# Test-Taking Strategies in Reading Comprehension Tests: Insights from Freshman and Senior High School EFL Learners

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## Abstract

Test-taking strategies (TTSs) have been found to be closely related to EFL learners' successful language acquisition. However, such strategies have received scant attention from a language testing perspective (Bachman, 1990). The current mixed-methods study aimed to investigate Iranian freshman and senior high school EFL learners' use of TTSs in reading comprehension tests and their perceptions of TTSs. To this end, 30 freshman and 30 senior high school EFL learners were selected from a public high school in Tabriz, Iran. The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire on TTSs. Afterward, six participants (three from each grade) were randomly invited for semi-structured interviews. SPSS software (version 27) was used to analyze the quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires, while the content analysis approach was utilized to analyze the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that senior participants used monitoring strategy the most, while freshman participants mostly used planning strategy. It was also found that both groups of participants had positive perceptions towards learning, teaching, and using TTSs. Implications are also presented as to the need for incorporating TTSs into teaching/learning methodologies, curricula, and materials.

**Keywords***:* High School EFL Learners, Monitoring, Planning, Reading Comprehension Tests, Test-Taking Strategies

## Introduction

English, as a foreign language, has gained significant attention around the world. Thus, becoming a proficient speaker of English has been thought to be essential in schools, academia, interactional settings, and workplaces. Due to the importance of English language proficiency, language tests have been popular in gauging learners' linguistic abilities in educational domains. The use of tests as measurement devices may be attributed to their cost-effective and time-saving characteristics. The way learners perform on tests can determine if they will be academically successful (Tunaz & Tüm, 2019). The results learners obtain on tests could be affected by cognitive, psychological, and test-administration factors (Hambleton et al., 1991). Consequently, research has demonstrated the critical role of TTSs in enhancing the performances of students in exams. Thus, the results obtained from language tests are highly crucial because they are life-changing or high-stakes for learners (Douglas, 2010). Following that, making use of TTSs helps learners achieve higher scores on language tests. Furthermore, those who are involved in constructing language tests should take into consideration that TTSs could be used by learners on the day of examination, and they should also be aware of the test content (Pourdana et al., 2012).

Reading comprehension is very common and important in real-life situations, such as education, workplace communication, healthcare, financial literacy, and daily activities. Particularly, the importance of reading comprehension can be related to language teaching contexts, as it is the fundamental way of gaining new information for EFL learners and is regarded as a highly significant factor for determining success in language learning (Pourmohammadi, 2015). At the same time, it is a very complicated procedure in which readers are expected to understand the connections between the ideas in the text and deploy their mental processes to interpret the information. According to Veeravagu et al. (2010, p. 206), reading comprehension is "a thinking process by which a reader selects facts, information, or ideas from printed materials; decides how they relate to previous knowledge; and judges their appropriateness and worth for meeting the learner's own objectives". Tests, as previously stated, are the most widely used tools for measuring learners' linguistic knowledge, and of course, this also holds true for assessing reading comprehension. Learners' test-taking performance in general and their reading comprehension abilities in particular are enhanced by the use of TTSs (Pour Mohammadi & Abidin, 2011). It is important to discover the mental processes involved in taking tests and how students submit their answers (McCaffrey & Lockwood, 2004). Also, it is highly important and helpful for learners to become familiar with TTSs, which are regarded as necessary to perform well on reading comprehension tests, such as struggling with difficult words that hinder them from understanding the main idea of the text (Cubuku, 2008). Yet, only a few studies have investigated the use of such strategies in school settings, although there has been a plethora of studies on TTSs (for example, Al Fraidan & AlSalman, 2023; Singh et al., 2021; Tran & Nguyen, 2023; Tunaz & Gülden, 2019; Waiprakhon & Jaturapitakkul (2018), to name a few). Furthermore, no study has investigated high schoolers' use of TTSs in the context of Iran, which justifies the necessity of conducting the current study to present illuminating results for the pertinent stakeholders. Therefore, this study investigated the TTSs used by Iranian freshman and senior high school EFL learners in reading comprehension tests. Also, it was aimed at investigating learners' perceptions

of TTSs on language tests. Consequently, the following research questions were formulated for the purpose of this study:

1. What TTSs do Iranian freshman high school EFL learners frequently use in reading comprehension tests?

2. What TTSs do Iranian senior high school EFL learners frequently use in reading comprehension tests?

3. Is there any significant difference between the TTSs used by Iranian freshman and senior high school EFL learners in reading comprehension tests?

4. What are Iranian freshman and senior high school EFL learners' perceptions of TTSs?

## Literature Review

### Test-Taking Strategies

There are a wide variety of definitions for the term TTSs. Cohen and Upton (2007) stated that TTSs are techniques that assist learners in completing test tasks. Allan and MacLennan (1997) considered TTSs as the ability of testees to answer test items without resorting to their knowledge or skills that are really meant to be measured by the test. From Bruch's (1981) point of view, TTSs are regarded as procedures that help test takers solve test tasks successfully. According to Rupp et al. (2006), TTSs are concerned with test takers' use of strategies while taking a test without considering the format of the test, text-related strategies that could be used with certain texts, and selections that are made on item-related strategies. Cohen (1998) suggested two subcategories for TTSs. He argued that TTSs include strategies for language use and strategies for test-wiseness. The former refers to intentional actions taken by language learners to improve their proficiency in using L2 for the purpose of accomplishing certain language tasks successfully. In this case, learners are expected to employ various strategies, including recalling information, revision, covering, and coping. On the other hand, the latter is concerned with testees' prior test-taking experience rather than their language proficiency.

Subsequently, another model was offered by Cohen (2006), in which TTSs were classified as strategies for language learning, test management, and test-wiseness. Strategies for language learning refer to learners' previously learned linguistic skills and components. Test management strategies are concerned with the operations used by testees to answer test items meaningfully. Strategies for test-wiseness refer to test takers' knowledge of test format and other peripheral information needed to respond to test items successfully. It is worth mentioning that strategies for test-wiseness are not indicative of competence in the construct being measured.

In addition to the existing models of TTSs in the literature, Barati (2005) proposed one of the most practical and intelligible models in which TTSs were divided into four categories as follows:

*Planning:* Previewing or overviewing test items to find out what actions should be taken

*Monitoring:* Addressing ambiguity in the comprehension of the language

*Evaluation:* Checking comprehension or production after completing the test tasks

*Test-wiseness:* Operations concerned with the knowledge of how the test should be taken

In this study, owing to the apparent nature of Barati's model, the researchers adopted it to discover what TTSs are used by Iranian freshman and senior high school EFL learners in reading comprehension tests.

## Reading Comprehension

According to Rahmani and Sadeghi (2011), reading comprehension is a process that involves the use of test takers' linguistic competence, world schematic knowledge, and particular topical knowledge. Reading comprehension is one of the most basic ways to learn new information and is a crucial ability for language acquisition success (Pourmohammadi, 2015). There are several definitions of reading comprehension in the literature. Chastain (1988) observed that reading comprehension is a receptive ability that seeks to decode the process of language. Reading comprehension involves the transfer of meaning from one entity to another, such as information from an author to a reader, so Nuttall (1996) claims that reading comprehension and meaning are closely intertwined. According to Radojevic (2009), two distinct types of information are necessary for reading comprehension: what readers already know and what they take in from the text. She also emphasized how important it is for students to draw meaning from their prior knowledge and experiences while they are trying to understand the meaning of a topic. According to her, the ability of test takers to comprehend the meaning of a particular passage is the focus of reading comprehension. Her definition appears to be in line with schema theory, in which readers' understanding of a given topic successfully is dependent on their prior background knowledge of the passage and the way they interact with it.

## Test-Taking Strategies and Reading Comprehension Test Performance

Empirical evidence supports the claim that there is a positive go-togetherness between TTSs and optimal performance on reading comprehension tests (Huang, 2016; Lee, 201, Akefi, & Ramazani, 2024). Nevertheless, the efficacy of TTSs is dependent on the testees' proficiency level, schematic knowledge, test format and type, sex, culture, L1, anxiety, motivation, or attitudes towards the test (Hambleton et al., 1991). Consequently, it is fair to say that different strategies lead to different test results.

Nourdad and Ajideh (2019) stated that in order to answer a particular task in a reading comprehension test, testees make use of a wide variety of TTSs. To make this point more vivid, it should be noted that test takers should refrain from making haphazard guesses and make educated guesses, drawing upon their background knowledge instead. Similarly, Roger and Harley (1999) recommended students take into consideration the features of the tests they are taking, attentively read the instructions, assess the total point value of all the test items, and effectively manage the time given. Additionally, in order to make intertextual inferences, it is advised that important details and semantic hints be taken from various sections of the reading passage as well as the

questions themselves in order to reduce the number of options. All in all, these strategies guarantee the likelihood of getting a better score.

**Previous Studies on Test-Taking Strategies and Reading Comprehension Tests**

There has been an increasing amount of research on TTSs over the last thirty years. Cohen and Upton (2007) aimed at identifying the TTSs that EFL testees found useful when answering a TOEFL subtest. They found that while some test-takers used more test-taking and test-management techniques, highly proficient test-takers mostly used academic reading skills to comprehend the test. Zhang et al. (2011) investigated the frequency of TTSs used at the tertiary level. Their results revealed that EFL learners made moderate use of TTSs. Furthermore, they found that compensation strategies were used most frequently, followed by affective, metacognitive, social, cognitive, and memory strategies. Additionally, a significant relationship was found between the overall use of strategies and various types of English TTSs. Kashkouli et al. (2015) investigated the use of TTSs by advanced, intermediate, and elementary MA applicants in TEFL on the Iranian National Entrance Examination. They found that the intermediate applicants demonstrated a higher utilization of TTSs compared to the others. The findings also revealed a strong preference for monitoring and evaluation strategies over other TTSs. Waiprakhon and Jaturapitakkul (2018) studied the use of TTSs by undergraduate students in the reading section of a computer-based ESP proficiency test called the Test of English for Thai Engineers and Technologists (TETET). They found that test-wiseness strategies were used the least and test-management ones were the most commonly used throughout all TETET reading subsections. Furthermore, the item types in the subsections and the types of TTSs employed were in agreement. Nourdad and Ajideh (2019), in their mixed-methods study, investigated the relationship between male and female university students' TTSs and their performance on reading comprehension tests. The results indicated that there was a positive relationship between TTSs and reading comprehension performance, and there were differences among successful, fairly successful, and unsuccessful testees with respect to their use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Finally, they found that metacognitive TTSs were utilized more than cognitive ones. Singh et al. (2021) explored the TTSs used by ESL learners in a course on English proficiency. As for their findings, participants said that reading and comprehending the passage improved their ability to make deductions when responding to the multiple-choice items. It was also found that they frequently attempted to guess the answers as part of a compensatory plan. In one of the recent studies, Tran and Nguyen (2023) set out to investigate Vietnamese EFL learners' use of TTSs on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). They found that the participants frequently used reading TTSs. Furthermore, they made use of memory and compensating TTSs more frequently than affective, cognitive, and metacognitive ones. Al Fardin and Al Salman (2023) probed Saudi high school EFL learners' use of TTSs on vocabulary tests. The participants used a variety of TTSs, such as inquiring about instructions, eliminating options, responding after reading all questions, and selecting answers at random. Some other students used TTSs imprudently, for example, reading questions and instructions only in part or skipping them entirely and selecting responses at random. To reiterate, it is wise to delve into the use of TTSs in high school EFL settings since such contexts have received scant attention in the literature. Moreover, contexts like

Iran have not been touched upon yet. Thus, it provides a rationale for conducting the current study in order to bridge the gap in this regard.

## Method

### The Design of the Study

In order to investigate Iranian freshman and senior high school EFL learners' use of TTSs in reading comprehension tests and their perceptions of TTSs, the researchers opted for both quantitative and qualitative data. To that end, a mixed-methods design was selected. Specifically, the researchers opted for explanatory mixed methods, wherein quantitative data were collected in the first phase and qualitative data were collected in the second.

### Participants

At the beginning of the project, it was planned to have 60 male and 60 female participants. However, due to unforeseen administrative challenges and lack of cooperation with the researchers, the sample was limited to solely 60 male subjects. Thus, the sample included 60 Iranian high school EFL learners (30 freshmen and 30 seniors), who were selected through convenience sampling from a public high school in Tabriz, which is located in the northwestern part of Iran. This type of sampling was preferred because it is the most commonly used one in the field of second language research and is usually used when researchers base their sampling procedure on convenience and availability or when participants enjoy some key characteristics that are in line with the purpose of the researcher (Dörnyei, 2007). Furthermore, all of the participants were males, who ranged in age from 15 to 18 years old. It is also worth mentioning that all of them were native speakers of Azeri and Persian.

### Data Collection Tools

The following tools were used for data collection purposes.

#### Test-Taking Strategy Questionnaire

A questionnaire on TTSs was adopted from Barati (2005). In order to ensure expert validation, a competent professor in ELT was asked to check the validity of its content. Following satisfaction with the content validity, it was adapted to meet the objectives of this study. It should be mentioned that adaption was restricted to only changing the tenses from simple past to simple present; therefore, it did not threaten the constructs. Furthermore, all the items were translated from English into Persian to avoid confusion on the part of the participants. This process was also cross-checked by a competent candidate in English translation studies. The questionnaire contained a total of 27 items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *never* (1) to *sometimes* (2), *often* (3), *usually* (4), and *always* (5). The participants were required to tick the questionnaire in a way that indicated the frequency with which they used each strategy. According to Barati (2005), six questions were focused on planning strategy, 13 questions on monitoring strategy, four questions on evaluation strategy, and four questions on test-wiseness strategy. However, it is worth mentioning that based on the piloting results, malfunctioning items were eliminated to obtain a reliable level of Cronbach's alpha in both English and Persian versions of the questionnaire. Therefore, the revised questionnaire had the following four clusters of items: two questions on planning, 12 questions on

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monitoring, two questions on evaluation, and two questions on test-wiseness. Planning strategy included items on "being aware that a course of action needs to be taken" and "deciding to postpone responding to difficult questions". Monitoring strategy incorporated items on "responding to shorter text's items before longer ones", "planning how to complete the test and following the plan throughout", "translating test items and responses into L1", "devoting more time to difficult items", "reading items and choices many times", "thinking about the meaning of test items before responding", "using schematic knowledge to answer test items", "being aware of what and how to do it during the test", "double-checking responses to previous items while completing the test", "correcting mistakes on the spot after spotting them", "asking the tutor for clarification in order to find some clues to responses", and "being aware of how far into the test it is throughout the process of test taking". Evaluation strategy held items on "responding to some items based on the clues found in the other ones" and "marking a predetermined choice when no item seems correct". Test-wiseness strategy contained items on "carefully watching progress to complete the test in a timely manner" and "ensuring the accuracy of answers as progressing throughout the test".

### *Semi-Structured Interview*

Concerning the participants' perceptions of TTSs, a semi-structured interview was employed by the researchers. This type of interview was preferred because it leads to follow-up questions, which clarify the nature of the responses better. The interview was composed of three open-ended questions, which were formulated by the first researcher (see Appendix), based on a comprehensive examination of the research area, and were tailored to address the specific objectives of the study, ensuring that the information gathered would be pertinent to the research inquiry. The other researchers cross-checked the questions. Also, in order to ensure expert validation, the interview questions were presented at a scheduled meeting to a competent professor in TEFL, who was asked to provide feedback and validation. The professor's comments mostly addressed how the questions were relevant and clear to understand in light of the study's goals. Their insightful feedback resulted in a few minor rewordings of the questions to improve clarity and ensure alignment with the study objectives.

### Procedure

Prior to data collection, in order to ensure ethical issues in research, the researchers obtained consent from the principal of the school. Then, they met the instructor of each grade to discuss the purpose of the study and the timeline of the classes. It is worth noting that there were two stages to the data collection process. In the first stage, the researchers briefly explained to both groups of participants (i.e., freshman and senior) what TTSs meant. Then, they were instructed to tick the questionnaire to indicate how frequently they employ each TTS.

In the second stage, six interviewees (three freshmen and three seniors) were recruited by the researchers based on their availability. After receiving their permission for audio recording, the interview sessions were conducted. Each participant was asked three questions on TTSs for 10 to 15 minutes, with an average interview time of 13 minutes, and their responses were audio-recorded to be transcribed. In order to avoid confusion, the interview was conducted in the participants' native languages (i.e., Azeri or Persian). Afterward, the transcribed files were coded inductively.

**Data Analysis**

As for analyzing the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires, the researchers entered the data into SPSS (version 27) to calculate descriptive statistics for each Likert-type item. First of all, the scores of students on the four different TTSs were calculated by adding up the values for each cluster of items. Then, the resultant values were changed into Z scores in order to make the clusters comparable. Finally, after meeting the assumptions of parametric tests, an independent samples t-test was used to discover whether there was a significant difference between the TTSs used by Iranian freshman and senior high school EFL learners in reading comprehension tests.

As for analyzing the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, the researchers used the content analysis approach in order to log the occurrence of salient themes in the participants' responses. Specifically, the process was carried out in six stages: (1) transcripts were carefully reviewed to fully understand the responses of the participants; (2) on the basis of important concepts, pertinent segments of the transcripts were coded; (3) these initial codes were organized into categories; (4) the initial codes underwent a thorough review to ensure accuracy and consistency in capturing the main points of the participants' responses; (5) the reviewed codes were consolidated into final codes; and (6) overarching themes that indicated recurrent patterns and insights were extracted from the finalized codes.

## Results and Discussion

The first research question is about what TTSs Iranian freshman high school EFL learners frequently use in reading comprehension tests. Table 1 presents the results in this regard.

**Table 1**

Test-Taking Strategies Used by Iranian Freshman High School EFL Learners in Reading Comprehension Tests

| Test-taking strategy | $Z$ score |
| --- | --- |
| Planning | 1.34 |
| Monitoring | -21.65 |
| Evaluation | -0.68 |
| Test-Wiseness | -0.67 |

As for the results obtained from the Iranian freshman high school EFL learners, Table 1 indicates that planning, test-wiseness, evaluation, and monitoring strategies were the most frequently used TTS, respectively.

Based on the results mentioned above, it can be realized that Iranian freshman high school EFL learners utilize planning strategy the most in reading comprehension tests. The results lend support to Molavi et al.'s (2021) study, in which successful Iranian male and female TEFL entrance exam candidates employed planning strategy most commonly. This can be interpreted that Iranian freshman high school EFL learners are in favor of planning what course of action needs to be taken in advance in order to answer test items. This lends support to Bachman and Palmers' (2010) statement that it is the product of planning strategy that leads to answering test items. Furthermore, another possible interpretation is that by means of planning, Iranian freshman high school EFL test takers tend to activate their topic familiarity and linguistic knowledge in order to organize their answers properly. This is also in harmony with Bachman and Palmers' (2010) observation that answering test items successfully involves testees' identification of a number of elements from their topical and language knowledge to form some mental plans. Finally, the use of planning is analogous to how builders construct a building. In order to have a strong foundation, each structure needs to be planned in advance. After such planning, buildings are constructed successfully. Iranian freshman high school EFL learners seem to apply the same procedure to language testing in such a way that proper planning leads to proper responses to test items. By and large, it can be remarked that without preparation, the test's outcome would not be encouraging.

The second research question deals with the TTSs Iranian senior high school EFL learners frequently use in reading comprehension tests. Table 2 shows the results accordingly.

**Table 2**

Test-Taking Strategies Used by Iranian Senior High School EFL Learners in Reading Comprehension Tests

| Test-taking strategy | *Z* score |
| --- | --- |
| Planning | -1.34 |
| Monitoring | 21.65 |
| Evaluation | 0.68 |
| Test-Wiseness | 0.67 |

As regards the results pertaining to the Iranian senior high school EFL learners, Table 2 reveals that monitoring, evaluation, test-wiseness, and planning were the most frequently used TTSs, respectively.

The afore-mentioned results show that Iranian senior high school EFL learners employ monitoring strategy the most in reading comprehension tests. The results are consistent with Kashkouli et al.'s (2015) study, in which monitoring was the most frequently used TTS by the applicants of the MA entrance exam in TEFL. The results are also congruent with Kashkouli and

Barati's (2013) study, in which monitoring was used most frequently compared to other TTSs. A possible interpretation with respect to the occurrence of the above-mentioned result is that Iranian senior high school EFL learners are serious about taking tests and worried about getting their answers wrong; so, they monitor their performance while taking tests. This is supported by Jamil et al. (2010), who stated that monitoring indicated that the test takers were genuinely focused on choosing the correct answers and took the test seriously, as their concerns about making incorrect decisions were evident. They were aware of their actions and cared about selecting the right responses during the test.

By the same token, their use of monitoring TTS could be considered an effective technique to take care of their nervousness while taking language tests. This is in line with Delavari and Nourdad (2017), who stated that when taking language tests, EFL students should employ monitoring TTS to lower test anxiety, boost performance, and increase exam success overall. What is more, they may be aware that in order to improve their success in academia in the future, they need to learn how to perform independently. This is in agreement with Bagheri (2015), who remarked that monitoring greatly improves critical thinking and self-regulation skills—all of which are necessary for academic success for EFL learners. All in all, it can be realized that by means of self-monitoring, learners are equipped with an eagle's eye outlook, which aids in the discovery of discrepancies, prompts reanalysis of the fuzzy sections, and enhances overall performance on language tests.

The third research question was about whether there is a significant difference between the TTSs used by Iranian freshman and senior high school EFL learners in reading comprehension tests. The results of the independent samples t-test to seek such a difference are shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3**

Independent Samples T-test Comparing Freshman and Senior Learners in Reading Comprehension Tests

| Independent Samples t-test | t | *df* | Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | -6.283 | 58 | .000 |

As shown in Table 3, the *p*-value (i.e., Sig) in the results of the independent samples t-test test was .000. This value was smaller than the preset alpha level —.05. Consequently, it can be claimed that there was a significant difference between the TTSs utilized by Iranian freshman and senior high school EFL learners in reading comprehension tests.

The fourth research question was about Iranian freshman and senior high school EFL learners' perceptions of TTSs. The three interview questions and the obtained qualitative findings are presented below:

*1. What is your perception of test-taking strategies? Are they helpful? Why?*

Regarding this question, both freshman and senior EFL learners had positive perceptions towards using TTSs. This is supported by Takallou et al.'s (2015) study, in which it was found that the participants had positive attitudes towards teaching and learning TTSs. Furthermore, both groups believed that TTSs were definitely helpful. As for the reason why they believed so, the most prominent one was that TTSs can help students increase their test scores. This is corroborating evidence for Houston's (2005) view, as he stated that TTS is the capacity of a person to raise their test score by identifying and leveraging cues included in the format, multiple-choice questions, and testing environment. Here is an excerpt from one of the participants:

> *"Well, I think TTSs are very good because I, for one, need to increase my scores and GPA on the final exams. Therefore, in addition to my knowledge, I need to learn TTSs more to do better on my exams."*

*2. Do you think test-taking strategies should be taught in high schools? Why?*

In this regard, both groups of participants were of the opinion that teachers should take on the responsibility of covering TTSs as a part of their course. According to them, the most conspicuous reason was that TTSs facilitate the process of test-taking on the national entrance examination (Konkour), which is a kind of standardized examination in Iran. This is in line with Bracely (2001), who stated that mastering different TTSs will raise results on standardized measures. What follows is an extract from one of the participants:

> *"In my opinion, TTSs should be taught not only at this school but also at other schools across the country. If students want to perform well on Konkour and major in English at university, such strategies will come in handy. Therefore, I would like to be taught how to use them."*

**3. Other than the strategies mentioned in the questionnaire, are there any other strategies you use while taking reading comprehension tests? If so, please describe them.**

As for this question, two of the participants said that they did not use any other strategies on the test. However, the other participants had different ideas. One of them stated that they guess the meaning of unknown words if the teacher does not define them. Another participant stated that they go through the questions first to remember them and then highlight the needed answers while reading the passage. Another participant said that they reworded some sentences to facilitate their comprehension. Finally, a fourth participant said that they answered questions in sequence in order to avoid disorientation. One possible explanation for the participants' use of different TTSs is due to their different levels of skills, which confirms Bahardoost and Ahmadi's (2018) results, demonstrating that testees with different performance and capability levels make use of different TTSs.

## Conclusion

This study is informative and significant since only a few studies have looked into how TTSs are used in high school contexts. Moreover, no study has investigated high schoolers' use of TTSs in Iran. Therefore, this study investigated what TTSs are used by Iranian freshman and senior high school EFL learners in reading comprehension tests. Furthermore, it was also aimed at investigating learners' perceptions of TTSs when taking language tests. The results indicated that senior participants used monitoring strategy the most, while freshman participants mostly used planning strategy. It was also found that both groups of participants had positive perceptions towards learning, teaching, and using TTSs.

This study bridged the gap in the literature and contributed to EFL teaching and assessment by presenting illuminating findings. Specifically, the results contribute to enhanced context-specific insights into the application of TTSs in high school settings, which allows EFL teachers to tailor their teaching methods accordingly. Furthermore, the results serve as empirical support for developing materials and curricula that draw attention to TTSs, thereby assisting learners in mastering reading comprehension tests. Accordingly, the findings of this study have some implications for EFL teachers, material developers, and curriculum designers involved in high schools. As the results provide empirical verification of the benefits of TTSs, it is wise for practitioners to take into account the key role TTSs play in helping high school EFL learners improve their test performance. Thus, the results imply the need for intentional incorporation of TTSs in teaching/learning methods in order to ensure the improvement of learners' performance on reading comprehension tests. In addition, planning and monitoring strategies were found to be the most frequently used TTSs by freshman and senior participants, respectively; so, it could be an important reason for practitioners to primarily cover these strategies in their instructional method and materials.

Nevertheless, the study had some limitations. The number of items and the scope of the questionnaire may not be sufficient to make strong assertions. Therefore, the results should be treated cautiously with respect to generalizability. Furthermore, the data were collected from a single high school, which may inhibit making bold claims regarding the nature of TTSs utilized by Iranian high school EFL learners. Therefore, more participants would have led to more robust results.

Finally, there are some suggestions for further research. Prospective researchers could investigate TTSs used by freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior high school EFL learners to come up with more illuminating findings concerning the application of TTSs in high school contexts. Furthermore, although questionnaire items were used for data collection purposes, it is suggested that prospective researchers use a think-aloud protocol to capture on-the-spot insights into the cognitive processes that EFL learners use when accomplishing reading comprehension. In addition, researchers could investigate the effectiveness of different teaching methodologies in helping students learn TTSs. Also, researchers can conduct longitudinal research to observe how

students' use of TTSs evolves from freshman to senior year, identifying trends and pivotal shifts in strategy application and efficacy. Finally, researchers are suggested to investigate the comparative effectiveness of different TTSs on high school EFL learners' successful performance on reading comprehension tests.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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# Appendix

## Interview Protocol

1. What is your perception of test-taking strategies? Are they helpful? Why?

2. Do you think test-taking strategies should be taught in high schools? Why?

3. Other than the strategies mentioned in the questionnaire, are there any other strategies you use while taking reading comprehension tests? If so, please describe them.