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MACRO READING SKILLS INCORPORATED IN GAZA PREPARATORY STAGE ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS AND TEACHERS' PROBLEMS WITH INSTRUCTING THEM

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Abstract:

The final goal of any reading activity is to extract the macro-level meaning (Sadeghi, 2021). The study aimed to examine macro-reading skills incorporated in Gaza preparatory stage English textbooks. The study also aimed at investigating the preparatory stage teachers' problems with instructing such skills. The researcher employed an evaluation checklist to examine macro-reading skills included in Palestinian preparatory stage English textbooks. Then, she conducted semi-structured interviews with 18 teachers teaching English to preparatory school students (seventh, eighth, and ninth graders) in Gaza so as to identify their problems with teaching macro-reading skills. Results indicated that the three English textbooks neglected many important macro skills of reading (e.g., identifying implied meaning in a passage, recognizing a sequence, making comparisons, and identifying the rhetorical form of the text). Additionally, the interview data revealed the participants' problems with teaching macro skills of reading (e.g., teachers' focus on micro skills at the expense of macro skills of reading and teachers' lack of knowledge about macro-reading skills).

Keywords: English textbooks, Gaza, macro skills, reading

1. Introduction

1.1 Issues that Motivated the Research

Reading is a fundamental skill since people use it for many purposes like academic and enjoyment purposes. According to Grabe (2009), reading is employed in reviewing magazines, web sites, posters, and newspapers, and it is also essential in educational and professional contexts. Setyowati (2021) and Kirsch, et al. (2002) also view that reading can develop persons' academic achievement and career opportunities, facilitate communication among people, add to peoples' experiences, and advance their learning.

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Moreover, Richards (1997) stresses the necessity of acquiring reading skills in a foreign language or a second language (FL/L2), as there is a growing demand for high quality L2/FL reading materials.

For English as a foreign language, English as a second language (EFL/ESL) reading comprehension to be developed, reading materials should include questions and exercises that are based on various reading comprehension sub skills, and teachers should train students to utilize different types of reading sub skills (e.g., macro-reading skills). In this context, Sadeghi (2021) provides that the final goal of any reading activity is to extract the macro-level meaning.

Macro skills in reading refer to learners' comprehension of larger units of texts, understanding main ideas, making inferences, recognizing a sequence, making comparisons (Wei, 2014), identifying the rhetorical form of the text and its relevance to text interpretation, determining the communicative function of the text, employing background information for understanding information explicitly stated in a text, and understanding cultural references (Brown, 2004). Benulic (1998) also provides some examples of macro-reading skills, such as scanning a text, skimming a passage, and recognizing the stages and supporting details of a written argument.

However, only a few EFL empirical studies investigated macro skills of reading. Examples of such studies include Mantra, Widiastuti, and Pramawati (2020) that explored micro and macro skills of reading acquired by 40 Indonesian EFL students. The researcher employed ex post facto design for fulfilling the study objectives, and the test results indicated that though the participants' reading comprehension was acceptable at a sufficient level, the students still experienced some challenges related to reading. Furthermore, Nurviyani, Suherdi, and Lukmana (2020) examined the effect of making multimodal inferences on 20 EFL students' macro and micro reading skills. Results of a reading test, a questionnaire and an observation showed that the participants' macro and micro skills of reading were enhanced. Te'ima (2018) explored 60 Iraqi EFL teachers' awareness of micro and macro reading skills. Based on data analysis of a questionnaire and an interview, findings revealed that the participants were unaware of such types of strategies, and did not instruct them to the students. Winarlim and Widiatti (2016) analyzed micro and macro reading skills assessed in the national exam for high school in Malaysia. Results indicated that most of the test questions were related to macro skills of reading.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, none of the empirical studies carried out on EFL reading in Palestinian schools and universities probed macro skills of reading. Additionally, the researcher, who has worked as a teacher of English at different institutions in Gaza since 1998, found that Palestinian preparatory school students did not utilize various important macro-reading skills, including identifying implied meanings in a passage and recognizing cultural inferences. Therefore, the present study purpose was examining the macro-reading skills incorporated in Gaza preparatory stage English textbooks. The study also aimed at investigating the preparatory school teachers' problems with instructing such skills.

1.2 Research Context

All schools in the Gaza Strip are divided into two types i.e., public schools (governmental and United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) schools) and private schools. Public schools receive most Palestinian students. Education which is administered by Palestinian government has been recently offered through two stages, including elementary and secondary stages. While elementary education includes the first ten grades, as pupils' ages range from six to 15, secondary stage encompasses 11th and 12th grades. It is noteworthy that not all governmental schools in Gaza are divided and arranged according to subdivisions of education (elementary and secondary stages) in Palestine, as some schools include only seventh, eighth, and ninth graders. UNRWA provides basic education in Palestine through two stages i.e., primary stage and preparatory stage. The primary education covers the first six grades, and the preparatory schooling consists of seventh, eighth, and ninth grades.

English is a compulsory subject in both public and private schools. All English textbooks employed in Palestinian schools focus on teaching language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Every reading comprehension lesson includes a text associated with various exercises and questions focusing on many reading sub skills.

It is worth mentioning that the researcher has worked as an instructor of *English language teaching* courses to English pre-service teachers at one of Gaza universities for 17 years. Indeed, pre-service teachers who practiced teaching in Gaza preparatory schools (seventh, eighth, and ninth grades) complained that the students' reading comprehension was very poor, and the students did not utilize many important skills like macro-reading skills. Therefore, the present study aimed at examining the macro-reading skills incorporated in the English textbooks of seventh, eighth, and ninth grades in Gaza schools. The study also investigated Gaza preparatory school teachers' problems with instructing macro skills of reading

1.3 Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent are macro skills of reading incorporated in Gaza preparatory stage English textbooks?
- 2) How do Gaza preparatory school teachers view the problems of teaching macro skills of English reading?

2. Research Key Terms

2.1 Macro Reading Skills

Unlike micro skills in reading which are related to lexical and syntactic knowledge (discriminating graphemes and orthographic patterns, determining grammatical words, recognizing different meanings of a structural pattern, and understanding cohesive items in a written text), *macro reading skills* refer to learners' comprehension of larger units of

texts, understanding main ideas, making inferences, recognizing a sequence, making comparisons, identifying the rhetorical form of the text and its relevance to text interpretation, determining the communicative function of the text, employing background information for understanding information explicitly stated in a text, differentiating between literal and implied meanings, and understanding cultural references (Brown, 2004; Wei, 2014).

Based on Brown and Wei, the researcher defines *macro level* as the level that is related to students' semantic engagement when reading a text. Examples of *macro reading skills* in a foreign language are skimming, scanning, identifying explicit details in a passage, recognizing implied meanings, understanding cultural references, recognizing a sequence, making comparisons, identifying the rhetorical form of the text and its relevance to text interpretation, determining the communicative function of the text, and employing background information for providing the explicit context of the text.

2.2 Reading

Spratt, Pulverness, and Williams (2005) define *reading* as a process of responding to a text and making sense of it, and it requires understanding the language of the text at the word level, sentence level, and whole-text level. Daniel (2018) views *reading* as a receptive skill in that it receives information rather than gives it out. Aebersold and Field (1997, 15) provide that reading is "what happens when people look at a text and assign meaning to the written symbols in that text"

The researcher defines *reading* as a process of extracting meaning out of a written text, and it consists of many sub-skills, including micro and macro skills. The researcher focused on only macro skills in this study i.e., skimming, scanning, identifying explicit details in a passage, recognizing implied meanings, understanding cultural references, recognizing a sequence, making comparisons, identifying the rhetorical form of the text and its relevance to text interpretation, determining the communicative function of the text, and employing background information for understanding information explicitly stated in a text.

2.3 Preparatory Stage English Textbooks

According to this study, preparatory stage English textbooks refer to the materials used for teaching English language to Palestinian seventh, eighth, and ninth graders.

2.4 Teaching

Teaching is defined by Inglis and Aers (2008) as showing, instructing, or imparting knowledge to learners. According to Merriam-Webster (2022), *teaching* means helping someone to know or do something or accustoming people to some actions or attitudes.

Teaching is defined in the present study as imparting knowledge to students and training them to utilize language skills like macro skills of reading.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 18 teachers instructing English to Gaza seventh, eighth, and ninth-graders. The participants were selected from six schools, including male and female teachers. While three schools were selected from East of Gaza directorate schools, the three other schools were chosen from West of Gaza directorate schools. All 18 participants were willing to participate in the study.

3.2 Instruments

The researcher utilized two instruments in this study i.e., an evaluation checklist and a semi-structured interview. After writing the two instruments, the researcher checked the content validity by showing them to a jury of experts. Then, the researcher considered the experts' comments prior to writing the final versions of the instruments.

a. An Evaluation Checklist

Hartley (2005) views that a textbook evaluation checklist is usually employed for assessing school textbooks. After consulting some references (e.g., Benulic, 1998; Brown, 2004; Wei, 2014) the researcher prepared an evaluation checklist (Appendix A).

b. A Semi-structured Interview

According to Opie (2004), a semi-structured interview provides opportunities to probe and expand the participants' responses by deviating from the prearranged questions to change the wording of questions or their order. The researcher used a semi-structured interview to get in-depth data about Gaza preparatory stage teachers' problems with teaching macro-skills of English reading. Revising some relevant studies (e.g., Hammad, 2014; Te'ima, 2018), the researcher wrote the interview questions. Each interview lasted 30 minutes and was audio-recorded. The researcher asked the participants to use the Arabic language to help them express their opinions freely. It is noteworthy that the researcher translated the interviews into English.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The study was carried out in August-September, 2022. First, the researcher examined macro skills of reading incorporated in English textbooks employed in Palestinian preparatory schools and counted the frequencies of such sub-skills. Then, the researcher conducted six focus-group interviews with 18 EFL teachers working in Gaza preparatory schools so as to identify the teachers' problems with teaching macro reading skills.

For analyzing the interviews data, researcher utilized the steps provided by Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006) i.e., transcribing the data, coding it, and organizing it into four categories like 'Textbooks neglect of most macro-reading skills', 'Teachers' focus on micro skills at the expense of macro skills of reading, 'Teachers' lack of knowledge about macro skills of reading', and 'Ministry of Education examinations

neglect of most macro-reading skills'. To establish the interview data credibility, another researcher read and coded the material, and the agreement consistency between the two researchers reached 85%.

For analyzing the evaluation checklist data, another evaluator was asked to examine the macro-reading skills included in the three textbooks. The two evaluators' responses to the checklist were analyzed employing frequencies and percentages. The researcher employed Holsti's formula to determine the reliability of the checklist data. Table 1 shows that the reliability coefficients were high: 0.94 for the seventh-grade textbook analyses, 0.95 for the eighth-grade textbook analyses, and 0.96 for the ninth-grade textbook analyses.

Table 1: Reliability Coefficient Between the Two Evaluators

Grade	C1	C2	C 1.2	R
Seventh Grade	185	188	176	0.94
Eighth Grade	288	283	272	0.95
Ninth Grade	253	243	239	0.96

$$R = 2 * (C 1.2)$$

 $C 1 + C 2$

 $R \rightarrow Reliability coefficient$

 $(C 1.2) \rightarrow Points of agreement$

 $C1 \rightarrow$ Number of frequencies in the first evaluator's analysis

 $C2 \rightarrow$ Number of frequencies in the second evaluator's analysis.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 First Research Question

The first research question was "To what extent are macro reading skills incorporated in the preparatory stage English textbooks?" For this question to be answered the researcher used an evaluation checklist. Tables 2, 3, and 4 show the frequencies and percentages of macro-reading skills incorporated in the English textbooks of the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades.

Table 2: Frequencies and Percentages of Macro-reading Skills Incorporated in the Seventh Grade English Textbook

Sub skill	Unit		Unit	Unit	Frequency	%													
	1	2	3	4	6	,	8	10	11	12	13	15	16	17					
Skimming	1	1	-	1	1	3	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	5.5			
Scanning	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	0.5			
Identifying explicit details in a passage	2	9	10	10	10	10	10	9	8	10	10	10	10	9	127	68			
Identifying implied meanings in a															0	0			
passage	_	_	_	_	-	_	-	-	-	_	_	_	_	-	0	U			
Recognizing cultural references	4	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	4			
Recognizing a sequence	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	1	ı	ı	-	-	-	-	0	0			
Making comparisons	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0			
Identifying the rhetorical form of the															0	0			
text	_	_	_	_	_	_	-	-	-	_	_	_	_	_	U	U			
Determining the communicative	4	4						1		1	1					7	4		
function of the text		_	-	_	-	_	1	-	1	1	_	_	_	-	7	4			
Employing background information for	3	4	4	2	4	2	1	1		1			5	5	33	18			
providing explicit context of the text.	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	4	2	1	1	-	1	-	-	3	3	33	18
Total	14	15	15	14	15	15	14	12	9	12	11	10	15	14	185	100			

As shown in Table 2, the seventh grade English textbook does not include many important macro skills of reading, such as identifying implied meaning in a passage, recognizing a sequence, making comparisons, and identifying the rhetorical form of the text. It can be also noticed from Table 2 that the item 'Identifying explicit details in a passage' got the highest score, 68%, followed by 'Employing background information for providing explicit context of the text', 18%, 'Skimming', 5.5%, 'Recognizing cultural differences', 4%, 'Determining the communicative function of the text', 4%, and 'Scanning', 0.5%. Table 3 shows the the frequencies and percentages of macro-reading skills incorporated in the eighth grade English textbook.

Table 3 indicates that the eighth grade English textbook does not include two macro skills of reading like identifying the rhetorical form of the text and determining the communicative function of the text. Additionally, it shows that while the third item 'Identifying explicit details in a passage' got 70%, the rest of the items got only 30%.

Table 3: Frequencies and Percentages of Macro-reading Skills Incorporated in the Eighth Grade English Textbook

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Sub skill	Unit	Frequency	%											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	11	12	13	rrequency	/0
Skimming	1	1	1	ı	-	ı	-	3	-	ı	-	-	4	1
Scanning	1	1	1	ı	-	ı	-	-	-	ı	-	-	1	0.3
Identifying explicit details in a passage	22	24	17	13	18	21	14	9	19	10	17	17	201	70
Identifying implied meanings in a passage	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0.3
Recognizing cultural references	1	3	ı	1	-	1	1	5	-	3	2	5	20	7
Recognizing a sequence	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	-	-	5	2
Making comparisons	-	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	5	-	-	9	3.1
Identifying the rhetorical form of the text	-	ı	ı	1	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	0	0
Determining the communicative function of the text	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
Employing background information for providing		1	2	4	4	(5	4		(7	7	47	16.2
explicit context of the text.	-	1	3	4	4	6)	4	_	6	/	/	47	16.3
Total	25	29	20	17	24	29	20	21	19	29	26	29	288	100

Table 4: Frequencies and Percentages of Macro-reading Skills Incorporated in the Ninth Grade English Textbook

Sub skill	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 8	Unit 9	Unit 10	Unit 11	Unit 12	Unit 13	Frequency	%
Skimming	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
Scanning	-	-	-	-	-	ı	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
Identifying explicit details in a passage	16	13	17	20	16	19	17	17	13	17	19	16	200	79
Identifying implied meanings in a passage	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
Recognizing cultural references	-	-	-	1	4	ı	-	1	-	-	-	-	6	2
Recognizing a sequence	-	5	-	-	-	ı	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	2
Making comparisons	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
Identifying the rhetorical form of the text	-	-	-	-	-	ı	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
Determining the communicative function of the text	-	-	-	-	-	ı	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0
Employing background information for providing explicit context of the text.	4	-	-	4	6	9	4	4	-	1	4	6	42	17
Total	20	18	17	25	26	28	21	22	13	18	23	22	253	100

As indicated by Table 4, the ninth grade English textbook neglected some macro skills of reading, including skimming, scanning, identifying implied meaning in a passage, making comparisons, identifying the rhetorical form of the text, and determining the communicative function of the text. Moreover, it can be noticed that the third item 'Identifying explicit details in a passage' got 79%, followed by 'Employing background information for providing explicit context of the text', 17%, 'Recognizing cultural references', 2%, and 'Recognizing a sequence', 2%.

4.2 Second Research Question

The second research question was "How do Gaza preparatory school teachers view the problems of teaching macro skills of English reading?" The researcher conducted interviews with 18 Gaza EFL preparatory school teachers. The interview data indicated that the textbooks used in teaching English to Gaza preparatory school students neglected many important macro skills of reading, such as identifying implied meaning in a passage, recognizing a sequence, making comparisons, and identifying the rhetorical form of the text, and centered on only a few skills like activating students' background knowledge and reading for identifying supporting details.

Participant 5: (female teacher, 11 years of experience): "I usually ask the students to do the textbook exercises in English reading classes. Such exercises are not related to macroreading skills you are talking about. Most questions focus on revising students' knowledge, identifying main ideas, and extracting detailed information from a text."

Participant 1 (male teacher, 21 years of experience): "No, the reading lessons do not cover such skills. The emphasis is placed on only facts and information that are directly stated in a passage."

The interview analysis also showed that most teachers focused on micro skills at the expense of macro skills of reading. According to them, helping students to recognize keywords, synonyms, antonyms, grammatical words, and phrases is the ultimate goal of teaching a foreign language.

Participant 2 (female teacher, 14 years of experience): "I often spend a whole class period on teaching keywords included in a passage. I explain each word, for example, its Arabic meaning, synonyms, antonyms, syllables, and its root. Then, I discuss the information included in a text with students. Finally, I ask individual students to read the text a loud and correct their pronunciation errors."

Participant 12 (male teacher, 10 years of experience): "I think that helping students to acquire vocabulary is the most important point since students should use them in writing or speaking. After illustrating the forms and meanings of all unfamiliar words stated in a text, I give the students an exercise to help them use the words in sentences. Then, I ask students to read the text silently and answer the textbook questions."

Participant 7 (female teacher, 15 years of experience): "When teaching unknown words in English reading classes I ask pupils about words types, for example, is the word an adjective, an adverb, or a noun? Are some words regarded as a phrase or a clause? etc."

Most interviewees reported that Ministry of Education examinations in Palestine placed emphasis on micro skills of English reading, and did not pay adequate attention to macro skills of reading other than finding main ideas of a text and identifying supporting details.

Participant 3 (female teacher, seven years of experience): "I should train the students on the sub-skills covered in the Ministry of Education exams, such as identifying words, pronouns referents, and meanings of some sentences, finding the gist of a text, and recognizing detailed information and facts."

Participant 1 (male teacher, 21 years of experience): "We as teachers are concerned only with the areas emphasized by the Ministry of Education in Gaza, and such areas do not focus on the skills you have just mentioned."

Furthermore, the data revealed that the participants lacked adequate knowledge about English reading sub skills, including macro-reading skills.

Participant 5 (female teacher, eight years of experience): "I have no idea about such skills. What I know is that students should read a text, and identify general ideas and supporting details stated in a text."

Participant 16 (male teacher, 11 years of experience): "I do not train my students to use macro reading skills, really, I never heard of them."

Participant 4 (male teacher, 24 years of experience): "No, we do not take any specialized training courses related to English language skills like reading skills. The courses that the Ministry of Education is interested in our beginner teachers' courses (e.g., lesson plans)."

To sum up, the interview analysis showed Gaza EFI preparatory school teachers' problems with teaching macro skills of reading. Such problems included textbooks neglect of most macro-reading skills, teachers' focus on micro skills at the expense of macro skills of reading, teachers' lack of knowledge about macro skills of reading, and Ministry of Education examinations neglect of most macro-reading skills.

5. Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

The study concluded that the three English textbooks used in Gaza preparatory schools neglected many important macro-reading skills, such as identifying implied meaning in a passage, recognizing a sequence, making comparisons, and identifying the rhetorical form of the text. According to Setyowati (2021), enabling students to utilize macro and micro skills of reading successfully is very essential for enhancing their proficiency in reading comprehension. Likewise, Sadeghi (2021) views that the final goal of any reading activity is to extract the macro-level meaning. Hence, it is recommended for textbooks designers of the preparatory stage English textbooks in Palestine to incorporate macro skills in English reading materials.

Moreover, the evaluation checklist analyses showed that 'identifying explicit details in a passage' got the highest score. It may be argued that the reading exercises and activities included in the three textbooks aimed at enhancing simple comprehension skills rather than higher-order thinking skills, including identifying implied meaning in a

passage and making comparisons. In line with this result, Hammad (2012) revealed that Gaza preparatory school students were used to answering questions that require direct answers from the texts. Darweesh and Ghayadh (2017) state that learner should go beyond what is explicitly stated in a text, and should read between lines. Delamain and Spring (2014) also view that teachers should train students on making deductions and reaching conclusions based on information given in texts, since such skills are essential for developing students' reading comprehension. Therefore, Gaza EFL preparatory stage teachers are strongly recommended to train pupils on going beyond the details explicitly found in passages.

Results also showed that most teachers tended to develop micro-level rather than macro-level processing in English reading classes. According to such teachers, focusing on words and structural patterns is a key to successful learning of a foreign language. In their opinions, acquiring language items (vocabulary and structural patterns) is required for conducting dialogues and writing compositions in later stages of learning. In fact, for developing EFL students' linguistic competence, teachers need to instruct students both micro and macro skills. In this context, Alami (2013) provides that improving students' analytical and critical thinking abilities requires not only a micro lexicon-grammatical but also a macro semantic engaging. Based on that, Gaza EFL preparatory school teachers are advised to enrich the reading materials through more macro semantic engaging questions so as to develop the students' higher-order thinking skills.

Additionally, the interview data indicated that all teachers did not have adequate knowledge about English language skills, including macro skills of reading due to lack of specialized training courses. In line with this result, Te'ima (2018) reported that Iraqi EFL teachers were unaware of macro-reading strategies, and did not instruct them to the students. According to Zimmerman (2010), specialized training courses can help EFL teachers work effectively with students. Indeed, the Ministry of Education in Gaza need to provide preparatory stage teachers with training courses and workshops related to English language skills. Consequently, the teachers will be aware of all skills (e.g., macro-reading skills) students need to practice in English classes.

Findings also revealed that the Ministry of Education examinations in Palestine neglected various important macro-reading skills (identifying implied meaning in a passage, making comparisons, identifying the rhetorical form of the text, and determining the communicative function of the text), the thing which encouraged students to disuse them in the classes. Many authors (eg., Alderson, 2000; Wei, 2014) emphasized the importance of assessing both micro and macro skills of reading. Thus, the examination department in Palestinian Ministry of Education is necessarily recommended to consider macro skills of reading when designing English language exams.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

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Appendices

Appendix A: An Evaluation Checklist

Sub skill	Unit	Frequency	%											
Skimming														
Scanning														
Identifying explicit details in a passage														
Identifying implied meanings in a passage														
Recognizing cultural references														
Recognizing a sequence														
Making comparisons														
Identifying the rhetorical form of the text														
Determining the communicative function of the text														
Employing background information for providing														
explicit context of the text														
Total														

Appendix B: A Semi-structured Interview

- 1) Do you train students to use all macro skills of English reading? Why/Why not?
- 2) Do you have adequate knowledge about macro skills of English reading? If no, why?
- 3) Do you employ well-prepared tests assessing EFL students' acquisition of macro-reading skills? If no, Why?
- 4) Is the time devoted to teaching macro skills of English reading adequate? If no, Why?
- 5) What problems do you encounter when instructing or attempting to instruct macro-reading skills of English reading?

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