



# An Investigation into the Relationship between French and English Reading Abilities: Freshmen Students of the English Department at Meknes as a Case Study

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## Abstract

*This study strives to investigate students' reading ability across foreign languages in Morocco. The main purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between French and English reading abilities. Specifically, it attempts to measure students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies and explore its impact on English reading development. Data were collected using two reading comprehension tests in French and English and a reading strategy questionnaire. 80 freshmen university students in Meknes formed the sample of this investigation. In this regard, the study employed Pearson product-moment and partial correlation as statistical tools to analyze the generated data. The findings showed that there is no relationship between participants' French and English reading abilities. The study also revealed that metacognitive knowledge and mainly the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies of students has a significant positive impact on their English reading ability. Eventually, the findings of this endeavor have triggered various implications and recommendations for future research.*

**Keywords:** *Reading Ability, Foreign Language Reading Development, Metacognitive Awareness, Reading Transfer, and indirect impact.*

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## Introduction and Background to the Study

Metacognitive knowledge has been acknowledged to play a significant role in the process of language learning and the transfer that takes place across languages. That is, the cognitive dimension of language transfer has widely been depicted by cognitive linguistics in the sense that once the human mind goes through the process of language internalization, the skills acquired in this process are easily brought into play in the learning of other languages. About second language reading, metacognitive knowledge has been referred to as the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. The latter has been found to foster reading skills as being cognizant of what the mind does when we read contributes to the success of reading comprehension. Henceforth, the main objective of this study is to investigate the nexus between English and French reading ability and the impact metacognitive knowledge has on the development of English reading ability.

There has been an academic interest in the topic at stake and many empirical studies have been conducted investigating the nexus between L1 and L2 reading abilities. However, in Morocco, researchers interested in this concern bridled the scope of their studies to only L1 and L2 reading development. That is, few studies have been conducted to reveal whether or not the transitional cognitive process that has been documented in L1 and L2 development can hold in the learning of foreign languages. In particular, little attention has been devoted to the transferability of reading ability across foreign languages. To this end, research-evoking is the fact that the investigation of reading ability across foreign languages in the Moroccan educational context has not received its merited attention. Therefore, this acts as a catalyst for the present study as it aims at exploring this topic in a context in which the examined languages (French and English) are recognized and learned as foreign languages. This exploration is to be realized through the examination of the relationship between French and English reading ability of Moroccan university students.



In this study, the variables that are to form the key elements of this framework are French reading ability (FRA), English reading ability (ERA), and Metacognitive knowledge (MK). Moreover, even though many scholars and language experts have developed various theories on reading development and metacognition, the theoretical assumptions made by Cummins (1979) have been thought to well fit in the conceptualization of this paper's theoretical framework. The L2 reading process is cross-linguistic, including cognitive activities between languages. That is, the transfer hypothesis generally guesstimates that L1 literacy skills, once acquired, are ready to transfer when triggered by L2 text input. Alongside, Cummins (1979) suggests that the conceptual knowledge developed in L1 makes the input in L2 more comprehensible due to the underlying cognitive and academic proficiency across languages. Accordingly, metacognitive awareness is of vital importance in the process of reading development for it makes readers more cognizant of what happens when they read and what they are supposed to do while reading to result in successful comprehension. Needless to say, the major objective of this study is to test two underlying hypotheses; the first one postulates that there is a transfer between French and English reading ability while the second assumes that metacognitive knowledge indirectly affects English reading ability through French reading. In accordance with previous theoretical frameworks in the field of foreign language reading and metacognitive knowledge, the following model has been constructed with the hypothesized interrelationships.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Reading ability**

Reading has gained tremendous interest by many scholars and language experts as it has widely been regarded as “a highly complex skill that is a prerequisite to success in many societies where a great deal of information is communicated in written form.” (Rayner, Pollatsek, Ashby & Clifton, 2012, p. vii). In this regard, the complexity of reading as a language skill has triggered the ground for an indispensable variability of definitions ascribed from different perspectives. For Brassell and Rasinski (2008), reading is defined as the skill of comprehending and making sense of the written text. They also point out that comprehension should not be discarded in an attempt of defining reading given the fact that it results from a successful text reading. Similarly, Grabe (2009) cited some scholars who claim that reading entails the skill of “...learning new conceptual information from texts, synthesizing new information from multiple texts, critiquing information in texts, and their comprehension skills to reinterpret texts” (Elley, 1992; Kirsch et al., 2002; NAAL, 2005; NAEP, 2007 as Cited in Grabe, 2009, p.4). This implies that reading is not only a skill in its own right but also a set of various sub-skills. From a cognitive perspective, moreover, reading has been referred to as a cognitive ability that enables a person to resort to his existing knowledge, process information, mentally interpret, and interact with the text. With this in mind, the analysis of the cognitive aspect of reading correspondently calls for other psychological factors such as working memory, eye movements, and word conceptualization (Perfetti, 2007; Urquhart & Weir, 2014; Perfetti, Landi, & Oakhill, 2005; Brassell and Rasinski, 2008). Therefore, all these definitions form the consensus that reading is considered to be a receptive and perceptive skill of language through which one delves into a reciprocal interchange and interpretation of the text.

### **Metacognition**

Given the fact that metacognition is an essential concept within cognitive psychology, defining metacognitive knowledge requires a brief account of what cognition entails. Although many language psychologists have attempted to define cognition and its working facets in language, Bruning, Schraw, and Ronning (1999) have provided a thorough definition of this concept. For them, the word cognition is “derived from the Latin word cognoscere, meaning “to know” or “to come to know”. Thus, cognition includes the activities and processes concerned with the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and processing of knowledge” (p.1). With this in mind, metacognitive knowledge has been defined as knowledge about cognition in general (Bransford, Sherwood, Vye, and Rieser, 1986). In other words, Pintrich (2002) asserts that metacognitive knowledge includes “awareness of and knowledge about one's cognition” (p.2). As cited in Pintrich (2002), metacognitive knowledge does encapsulate knowledge of cognition and the ongoing processes of the control, regulation, and monitoring of cognition (Bransford et al, 1999; Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, & Campione, 1993; Flavell, 1979; Paris & Winograd, 1990; Pintrich, Wolters, & Baxter, 2000). One can conclude that, about language, cognition is the knowledge of language a person has while metacognitive knowledge involves one's awareness of this specific knowledge.

### **Metacognition and Language Development**

There is a consensus in the literature that cognition and language are inseparable. This view has widely been explored in cognitive linguistics, which has been defined as the roundabout in which language, communication, and cognition meet and interact (Ellis & Robinson, 2008). This implies the reciprocal interaction between language and cognition as they both create each other. Ellis and Robinson (2008) state, “Language is used to organize, process, and convey information, from one person to another, from one embodied mind to another” (p.1). That is, language is regarded to have focal functions in cognition as it



constitutes the communication that is established between human brains. It has similarly been acknowledged that cognition, awareness, self, human communication, community, culture, and history are all interweaved through language and in its different ways. Notably, consciousness is an indispensable factor in the interrelationship between language and cognition for the concept of attention has been one of the most researched aspects of cognitive linguistics.

The concept of attention is another key element that establishes the nexus between language and cognition. In this regard, Ellis and Robinson (2008) cite that “Perception and Attention analyses of the ways our embodiment and perceptuo-motor systems govern our representation of the world and the ways that language can guide our attention to these representations” (Barsalou, 1999; Coventry & Garrod, 2004; Mandler, 2004; Talmy, 1988, 2000a, 2000b). The listener may be able to attend to the linguistic expressions uttered during a speech and to the conceptual and the contextual content these expressions represent, but none of these ever seem to consistently appear in the ground of the hearer’s attention (Talmy, 2008). This emphasizes the importance of attention in language development and how the former happens to trigger and foster the learner’s awareness of the language learning process. Accordingly, a high level of attention on a linguistic input usually results in good cognitive effects such as simplicity, significance, and precision, while decreased attention brings about converse effects such as ambiguity and discrepancy (Talmy, 2008). This correlation has empirically been confirmed by many researchers who conducted many experiments on the effects of attention on language learning; this would lead to a brief account of noticing hypothesis under which research on this matter has been carried out.

Noticing the hypothesis has extensively been accredited for yielding valuable insights on the role of pragmatic awareness. In this regard, Norouziyan & Eslami (2016) assert that Schmidt (1995) claims that “Attention to input is a necessary condition for any learning at all” (p.35). As implied by this, the concept of attention, which is also referred to as awareness, fosters the learning of languages as consciously paying much attention to the process of learning and the aspects it triggers have been proven to facilitate the internalization of the linguistic features. Furthermore, studies conducted on attention and language development form the consensus that only under awareness “input” could convert to “intake”. Akin to this consensus, it is worth pointing out that when learners are pushed to notice specific features of the language, they easily process the language in a way that makes them cognizant of what happens when words are combined to form meaning (Schmidt, 1995).

#### **Metacognitive Awareness and the Transfer of Reading Ability**

The advancement reading comprehension research has been making has led to an important focus on the role of metacognitive awareness of readers’ cognitive and motivational processes while reading (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1999; Pressley, 2000, Cited in Mokhtari, 2002). It is agreed upon in the literature that indispensable elements of skilled reading are awareness and the monitoring of one’s cognitive processes; the latter is encapsulated within the concept of metacognition. For Mokhtari (2002), copious are the efforts that have been invested in the construction of what is now called ‘metacognition’ taking into consideration the impracticality of accounting for all the traits of this concept. In this matter, scholars extensively come to the congruence that metacognition refers to the “knowledge about cognitive states and abilities that can be shared among individuals while at the same time expanding the construct to include affective and motivational characteristics of thinking” (Paris & Winograd, 1990, p.15, cited in Mokhtari, 2002). Flavell (1979), in his article “Metacognition and Cognitive Monitoring”, has depicted the process of cognitive monitoring as taking place through the intersections of four interrelated classes: Metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experiences, goals (or tasks), and actions (or strategies). About reading, it has been assumed that readers’ reflections indicate how they use, plan, monitor, and assess the available information as they try to make sense of what is being read (Wade, Trathen, & Schraw, 1990, cited in Mokhtari, 2002). Furthermore, research on reading comprehension monitoring has been stressing the importance of metacognitive awareness in reading comprehension as it makes the distinction between skilled and unskilled readers. Paris and Jacobs (1984) assert that “skilled readers often engage in deliberate activities that require planful thinking, flexible strategies, and periodic self-monitoring” while “beginning readers or poor readers do not recruit and use these skills. Indeed, novice readers often seem oblivious to these strategies and the need to use them”(p.2083, cited in Mokhtari, 2002). All these arguments considered, metacognitive awareness is true of focal importance in the process of reading development as it makes readers more cognizant of what happens when they read and what they are supposed to do when they read to result in successful comprehension. Not only metacognitive awareness plays a vital role in reading development but it also fosters the reading transfer from one language to another.

It has considerably been stated that the conceptual knowledge we develop in L1 makes L2 input more lucid due to the cognitive proficiency we demonstrate in the languages we speak (Cummins, 1979). In this vein, Bachman and Palmer (2010) suggest that language knowledge draws upon metacognitive strategies to deal with a challenging task. Such metacognitive knowledge is a higher-order underlying proficiency that directs the ways knowledge of the language is used in L1 and L2 (Guo, 2018). As far as reading is concerned, Schreiber (2005) refers to metacognitive knowledge as awareness of reading strategies and regulation of

these strategies. Compatibly, metacognitive awareness of reading strategies has been found to effectively operate in the reading process across languages in the sense that “readers can deliberately use strategies for planning (setting goals, previewing, and activating background information, etc.), monitoring (selective attention, predicting, making inferences, interpreting ideas and integrating with personal experience, etc.) and evaluating (self-questioning, self-correction and reflecting, etc.)” (Griffith&Ruan, 2005, cited in Guo, 2018, p.213). This implies that ‘metacognitive readers’ do not only possess the knowledge of strategies, but also the ability to apply and make use of this knowledge with various types of texts to actively engage in the thinking process (Anderson, 2012, cited in Guo, 2018).

### **The Present Study**

The present study is an attempt to crystallize and investigate the interrelationship of learners’ reading ability in French and English as foreign languages in Morocco. Considerably, in the Moroccan context, it is mandatory to point out that French is learned a few years before English. With this in mind, this paper intends to discover whether or not French reading skills, once acquired and mastered, pave the ground for English reading development. Moreover, this paper attempts to scrutinize the assumed indirect effect of the metacognitive knowledge of the learner on the interrelationship between French reading ability and English reading development. It concerns itself with demystifying the assumed nexus between the metacognitive awareness of reading skills and their manifestation when a learner is confronted with a reading comprehension task.

Based on a careful review of literature whose grounded focus copes with the topic at hand, this study would be an investigation of two-directional hypotheses:

DH1: There is a relationship between French reading ability and English reading development.

DH2: After controlling the effects of French Reading ability, there is a relationship between Metacognitive Knowledge and English Reading ability.

### **Method**

#### **Participants and Research Site**

The target population in this paper includes freshmen university students from the English department at the School of Arts and Humanities in Meknes city. Choosing this population was not been done randomly, it was based on some rational reflections. To voice these reflections, a brief flashback of the research objectives should be brought in this section. Since the mere objective of this endeavor is to investigate the transfer between French and English reading ability, freshmen university students majored in English studies are thought to form the suitable population for two main reasons; first, these students have studied French for years and they are supposed to be good at it. Second, they have opted for English studies, which should normally indicate their satisfactory level in English. Moreover, the fact that this paper aims at measuring students’ metacognitive awareness of reading strategies shares some compatibility with the chosen population as these freshmen have been introduced to reading comprehension and study skills.

Given the impracticality of administering the tests to all freshmen, a sampling size is to be decided upon in this regard. Although random sampling is the most valid and reliable type of sampling, the researchers can not make use of it in this paper as its adoption requires the availability of a frame (list of all freshmen). Having eschewed random sampling, this study is left with non-random sampling as the available and suitable type in this matter. Still, various are the sampling types that are encapsulated within non-random sampling, and adopting one of them should be based on reason. With all these considerations in mind, non-random convenience sampling has been thought to well fit the practicum of this study. The choice of this type of sampling was based on two considerable elements, namely the availability of the respondents and the accessibility of the sample size. In a nutshell, the sample of the present study included a total number of eighty Freshmen University students, thirty of them were males and fifty were females. Noticeably, the researchers had the intention of including 120 students but due to some limitations, this was not possible.

#### **Instruments**

*The English Reading Comprehension Test (ERCT)* was devised by the researchers based on many reading comprehension exams administered by professors in the department of English studies. It was also revised by many professors who did a lot of modifications and provided advice on some possible issues.

*The French Reading Comprehension Test (FRCT)* was adapted from a collection of high school reading comprehension exams and revised by experienced French teachers.





The researchers made sure that the two reading comprehension tests are consistent in terms of the rubrics they include. Therefore, the indicators or the rubrics which are supposed to measure students' reading ability are as the following: choosing a title, vocabulary, true or false questions, direct questions, paraphrasing, summarizing, and outlining. These indicators were carefully devised to assure a similar level of difficulty and were scored using the same scoring rubrics and procedures in both tests.

*Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARS)* was adapted from Mokhtari, K., & Reichard, C. (2002); Assessing students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. It was originally designed to assess adolescent and adult readers' metacognitive awareness and perceived use of reading strategies while reading academic or school-related materials. Also, the inventory has three strategy subscales: Global Reading Strategies, Problem-Solving Strategies, and Support Reading Strategies, which include thirty different reading strategies that learners may be using while reading. Noticeably, the original version of the inventory has thirty reading strategies, but, after conducting a pilot study, the research had to adapt it and reduce the number of strategies to twenty-one following the directions given in the manual of the inventory.

### **Reliability and Validity of the Instruments**

The issue of reliability and validity is of central concern when it comes to measuring concepts in quantitative research. That is, tackling the reliability of the instruments used in this study required the researchers to keep certain considerations in mind. Given the fact that internal reliability deals with multiple-indicator measures, the researchers consulted many professors and examiners to check whether the rubrics and the subscales included in the three tests do measure reading ability. Another key element of reliability is inter-observer consistency; it is normally meant to establish some consistency in the observation made by more than one observer, however, the research tends, at least in this paper, to term it as 'inter-examiner consistency' through which all the raters agreed upon the same scoring criteria and procedures. Moreover, measurement validity is another taxing yet very important procedure through which the researchers should assure that a measure of a concept does measure that concept. In this regard, face validity was one of the main concerns of the researchers while devising the tests; it was established by asking practitioners in the field whether or not the tests appeared to be getting at the concept of reading ability. The final version of the tests included modifications that experts in the field suggested.

### **Data Gathering Process**

The three tests were administered to students in the campus during their available time. Given the amount of time each test required (one hour and thirty minutes), the administration process took approximately 25 days. Noticeably, participants had to meet the researchers twice as taking three tests at one time was not possible for them, so they had to sit for the French test on one day and the English test and the MARS on another day. For the sake of making the participants feel at ease, the researchers talked to them first and explained that these tests were not for any university official examination and they would only be used for research purposes, some participants were even allowed to use nicknames instead of their actual names. The researchers kindly asked some colleagues to help with the invigilation task to assure a better organization of the mission. Moreover, participants were given clear instructions before starting the test and were encouraged to ask for any further clarification. The number of participants who were willing to meet the researchers and sit for the tests was very small in the beginning, which led the researchers to consult some professors and ask for the possibility of administering the tests right after their classes. This strategy was very successful as students could not refuse to do a task assigned by their professors.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The full realization of this paper's practical objectives does not stop at the stage of data collection. The latter should be followed by the analysis of the generated data. To do so, the data analysis process undertook various procedures and statistical steps to arrive at thorough scrutiny of the results. In this vein, the utility of tests and inventories as data collection instruments implies their results to be in the form of scores that were to be analyzed as numerical data. That is, receiving results as numerical datasets required the operation of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). As a first stage in the data analysis process, participants' scores in French, English and the MARS tests were tabled, interpreted, and discussed alongside with their central tendencies. Moreover, to confirm or reject the first research hypothesis of this study which guesstimates the presence of a correlation between French and English reading ability, Pearson correlation was the right statistic type of analysis to be used to describe the strength and direction of the linear relationship between these two variables. About the second hypothesis which postulates that metacognitive knowledge has an impact on English reading ability through French reading ability, the depiction of such relationship requires the researchers to control the effects of French reading ability as a mediating variable through the

use of partial correlation to get a clearer and more accurate indication of the relationship between English reading ability and metacognitive knowledge.

**Results**

**The Relationship between Scores in English and French Reading Comprehension**

The quantitative variables between which the correlation is to be sought are French and English reading abilities. The quantification of these variables goes back to the fact that the reading ability has been measured using tests that yielded scores as numerical data. Considerably, it is also important to note that while English reading ability is the dependent variable, the independent one is French reading ability. All these considered, Pearson product-moment correlation as a type of statistical analysis, together with a scatterplot is to be tabled, interpreted, and discussed to describe the direction and the strength of the relationship.

The null hypothesis that this analysis is examining is as the following:

NH: there is no relationship between French reading ability and English reading ability

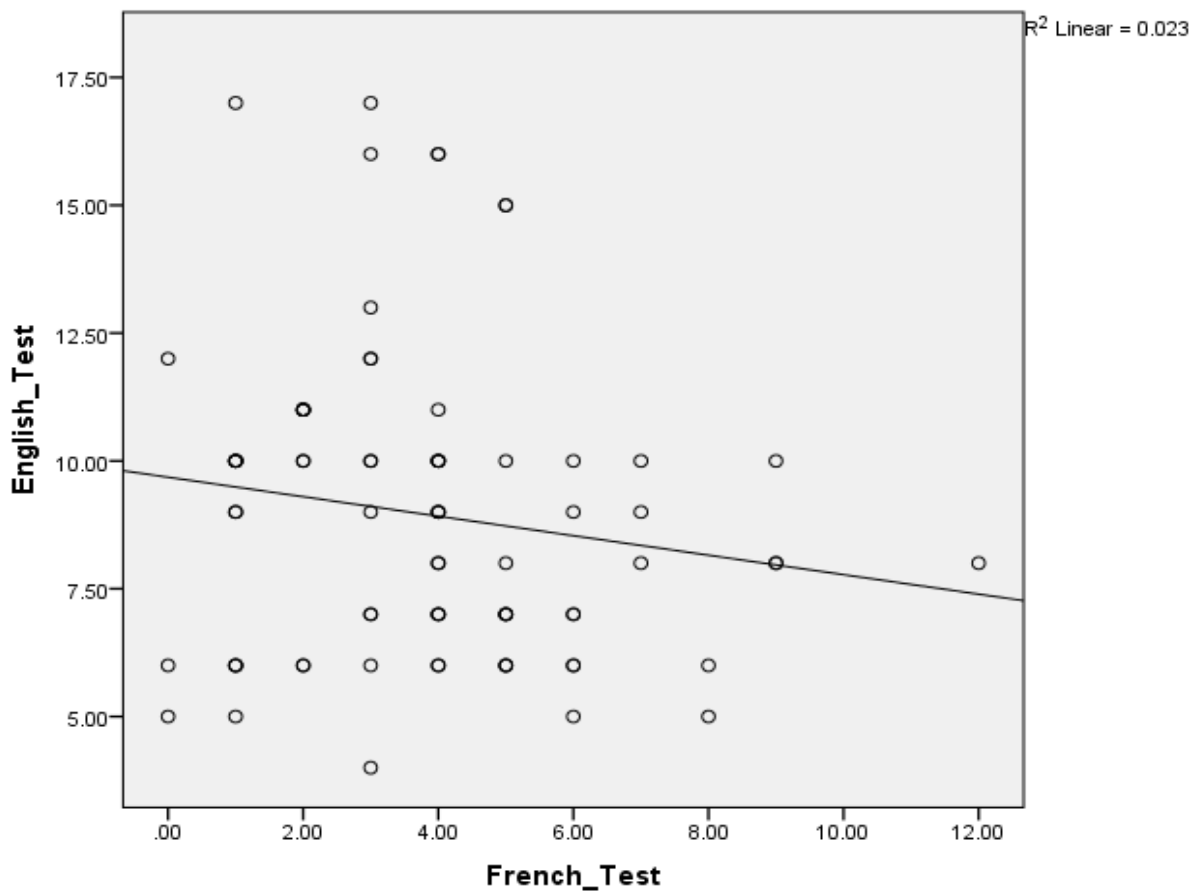


Figure 1: The Scatterplot of the English and French Tests

		French_Test	English_Test
French_Test	Pearson Correlation	1	-.150
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.183
	N	80	80

English_Test	Pearson Correlation	-0.150	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.183	
	N	80	80

Table 1: The Correlation between the French and English Tests

To gain a better idea of the nature of the relationship between French and English reading abilities, it is of significance to inspect a scatterplot that provides assumptions on the linearity of the relationship. That is, figure 1 represents the scatterplot of the two variables under investigation. Given the apparent fact that the data dots are scattered all over the place and do not follow any straight line neither upward nor downward, the correlation between participants' scores in English and French reading comprehension tests is represented to be very weak. Alongside this, this very weak relationship is also reflected in  $R^2$  linear as it equals 0.023. Moreover, Table 1 shows the Pearson  $\rho$  correlation coefficients between English and French reading tests. It also reports that both tests were taken by all participants (80) with no missing data. Further, it is blatant from table 8 that the sig value equals -0.15, which implies that there is a very weak to almost no relationship between the English and French tests' scores.

### The Relationship between English Reading Ability and Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies

Scrutinizing the partial correlation between English reading ability and metacognitive awareness of reading strategies requires controlling for the effects of French reading ability as a third variable.

Control Variables			English_Test	MARSI	French_Test
-none <sup>a</sup>	English_Test	Correlation	1.000	.002	-.150
		Significance (1-tailed)	.	.494	.092
		Df	0	78	78
	MARSI	Correlation	.002	1.000	.081
		Significance (1-tailed)	.494	.	.238
		Df	78	0	78
French_Test	Correlation	-.150	.081	1.000	
	Significance (1-tailed)	.092	.238	.	
	Df	78	78	0	
French_Test	English_Test	Correlation	1.000	0.86	
		Significance (1-tailed)	.	.651	
		Df	0	77	
	MARSI	Correlation	.086	1.000	
		Significance (1-tailed)	.651	.	
		Df	77	0	

Table 2: The Partial Correlation between MARSI and English Test

Table 2 represents the partial correlation between participants' scores between the English reading test and MARSI before and after controlling the effects of French test scores. With the effects of French tests included, the table displays the  $\rho$  correlation between the two variables (English and MARSI), and which equals 0.002. The latter indicates that there is no correlation between participants' scores in English and MARSI tests. In contrast, it is clear from the table that removing the effects of the French test has brought forth different  $\rho$  which is 0.86. Such a sig number implies an almost perfect positive relationship between the two variables.

### Discussion

About the hypotheses formulated above, the sig value and the scatterplot indicate the absence of a relationship between the French and English tests. In this vein, this very weak correlation contributes to the acceptance of the null hypothesis which postulates that there is no relationship between French reading ability and English reading ability, and the rejection of the alternative research hypothesis which guestimates that there is a correlation between the two variables. Therefore, students' reading ability in French can not predict their reading skills in English, and any achievement or failure in English reading development should not be linked to French reading ability.



Having refuted the first research hypothesis, its sub-hypotheses are to be rejected as well. Students, on the one hand, with good French reading skills are not necessarily supposed to be good English readers. As far as the sample is concerned, good French readers have not been found to transfer their acquired reading skills to the process of English reading development. However, this does not allow any hast generalization as there are participants whose good mastery of French reading skills partly contributed to their excellence in English reading development.

On the other hand, the sub-hypothesis which claims that learners with poor French reading skills are supposed to be poor English readers is debunked in the sense that no relationship was found to be driven by French and English reading difficulties. Akin to this, reading difficulties students have in English are not to be associated with any French learning problem, but rather be ascribed to problems related to the English language itself. However, there could be other variables through which any failure in a language could be explained such as attitudes, teaching methodology, age, gender...etc.

The findings of these hypotheses are incompatible with the majority of empirical studies conducted in the same regard. Geva and Ryan (1993) have found that “the underlying proficiency, which is mediated through the child’s first language, can then resurface as a transfer of relevant concepts and skills to another language”(p. 6). This accentuates the realization that a successful journey on the learning of a language, and mainly reading development, activates the transfer of the skills acquired to other hoped-to-be-learned languages. Additionally, Jiang (2011) reported that the fact that the Chinese reading ability of the participants was well developed when they started learning English put them at an advantage. Accordingly, they were cognitively ready to demonstrate a good mastery of reading strategies acquired in the Chinese reading development process when they approached English texts. Consequently, consistent with prior studies, these studies emphasized the significance of maintaining L1 literacy skills to assist in L2 reading development.

As discussed above, none of the reviewed studies share any congruence with the findings of the current investigation. Given the fact that there is no relationship between French and English reading abilities, it is of explanatory significance to shed light on the underlying variables that could have affected students’ performance in French. On the one hand, the fact that English nowadays is the language of the world and French is not enjoying any international status makes learners tend to perform well in the language that would make them easily engage in what is now called the global world. On the other hand, students’ low achievement in French could partly be associated with the way they were taught. The teaching methodology has far been acknowledged to play an important role in the learning process in the sense that a good teaching method would prop up learners’ achievement while any discrepancy in the way a teacher instructs can render student’s performance into demise. Thus, it can be assumed that French teaching strategies are not as engaging and effective as those utilized in an English class.

The findings also indicate that there is a perfect positive correlation between participants’ scores in English tests and MARSII. This confirms the second research hypothesis of this study which postulates that students’ metacognitive awareness of reading strategies has a positive impact on their English reading ability. Given this, the metacognitive knowledge students acquire fosters their English reading skills as they are more deliberate and conscious in their use of reading strategies. Considerably, this proved fact has previously been shared and agreed upon by many empirical studies.

The role of metacognitive knowledge in reading development has extensively been marked in different pieces of research. In her empirical study, Guo (2018) states that “the results suggested that metacognitive knowledge is a crucial contributor to L2 reading” (p.23). This advocates the central function of metacognitive knowledge in language learning, which contributes to the literature on metacognition and language development.

Cartwright (2005) has concluded that metacognitive knowledge is a higher-order cognitive proficiency that equips readers with ‘cognitive flexibility’ to “shift attention between text details and enhances their inhibition ability to ignore irrelevant information and suppress distracting behavior” (cited in Guo, 2018, p.23). Another akin finding by (Vuong& Martin, 2014) is that the executive control function has a critical role in resolving representational conflicts and giving more space to alternative interpretations during the process of comprehension. The findings of this study are compatible with all aforementioned studies in the sense that participants’ English reading ability has been found to positively be impacted by their deliberate and cognizant use of reading strategies in the process of comprehension.

### **Limitations of the Study and Future Work**

Although the current study has produced insightful results, it was limited to many aspects whose absence or adequate presence would have promoted different findings. The first methodological limitation is that the study was unable to encompass the entire population. It only involved 80 students, which is a relatively small number that does not allow any attempt to generalize the findings to all Moroccan freshmen university students. Another potential problem is the bridled number of variables; the investigation should have included another one or two language skills to gain a clearer idea of the language transfer that takes place across languages. Furthermore, the inquirer could not account for any influence of the tests given the fact that the idea of





taking a test does affect participants' performance on the test. Admittedly, devising the tests should have been based on the results of a previously administered language proficiency test for the sake of adequate reading comprehension tests that would suit the participants' level. Lastly, although all the four raters followed the same scoring procedure, no inter-rater reliability was measured because there were some rubrics such as summarizing and paraphrasing whose correction must not have escaped from the biased subjectivity of the raters.

### **Methodological Implications**

Various are the reflections that have been generated from the present study, and which researchers should take into consideration in future attempts. First, the adoption of a mixed-methods approach in the investigation of this topic would have yielded more exploratory insights on the reasons behind students' failure in French, their attitudes and awareness of the working elements in the process of learning languages and the transfer that takes place across the linguistic systems, and learners' adequate knowledge of the language. Second, the results of this study would have been richer had the researchers included more variables such as writing and speaking to have a more lucid idea on the concept of language transfer. Hence, another possible area of future research would be to investigate language transfer in different language skills. Third, the rubrics used in the reading comprehension tests are not the only effective areas that measure reading ability; thus, future research should try to broaden the scope of the tests to thoroughly account for what reading ability entails. Fourth, conducting a comparative study between participants from different contexts, universities, and departments would have made the research of more significance as the results obtained in this investigation would indeed have been different in other contexts and with different participants. Last, investigating language ability, in general, necessitates the adoption of longitudinal research for the sake of a better understanding of how learners happen to develop their linguistic abilities and at what stage the transfer exactly takes place.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Given the fact that almost all the participants demonstrated a very low level in French, this finding suggests that French teachers, syllabus designers, and curriculum developers either reconsider the whole idea of teaching French in Morocco at all or try to bring about change that would level up the language to the national and international expectations. Moreover, the spotted contribution of metacognitive knowledge to English reading development has the major pedagogical implication of incorporating metacognitive instruction into the English curriculum to enhance foreign language reading. This also applies to tertiary syllabus designers in a way that they have to include courses whose main focus is to introduce students to reading comprehension and study skills with consistent regard to the metacognitive knowledge of the language.

### **Conclusion**

The present correlational study is concerned with exploring reading ability across foreign languages in Morocco through the investigation of the metacognitive relationship between French reading ability and English reading development. In this investigation, the aim was to explore the relationship that is held by reading ability in English and French as foreign languages in Morocco. The second aim of this study was to measure students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies to explore its impact on English reading development. The paucity of empirical studies conducted on the topic at stake acted as a catalyst for the conduction of this investigation in the Moroccan context where English and French are recognized as official foreign languages. Acknowledging the previous studies conducted on the topic of the present endeavor, the latter has thoroughly reviewed the relevant literature to trace the place and the theoretical orientations of the current study. It has also accounted for the empirical studies that have been carried out in the same regard to provide insights and clarify the empirical ground on which a theoretical framework can be developed accordingly. As the significance of undertaking this study implied, this endeavor has contributed to the body of literature that is being built on foreign language reading and metacognition. It has surely yielded invaluable insights and implications for the French language teaching community and English reading comprehension and study skills tertiary courses. In accordance with the study's intent to compare students' reading ability in French and English, two reading comprehension tests were devised by the researchers in both languages. The design of the two tests was based on a review of various reading comprehension tests that were devised and administered by university professors and experienced teachers of French and English. Notably, consistency among the tests' rubrics was one of the main considerations of the inquirer as the tests contained the same rubrics and were scored using a unified scoring procedure. Furthermore, measuring students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies called for the need for a valid and reliable instrument. That is, the inquirer had to adapt the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) by Mokhtari, K., &Reichard, C. (2002). The inventory originally had three strategy subscales: Global Reading Strategies, Problem-Solving Strategies, and Support Reading Strategies, which encapsulated thirty different reading strategies. The latter had to be reduced by the researchers to twenty-one



reading strategies following the MARSIs manual on “Assessing Students’ Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies” (Mokhtari&Reichard, 2002). The investigation of the correlation between students’ scores in English and French reading comprehension tests has shown that there is no relationship between English and French reading abilities of students. This implies that the French reading ability of students has not been empirically proved to be a predictive aspect of English reading ability. In this vein, the results rejected the first research hypothesis in the sense that they did not support the claim that there is a reading transfer between French and English. Also, the second major finding of the study was that students’ metacognitive awareness of reading strategies did correlate with their English reading ability. Significantly, this spotted relationship implies the indispensable role metacognitive knowledge plays in the process of English reading development. This has been previously acknowledged by many scholars in the very sense that being in the know of the reading process and the strategies utilized while interacting with the text briskly contributes to the consolidation of language reading skills in general.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A: The English Reading Comprehension Test**

**FULL NAME:** .....

**Please read the text and answer all the questions**

To avoid the various foolish opinions to which mankind is prone, no superhuman genius is required. A few simple rules will keep you, not from an error, but a silly error. If the matter is one that can be settled with observation, make the observation yourself. Aristotle could have avoided the mistake of thinking that women have fewer teeth than men. By the simple device of





asking Mrs. Aristotle to keep open while he counted. Thinking that you know when in fact you don't is a fatal mistake, to which we are all prone. I believe that hedgehogs eat black beetles because I have been told that they do; but if I were writing a book on the habits of hedgehogs, I should not commit myself until I had ... seen one enjoying this unappetizing diet.

There are ways in which you can make yourself aware of your own bias. If an opinion contrary to your own makes you angry, that is a sign that you are subconsciously aware of having no good reason for thinking as you do. If someone maintains that two and two are five, you feel pity rather than anger, unless you know so little of arithmetic that his opinion shakes your contrary conviction. The most savage controversies are those about matters as to which there is no good evidence either way. Persecution is used in theology, not in arithmetic because in arithmetic there is knowledge, in theology there is the only opinion. So whenever you find yourself angry about a difference of opinion, be on your guard; you will probably find on examination, that your belief is going beyond the evidence warrants.

Be very wary of opinions that flatter your self-esteem. Both men and women are firmly convinced of the superior excellence of their sex. If you are a man, you can point out that most poets and men of science are male; if you are a woman, you can retort that so are most criminals. The question is inherently insoluble, but self-esteem conceals this from most people. We are all, whatever part of the world we come from, persuaded that our nation is superior to all others. Here again, the rational man will admit that the question is one to which there is no demonstrably right answer. The only way I know of dealing with this general human conceit is to remind ourselves of a small planet in a little corner of the universe, and that for aught we know, other parts of the cosmos may contain beings as superior to ourselves as we are to jelly-fish.

Bertrand Russell from Unpopular Essay

**I. Provide a title to the text**

.....

**II. Choose the best alternative**

- 1. **prone:** afflicted with, used to, heir, liable
- 2. **theology:** the study of myths, the study of religion, the study of politics, the study of ethics
- 3. **retort:** shout back, reply quickly, confirm, opine

**III. find the words in the text that have the same meaning as:**

- 1. Deadly (Paragraph 1):.....
- 2. Prejudice (Paragraph 2):.....
- 3. Unanswerable (Paragraph 4):.....

**IV. Check whether these statements are True or False. If a statement is false, rewrite it so that it becomes true.**

- 1. Superhuman genius is needed to avoid foolish opinions





.....  
.....  
.....

2. Aristotle avoided the mistake of thinking that women have fewer teeth than men

.....  
.....  
.....

3. No woman would probably retort that most men are criminals

.....  
.....

4. The author believes that hedgehogs eat black beetles because he has once seen one eating them

.....  
.....  
.....

**V. Using your own words, answer the following questions**

1. What are the “simple rules” which the author suggests in his essay?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2. What examples does the author use to illustrate his rules?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3. What, in the author’s opinion, is the difference between knowledge and opinion?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

4. The author’s main point is that we should not believe strongly in anything. Is this correct? If so, in what sense do you agree with the author? If not, how would you change this statement

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**VI. Paraphrase the following sentences**





Appendix B: The French Reading Comprehension Test

Nom

et

prenom:

.....

Lisez le passage et repondez aux questions:

"Chacun est le maître de sa propre vie"; c'est certainement là l'argument le plus simple et plus terrible des avocats de l'euthanasie la liberté de chacun de faire ce qu'il veut de sa propre vie .Ne plus pouvoir vivre dans la douleur, s'euthanasier ! Ne plus croire à aucun remède, s'euthanasier ! Se retrouver seul et rejeté par ses pairs devant une maladie, s'euthanasier ! Ne plus supporter le regard des autres à son handicap, s'euthanasier !

Ah non, je n'adhère nullement à ces affabulations ! Tout d'abord ce qu'oublie un peu vite les partisans de l'euthanasie, est que croyant ; que nous sommes, répondront que la vie n'appartient pas à son dépositaire humain, mais à son créateur divin, pour la bonne raison que c'est lui seul qui lui a insufflé la vie et c'est lui seul qui la lui reprend [...]

De plus, je ne renonce pas aux dernières parts d'humanité qui nous restent, on n'est pas seul propriétaire de sa propre vie. Nous apparterons à une famille, à un milieu, à une communauté : autant de gens auxquels nous sommes ; rattachés, aux yeux desquels nous avons un prix, aussi insignifiant soit-il parfois. Et, à mon avis, c'est bien la marque de la barbarie que de rejeter au loin ces liens vitaux pour instaurer un droit à mourir.

S'il nous est parfois impossible d'empêcher le geste malheureux d'un désespéré, il serait ignominieux d'inscrire dans la loi l'idée que la valeur de la vie est relative. Nous sommes précieux aux yeux de nos proches et nous sommes responsables de l'image que nous renvoyons à nos descendants. Rien n'est, en fin de compte, plus faux que l'argument «chacun est le maître de sa vie» , si l'homme moderne daigne de relever le nez de son nombril...

André Samengrelo, Culture de mort, Culture de vie

\*Euthanasie : Mort douce et sans souffrance

I. Donnez un titre convenant au texte

.....

II. Répondez par vrai ou faux. Justifier votre réponse.

1. "Chacun est le maître de sa propre vie" est l'argument utilisé par les personnes qui sont contre l'euthanasie

.....  
.....  
.....

2. L'auteur est un des avocats de l'euthanasie.

.....  
.....  
.....

3. L'auteur est un homme croyant.

.....  
.....  
.....

4. L'auteur n'a pas présenté un contre argument a son point de vue.

.....  
.....  
.....



**III. A partir du texte retrouvez les mots avec le meme sens des mots suivantes :**

1. Honteux (ignominieux) .....
2. sauvage .....
3. approuver (adhère) .....
4. propriétaire (dépositaire) .....

**IV. utilisez vos propres mots et répondez aux questions suivantes:**

1. Que pense l 'auteur de l'euthanasie?

.....  
.....  
.....

2. Quelles sont les affabulations et dites si l'auteur les approuve ?

.....  
.....  
.....

3. A partir du texte quel est le probleme de l'euthanasie?

.....  
.....  
.....

4. Quels sont les arguments que l'auteur a utilisé pour defendre Euthanasie?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

5. Qu'elle est la conclusion retenue par l'auteur à la fin du texte ?

.....  
.....  
.....

**V. Reformulez les phrases suivantes**

1. Ah non, je n'adhère nullement à ces affabulations !

.....  
.....

2. Nous sommes précieux aux yeux de nos proches et nous sommes responsables de l'image que nous renvoyons à nos descendants

.....  
.....







<b>B</b>						
<b>GLOB</b>	4. I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>GLOB</b>	5. I use context clues to help me better understand what I'm reading.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>GLOB</b>	6. I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text	1	2	3	4	5
<b>GLOB</b>	7. I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong	1	2	3	4	5
<b>SUP</b>	8. When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>SUP</b>	9. I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>SUP</b>	10. I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>SUP</b>	11. I use reference materials such as dictionaries to help me understand what I read	1	2	3	4	5
<b>SUP</b>	12. I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read	1	2	3	4	5
<b>SUP</b>	13. I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it	1	2	3	4	5
<b>SUP</b>	14. I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>PROB</b>	15. I read slowly but carefully to be sure I understand what I'm reading.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>PROB</b>	16. I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>PROB</b>	17. I adjust my reading speed according to what I'm reading.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>PROB</b>	18. When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I'm reading.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>PROB</b>	19. I stop from time to time and think about what I'm reading	1	2	3	4	5
<b>PROB</b>	20. When text becomes difficult, I re-read to increase my understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>PROB</b>	21. I try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	1	2	3	4	5

Adapted from Mokhtari, K., & Reichard, C. (2002). Assessing students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94 (2), 249-259.