test Type- Reading Strategies  
Reading Comprehension

### **Introduction**

Over the last decades there has been a growing interest in the issue of authenticity in the fields of applied linguistics and general education. In applied linguistics the notion emerged in the late 1970s at the time when communicative methodology was appearing and there was a growing interest in teaching and testing 'real-life' language. In general education, the notion gained recognition more than a decade later in the late 1980s (Lewkowicz, 2000).

Authenticity is now firmly established as a central concern in test design and test validation; however, there is disagreement about what authenticity is and about the degree of authenticity that can realistically be achieved (Spence-Brown, 2001). In spite of many different interpretations of authenticity and authentic assessment, Guariento and Morley (2001) asserted one feature of authenticity upon which there has been general agreement over time: the critical characteristic of authentic materials is that they are aimed at the native speakers of the language and not prepared for pedagogical use with language learners. Despite the importance accorded to authenticity, there has been a marked absence of research to demonstrate this characteristic (Lewkowicz, 2000).

According to Spence-Brown (2001), authenticity can be considered in relation to the materials (or texts), the assessment tasks, the interaction between participants, and the assessment criteria. Authentic texts, as only one component of authentic assessment, have received various definitions; the most referred one is “genuine, unaltered texts written by native speakers and not designed for pedagogical purposes” (Ahmad, 2006, p. 10). Recently, however, Lewkowicz (2000) questioned the validity of the current dichotomy between authentic texts as intrinsically good and inauthentic texts, produced for pedagogic purposes, as inferior. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the defining characteristics of authentic assessment, as well as, to examine the supposed superiority of authentic materials to inauthentic materials in teaching and testing language abilities.

Concluding the long debate on characterizing authentic assessment, Bachman and Palmer (1996) referred to authenticity as the degree of correspondence of the characteristics of a given language test task to the features of a target language use (TLU) task. To determine the degree of correspondence between test and TLU tasks –that is, to determine the authenticity of test tasks – Bachman and Palmer (1996) proposed a framework of task characteristics. This framework “builds on that proposed by Bachman (1990) and consists of a set of features for describing five aspects of tasks: setting, test rubrics, input, expected response, and the relationship between input and response” (Bachman and Palmer, 1996, p. 47). According to Kobayashi (2002), this model is the most influential and comprehensive model available. The framework, to Lewkowicz (2000), is important since first, it allows for a degree of agreement among test developers interested in verifying the authenticity of test tasks. Second, it takes into account both the input provided in a test as well as the expected response by characterizing not only test tasks but also test-takers’ interactions with these.

Bachman and Palmer (1996) pointed out that “to determine the degree of correspondence between test tasks and TLU tasks, it is necessary to first identify the critical features that define tasks in the TLU domain” (as cited in Lewkowicz, 2000, p. 49). Lewkowicz (2000) created a list of unresolved questions related the problem of defining critical task characteristics in operationalizing Bachman and Palmer’s framework. One of those questions asks about the effect of authenticity on test-taking processes and strategies. There have been few studies that examined the effect of authenticity on the test-taking strategies that test-takers use in various

situations. Thus the present study investigates the potential effect of the authenticity of texts on reading and test-taking strategies that students use in taking reading tests with multiple-choice and short-answer questions. Also, it explores test-type and gender effect on the use of reading and test-taking strategies.

### **Method**

What follows is an account of the methodology of the study, including the characteristics of the participants, the structure of the materials, and the description of the procedure which has been used in the present study and finally the details of the statistical measures employed to analyze the data collected.

### **Research Questions**

This study is an attempt to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Is there any difference between test-takers' strategy use in tests on authentic reading passages vs. those on simplified ones?
2. Is there any difference between test-takers' strategy use in multiple-choice tests vs. those in short-answer tests?

Is there any difference between male and female test-takers' reading and test-taking strategy use?

### **METHOD:**

What follows is an account of the methodology of the study, including the characteristics of the participants, the structure of the materials, and the description of the procedure which has been used in the present study and finally the details of the statistical measures employed to analyze the data collected.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were 54 freshmen and sophomores studying English Language and Literature at the University. They were 34 female and 20 male students whose age ranged from 19 to 25.

The justification for choosing this group was their very high proficiency of English. There was a reason for this assumption, i.e. in their university entrance exam the students have taken a test of general English .

The reason for selecting proficient English learners was that although both groups of high proficient and low proficient learners have been shown to use many learning strategies, only proficient learners are characterized by their ability to coordinate strategies with task demands and with their own learning style preferences while low proficient learners were deficient in this regard (Yamamori et al., 2003). Since this study investigates text- and task- type effect on

strategy use, it is essential to survey the pattern of strategy use reported by successful learners whose selection of strategies is practical, proper, and meaningful.

The participants were kept naive with respect to the purpose of the tests they took. The test was administered during their regular class time and their teachers told them that the reading test was a requirement for their course.

### **Procedure**

Having obtained the approval of the professors of two classes of freshmen and sophomores, the researcher pre-arranged the time with the two professors for test administration during one of their regular class times. Each of them were given equal number of A and B test booklets and were asked to distribute them randomly to the students of their class so that half of the students of each class received test booklet A (multiple-choice tests) and the other half received test booklet B (short-answer tests). As for one of the questions of the study (test-type effect on test-taking strategy use), it was needed to investigate the difference between the students' strategy use on test booklets A and B. By distributing both versions of the test booklet to each class, the researcher tried to avoid the possible problem of administering one test version to a more proficient group and another test version to a less proficient group.

The students were informed of the test as a requirement for their course. They were asked to cross those items of the questionnaire that corresponded to what they did in reading the passages and answering the questions. In addition, they were asked to answer them honestly and to give their responses according to how they actually did in the test. The actual time allotted to answer the tests was 30 minutes. Total score of the two reading comprehension tests in each booklet was 10, one score for each correct answer (both for multiple-choice and short-answer questions).

### **Materials**

The materials in this study included two test booklets (A & B), each containing two tests of reading comprehension followed by strategy questionnaires. Materials development included the selection and simplification of reading passages, deciding upon the proper test-taking strategies for the questionnaires and the arrangement of the passages as well as their comprehension questions and the questionnaires in two versions of the test booklet. Below is a full account of the characteristics of each section of the tests.

In order to investigate the effect of authenticity of reading comprehension texts on test-takers' strategy use, both authentic and simplified reading passages were required. As it was mentioned before, authenticity has various definitions and this study adopts the one which defines authentic texts as genuine, unaltered texts written by native speakers (Lewkowicz, 2000). Two reading passages were chosen on the basis of their topic and length from one version of the Michigan

Test<sup>3</sup>. The first passage explains the structure and uses of a new drug (interferon) and the second passage describes the historical background of a famous poem (Paul Revere's Ride). Each passage is followed by five multiple-choice questions. The idea behind this selection was that the passages were assumed to be genuine and authentic and the questions have passed standard process of construction.

Next step was to simplify the authentic reading passages. According to Young (1999), different approaches exist for making authentic input more accessible to learners. The most traditional and at same time largely dominant approach is the structural simplification procedure in which long sentences are rewritten in shorter and simpler ones, specialized or low frequency words (on the basis of word lists) are avoided, idiomatic expressions are deleted or rephrased and complicated syntax is revised by using simpler sentence structure.

Concurrent with this approach, various readability formulas have been devised. According to Rezaee (2000), the main function of a readability formula is to indicate understanding and comprehension due to the style of writing. As cited in Rezaee, in their comprehensive study on readability, Gray and Leary (1935) listed the important factors that affect the readability of a passage:

1. Average sentence length
2. percentage of easy words
3. Number of easy words
4. Number of different hard words
5. Minimum syllabic sentence length
6. Number of explicit sentences
7. Number of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> pronouns
8. Maximum syllabic sentence length
9. Average syllabic sentence length
10. Percentage of monosyllables
11. Number of sentences per paragraph
12. Number of simple sentences
13. Percentage of different words
14. Percentage of polysyllables

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- Part 1: A written composition
  - Part 2: A listening comprehension test
  - Part 3: A multiple choice test containing grammar, cloze reading, vocabulary, and reading comprehension
  - Part 4: An oral interview/speaking test (optional).
- (Adopted from: <http://uoregon.edu/~espinoza/mich.html>)

15. Number of prepositional phrases (p. 7)

While many readability formulas have been developed since 1920, almost all of them deal with length of sentences and the number of syllables in words. What is important to these factors is that they have a lot in common with the aspects of structural simplification approach. Recently the validity of readability formulas has been questioned and there has been a quest for devising other techniques for identifying the readability of reading passages (e.g. Rezaee, 2000), comparably, serious limitations have been observed that decrease the effectiveness of linguistic simplification procedure. This approach to simplification can lead to choppy, unnatural discourse models and several studies showed that the use of shorter sentences does not necessarily improve the students' ability to comprehend what they read. Above all, this approach may have negative impact on the process of language learning because removing unknown linguistic forms may deny learners the access to some of the items they need (Yano, Long, & Ross, 1994).

Another approach to text simplification is a simple account instead of a simplified version. Within this approach, the length of a text is shortened and some paragraphs or sections may be deleted. The glossing of words or phrases is another approach which consists of providing definitions of the glossed word either in second or native language. However, as Young (1999) pointed out, research on text glossing indicates that it does not improve reading comprehension.

The last approach is content simplification. Yano, et al. (1994) referred to it as 'elaborative modification' that consists of rewriting authentic text so that explicitness and redundancy can compensate for unfamiliar linguistic items. This type of simplification is based on cognitive processing perspective and includes clarifying, elaborating, explaining and making connections explicit.

### ***Result***

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of the current study is to detect the frequency of reading and test-taking strategies that Iranian EFL students utilize while taking reading comprehension tests. Moreover, the present study intends to shed more light on the potential effect that authenticity of texts (genuineness), variation in test type, and gender exert on the respondents' reported strategy use. To find answers to the proposed null hypotheses in this study, relevant data were gathered through multiple-choice and short-answer tests of reading comprehension along with strategy questionnaires. In chapter three the method of the study was described in detail. This chapter presents a full account of data analysis and the results of the study.

### **4.2. Investigation of the Question Number 1**

In order to assess Iranian EFL university students' reading comprehension test-taking strategies, frequency analysis of the participants' self-reported strategies were conducted. Table 4.1 indicates the frequency and percent of all the strategy items in the questionnaires, including 11

reading strategies (R), 10 test-management strategies (T), 2 general test-wisness strategies (TW), 2 multiple-choice test-management strategies (TMC), 4 multiple-choice test-wisness strategies (TWMC), and finally, 3 short-answer test-wisness strategies (TWSA).

**Table 4.1.** Frequency and Percentage of Reported Reading and Test-taking Strategy Use

Strategy	Frequency	Percent
R1. I read the instructions before the test.	46	46.9
R2. I use general knowledge outside the text in order to cope with the text.	32	32.6
R3. I read the whole passage carefully.	63	64.2
R4. I read the whole passage rapidly.	45	45.9
R5. I identify an unknown word or phrase.	43	43.8
R6. During reading I reread to clarify the idea.	61	62.2
R7. During reading I ask if previous understanding is still accurate given new information.	38	38.7
R8. I look for sentences that convey the main ideas.	70	71.4
R9. I note the different parts of the passage (introduction, examples, transitions, etc.) and how they interrelate.	39	39.7
R10. I use logical connectors to clarify content and passage organization (e.g., 'First of all', 'On the other hand', 'In conclusion').	50	51
R11. I verify the referent of pronouns.	39	39.7
T1. First I read the passage and then the questions.	63	64.2
T2. First I read the questions and then the passage.	32	32.6
T3. I read one question at a time and then answer it.	61	62.2
T4. I reread the question for clarification.	60	61.2
T5. I read the questions and return to the passage to look for the correct answer.	70	71.4
T6. I read all the questions before I start answering.	23	23.4
T7. I make an educated guess (e.g., using background knowledge or extra-textual knowledge).	29	29.5
T8. I predict or produce my answer after reading the question before returning to passage and answering the question.	37	37.7
T9. I answer the question on the basis of a general understanding of the passage.	49	50
T10. I choose the answer through deductive reasoning.	42	42.8
TW1. I use clues in other questions to answer an item under consideration.	39	39.7
TW2. I make a blind guess not based on any particular rationale.	7	7.1
TMC1. I consider the options and focus on a familiar option.	23	46
TMC2. I select an option because the other options did not seem	18	36

reasonable or understandable.

TWMC1. I select an option even though it is not understood, out of a vague sense that the other options couldn't be correct.	4	8
TWMC2. I select an option because it appears to have a word or phrase from the passage in it – possibly a key word.	11	22
TWMC3. I select an option because it is different in its length/location/ wording structure from other options	4	8
TWMC4. I match words or phrases in the question to similar ones in the passage or in the options.	24	48
TWSA1. I match words or phrases in the question to similar ones in the passage.	26	54.1
TWSA2. I write a general answer.	16	33.3
TWSA3. I copy a sentence or part as the answer.	23	47.9

The frequency of each item represents the number of times the item was marked in both of the questionnaires. Figure 4.1 gives a schematic representation of the percentages of reported strategies.

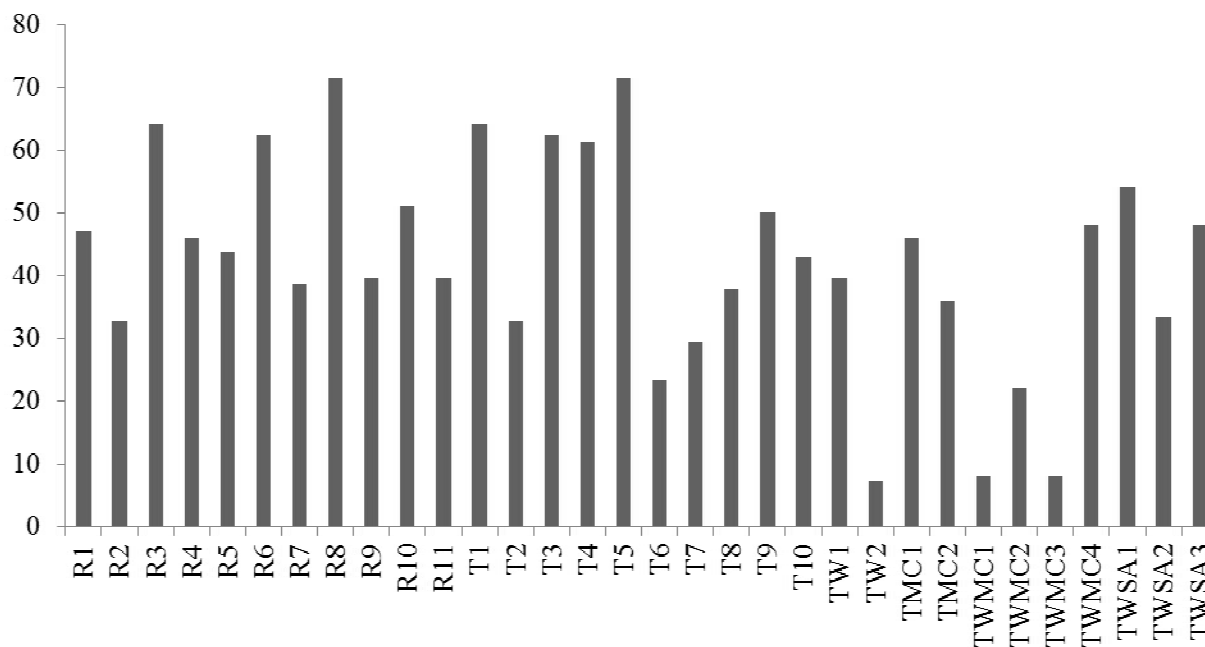


Figure 4.1. Percentage of Reported Reading and Test-taking Strategy Use

As shown in Table 4.1, items R8 ‘I look for sentences that convey the main ideas’ and T5 ‘I read the questions and return to the passage to look for the correct answer’ were equally the most frequently used strategies and item TW2 ‘I make a blind guess not based on any particular



*rationale*' was the least frequently used strategy. However, the percentage for items TWMC1 '*I select an option even though it is not understood, out of a vague sense that the other options couldn't be correct*' and TWMC3 '*I select an option because it is different in its length/location/ wording structure from other options*' were quite low and so close to that of TW2. Results show that the participants did not utilize all the strategies in the questionnaires.

### 4.3. Investigation of the Question Number 2

The first null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference between test-takers' strategy use in tests on authentic reading passages with those on simplified reading passages. In order to test this null hypothesis, the participants' reported test-taking strategies in authentic and simplified reading texts were assessed. Table 4.2 presents the related descriptive statistics. A point should be clarified that the number of participants is different among the categories of strategies. The reason is that the first three categories of strategies were included in both test booklets and responded by all the participants. However, the other categories are test-type specific and included in one of the test booklets and responded by half of the participants.

**Table 4.2.** Descriptive Statistics of Reported Strategy Use for Authentic and Simplified Reading Texts

Strategies	N	Authentic		Simplified	
		M	SD	M	SD
R	49	4.9	2.1	4.7	2
T	49	4.8	1.56	4.8	1.55
TW	49	0.51	0.54	0.41	0.53
TMC	25	0.96	0.73	0.48	0.58
TWMC	25	0.8	0.7	0.88	0.66
TWSA	24	1.5	0.93	0.83	0.38

N=number of respondents, M=mean, SD=standard deviation

Results are reported in terms of mean scores of the six categories of strategies for authentic and simplified types of texts. As can be seen in the table, the mean scores of strategy use (R, TW, TMC, and TWSA) for authentic texts were higher than those for simplified texts. In order to see whether the differences were significant or not, paired-samples t-test was performed. Results showed significant difference for two categories of strategies, i.e., multiple-choice test-management strategies,  $t(24) = 3.674, p = .001$ , and short-answer test-wiseness strategies,  $t(23) = 4.29, p = .000$  (at  $P < .05$  level of significance). Therefore, the participants reported using significantly more TMC and TWSA strategies on authentic reading tests than simplified ones and the first null hypothesis is rejected.

#### 4.4. Investigation of the Question Number 3

As proposed by null hypothesis 2, there is no significant difference between test-takers' strategy use in multiple-choice tests with that in short-answer tests. In order to test this null hypothesis, the participants' reported test-taking strategies in multiple-choice and short-answer tests were assessed. Table 4.3 represents the related descriptive statistics.

**Table 4.3.** Descriptive Statistics of Reported Strategy Use for Multiple-choice and Short-answer Questions

Strategy	N	Multiple-choice		Short-answer	
		M	SD	M	SD
R	24	5.04	1.75	7.04	1.85
T	24	4.67	1.57	4.88	1.56
TW	24	0.46	0.5	0.38	0.57

Results are reported in terms of mean scores of the three categories of strategies (reading, test-management, and test-wiseness) that were shared by both questionnaires on multiple-choice and short-answer tests. In order to see whether the differences between reported strategies in multiple-choice and short answer tests were significant or not, paired-samples t-test was run. Results showed significant difference for the category of reading strategies,  $t(23) = 3.562$ ,  $p = .002$ . Thus the participants employed significantly more reading strategies in short-answer tests of reading comprehension than multiple-choice tests. As a result of this, the second null hypothesis is rejected.

#### 4.5. Investigation of the Question Number 4

The third null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference between male and female participants' reading and test-taking strategy use. In order to screen the data against this null hypothesis, male and female participants' reports on the use of all six categories of strategies were examined. The related descriptive statistics is presented in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4.** Descriptive Statistics of Reported Strategy Use for Male and Female Participants

Strategy	Male			Female		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
R	15	7.2	1.78	34	5.00	2.17
T	15	4	1.19	34	5.85	1.45
TW	15	0.47	0.51	34	0.38	0.55
TMC	10	1.6	0.51	15	0.67	0.61
TWMC	10	1.4	0.51	15	0.40	0.5
TWSA	5	0.6	0.54	19	1.58	0.5

As shown in the table, there is difference between male and females' reported test-taking strategy use. Females employed more test-management and short-answer test-wiseness strategies than males, while males employed more reading, test-wiseness, multiple-choice test-management, and multiple-choice test-wiseness strategies than females. Independent-samples t-test was performed in order to see whether the differences between males' and females' reported strategies were significant or not (see Table 4.5).

**Table 4.5.** T-test Results for Gender Difference in Test-taking Strategy Use

Strategy	df	t	Sig.
R	47	3.437	0.001
T	47	4.314	0.000
TW	47	0.503	0.618
TMC	23	3.943	0.001
TWMC	23	4.796	0.000
TWSA	22	3.783	0.001

Results showed that females reported using significantly more T strategies and TWSA strategies than did males. However, males reported using significantly more R strategies, TMC strategies, and TWMC strategies than did females. Therefore, the third null hypothesis is rejected.

#### 4.6. Analysis of the Final Evaluation Questions

As to the final parts of the questionnaires, the students were asked to write their answers to two questions regarding their evaluations of the passages as well as the strategies. Since the participants might behave differently in reading authentic and simplified texts, the first question asked whether they perceived one passage to be more difficult than the other. The second question asked about the students' evaluation of the strategies, and whether they regarded all or some them as helpful in taking reading comprehension tests. It aimed to discover the participants' perspective on test-wiseness strategies.

With respect to the first question, the students' responses varied across the two test booklets. Out of 25 students who responded to test booklet A (multiple-choice tests), 12 students considered the authentic passage as the more difficult passage. They pointed to some features of the passage that resulted in its difficulty, for example its 'scientific subject', 'more difficult words', length, and 'difficult questions'. 5 students chose the simplified passage as the difficult passage; their reasons were their lack of background knowledge, the passage being 'confusing' and 'concise', and its 'difficult questions'. Finally, 4 students regarded neither of the passages as being difficult and 4 students did not answer this question.

However, out of 24 students who responded to test booklet B (short-answer tests), 9 considered the authentic passage and 10 considered the simplified one as the more difficult passage. They stated some reasons for recognizing the authentic passage more difficult than the simplified one. For example, they pointed that they 'had no background knowledge about it', the passage contained 'new words' and 'proper nouns', it had an 'old-fashioned style', and it was 'about history'. The students who chose the simplified passage mentioned reasons such as its 'more complicated topic' and its length. In addition, 3 students regarded neither of the passages as being difficult and 2 students did not answer these questions. It should be noted that these students reported using significantly more test-taking strategies in authentic passage, as did the students who responded to test booklet A.

Regarding the second question, 43 students out of 49 answered this question and except one student, all of them regarded the strategies helpful. Moreover, 17 students pointed out that some of the strategies cannot assist in reading comprehension and referred to some test-wiseness items as examples of such strategies.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Considering the need for discerning the processes and strategies that test-takers employ in responding to test tasks, the present study set out to examine the effect of text authenticity, variation in response format (multiple-choice and short-answer questions), and gender on reading and test-taking strategies that Iranian learners of English as a foreign language use in reading comprehension tests. This study examined the supposed superiority of authentic texts to inauthentic (simplified) texts in testing reading ability.

Analysis of the reported test-taking strategy use revealed that the participants used equal reading, test-management, test-wiseness, and multiple-choice test-wiseness strategies in authentic and simplified passages. Therefore, the authentic passages did not affect the number of these types of strategies used by test-takers. However, in the authentic passage of test booklet A, the participants used significantly more multiple-choice test-management strategies than they did in the simplified passage and in the authentic passage of test booklet B, the participants used significantly more short-answer test-wiseness strategies than they did in simplified texts. In other words, authentic passage led the participants who responded to multiple-choice questions to use more multiple-choice test-management strategies and led the participants who responded to short-answer questions to use more short-answer test-wiseness strategies. The reason may be the difficulty of the authentic passage which resulted in using more test-management and test-wiseness strategies to arrive at an answer instead of using reading strategies.

However, these two categories of strategies together comprise only 5 items of the questionnaires and they are test-type specific strategies. It can be concluded that in comparison to the wide range of test-taking strategies assessed, genuine texts affect only a narrow set of strategies and their effect is negligible. In other words, genuine unaltered texts written by native speakers do

not prove to be superior to simplified texts in testing reading ability. Similarly, Spence-Brown (2001) suggested that authenticity must be viewed in terms of the implementation of an activity, not its design.

In addition to the participants' strategic behavior, their perspective on the difference between authentic and simplified passages has been assessed. Analysis of the final evaluation questions revealed that not all the participants considered the authentic passages as more difficult than the simplified passages. These results are consistent with those of Lewkowicz (2000) who concluded that test-takers were willing and able to identify the attributes of a test which may affect their performance. However, these attributes did not necessarily include authenticity which has been considered an important test attribute in the testing process. Therefore, the theoretical importance of authentic materials in language assessment is questionable, lacks the practical investigation, and needs more investigation.

With regard to the variation in response format, the participants reacted quite differently. They did not use significantly more test-management and test-wiseness strategies in short-answer or multiple-choice tests and the type of test had no effect on the frequency of such strategies. On the contrary, they used significantly more reading strategies in short-answer tests than they did in multiple-choice tests. It can be inferred that short-answer tests are more demanding on the part of the reader because they are required to produce a language sample rather than just selecting a response from among alternatives. These findings are in line with the findings of previous research which pointed to the marked difference in performance as well as in processing of multiple-choice and short-answer questions (Stathman, 1980; Bender, 1982; Lee, 1989; Wolf, 1993; Kobayashi, 2002; Brantmeier, 2005).

As far as gender effect is concerned, strategy research has yielded various results. However, most of research has demonstrated increasing evidence of females using more strategies more frequently than males or, at least, they use strategies differently (Macaro, 2006). Results of the present study showed that females used significantly more test-management strategies and short-answer test-wiseness strategies than did males, but unexpectedly males used significantly more reading, multiple-choice test-management, and multiple-choice test-wiseness strategies than did females. It should be noted that for all six categories of strategies, females outnumbered males by more than 50%; however this unexpected gender effect is reflected in three categories of reading, multiple-choice test-management, and multiple-choice test-wiseness strategies.

Similar to the findings of Wharton (2000), these results showed that males used more categories of strategies more frequently than females. This contradicts Green and Oxford's (1995) assumption that research has demonstrated increasing evidence of females using more strategies more frequently than males. In a similar vein to Young and Oxford (1997), it can be concluded that gender-based differences in strategic behavior might not be present in general categories, but rather at the level of specific strategies.

In conclusion, as mentioned above, Iranian university students did not employ all reading and test-taking strategies. This could be due to several reasons. First and foremost, it is quite possible that the students are just not aware of the wide choice of strategies available. In fact, some students wrote comments on the last part of the questionnaires that they did not know there were so many strategies for taking reading comprehension tests and said that they actually found some of them helpful. Second, the students may have already discovered some strategies and actively use them discarding the rest. The important issue is that students should be exposed to as many strategies as it is possible to choose the ones that are more suitable to them based on their personality and motivation

### **Implications**

As to the application of the results of this study to language teaching/learning, the attention of both teachers and students must be drawn to the role of test-taking strategies. Most of the L2 teachers not only are not aware of these strategies but also they do not possess specific skills such as the ability to incorporate strategy instruction in their classrooms, to assess students' strategy use appropriately, and sometimes to develop appropriate materials for teaching strategies or assessing them that is required for effective delivering of test-taking strategies to their students. The application of the findings of the present study to teacher training programs entails the development of understanding and techniques for delivering effective test-taking strategy instruction in teachers.

In L2 classrooms, the primary task of the language teachers should be to make the students aware of the whole body of test-taking strategies available for better performance on language tests and have them critically reflect upon their own preferences towards such strategies. Teachers will be able to identify their students' pattern of test-taking strategy use through observations, questionnaires, interviews, personal diaries, think aloud protocols and other available means and supply them with a variety of test-taking strategies that are unfamiliar to their students.

After identifying students' preferences towards test-taking strategies, teachers should discuss the strategy items individually, solicit the students' opinion on each strategy, and have them consider the value and purpose of each strategy for taking language tests. As far as the results of the present study are concerned, teachers should try to discourage students from using test-wisness strategies. Instead, they should encourage students to utilize test-management strategies.

Finally, considering the need for a more thorough understanding of the processes and strategies employed by test-takers, any language test should go under validity analyses from test-takers' perspectives prior to the administration of the test to see whether the processes that test-takers go through to get answers right or wrong correspond to the intended processes; in other words, to see when and how they employ test-wisness strategies. Language test developers should make attempts to construct tests which do not lend themselves to test-wisness strategy use.

Additionally, they should be aware of the various test types and the effect that they may exert on test-takers' strategy use.

### **5.5. Suggestions for Further Research**

Further research on Test-taking strategies in the Iranian EFL context could concentrate on the following issues:

1. This study investigated the authenticity of texts. Further research can focus on the effect of authenticity of tasks on test-taking strategies.
2. The participants of the present study were all university students who were assumed to be advanced learners. Further research can address students with different proficiency levels and from different contexts, such as language institutes to gain a thorough understanding of reading comprehension test-taking strategies.
3. The single strategy assessment tool employed in this research was the questionnaire. Future studies can implement other tools (think-aloud protocols and interview) as well.
4. Further studies can investigate the effect of other reading test types (e.g. written and oral recall, cloze, sentence completion, true/false, matching activity, checklist, and fill-in-the-blank) on the use of test-taking strategies.

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