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# English language learners' strategies for reading online texts: Influential factors and patterns of use at home and in school

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## ABSTRACT

We investigate five fourth and fifth-grade English language learners' (ELLs) strategy use when they read online texts at home and in school. We also identify factors that play a role when these learners read online texts, as well as similar and different patterns in reading strategies at home and in school. The findings show that three factors influence the ELLs' selection of online texts and use of reading strategies. In addition, the ELLs used nine reading strategies to enhance their reading online texts. Based on these findings, we discuss (a) the ELLs' online reading strategies in different contexts, (b) the multidimensional zone of proximal development, and (c) collaboration between parents and teachers.

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## 1. Introduction

English language learners (ELLs) need to master necessary language skills to become successful in global learning environments, and reading is one critical skill (Chapelle & Jamieson, 2008). Since written input is a significant resource for the ELLs' language learning process, reading plays important roles in their academic success (Cummins, 1991; Eskey, 2005). Reading contexts and patterns, however, change as technology permeates our lives. Understanding and using technology becomes necessary for the ELLs to interact with the world and to transform it (Kellner, 2001). In contemporary technology-enhanced reading environments, online texts include not only textual resources—traditional texts—but also other semiotic modes—pictures, audio, video, and computer games. Literate people are expected to be aware of changes in technology and multimodality, and to be able to understand and use these diverse texts (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Park, 2012; Chatel, 2002).

Readers adjust their reading patterns and adopt diverse strategies in contemporary reading environments. In both paper-based and online reading contexts, readers use dynamic strategies to make their reading more effective. Skillful readers adopt diverse reading strategies—such as thinking about the topic, setting up their reading purposes, moving back and forth in the text, monitoring their comprehension, and planning when they are reading—more frequently than unskilled readers (Brown, 1980; Carrell, 1989; Carrell, Pharis, & Liberto, 1989; Oxford & Crookall, 1989). In this paper, we identify ELLs' patterns in the use of online reading strategies at home and in school and describe influential factors.

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## 2. Theoretical framework and literature review

### 2.1. Sociocultural contexts and dialogism

We adopt [Vygotsky's \(1986\)](#) sociocultural perspective and [Bakhtin's \(1986\)](#) dialogic perspective to gain a holistic understanding of online text reading processes. Vygotsky emphasizes the roles of languages, cultures, and communities in human development. He shows how language, as a mediational tool, plays a vital role in the developmental process ([Johnson, 2004](#); [Lantolf & Thorne, 2006](#); [Vygotsky, 1986](#)). From a sociocultural perspective, reading is not simply a process for comprehending the meaning of texts, but also involves active and dialogic processes to make and negotiate meanings while reading texts. During the developmental process, learning creates a zone of proximal development (ZPD), “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” ([Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86](#)). Learners begin to internalize what they learn, and their development occurs when they interact and cooperate with people in diverse learning environments ([Vygotsky, 1978](#)). [Bakhtin \(1981, 1986\)](#) focuses on utterances, as a unit of speech that includes responsiveness to other voices. Bakhtin emphasizes that an utterance always has a dialogic relationship with preceding and anticipated future utterances.

We use these combined perspectives of Vygotsky and Bakhtin in our approach to ELLs' reading in technology-enhanced learning contexts. We consider ELLs as active participants in online reading, and we study how they use dynamic strategies. Our study offers a comprehensive understanding of second language (L2) learners' similar and different online reading strategies and the influential factors at home and school.

### 2.2. Electronic literacies and online reading

Electronic literacies involve literacy skills required in computer enhanced learning contexts. Electronic literacies rely on computer literacy, computer-mediated communication (CMC) literacy, multimedia literacy, and information literacy. Computer literacy is the basic skill required to use computer software and hardware, and CMC literacy refers to the capacity of using CMC to interact with others. CMC can be synchronous, as with an instant messenger, or asynchronous, as with email and blogs. Multimedia literacy means having the literacy skills to understand and create complex documents. Since online texts often include textual resources, images, audio, and videos, online literacy requires multimedia literacy. Information literacy is the ability to locate and evaluate online resources ([Lemke, 1998](#); [Rosell-Aguilar, 2004](#); [Warschauer, 1999, 2002](#)).

Reading online texts is different from reading on paper. Therefore, readers need to adopt new literacy skills and adjust their reading patterns and purposes in new reading environments ([De Ridder, 2000](#); [McNabb, Hassel, & Steiner, 2002](#); [McPherson, 2005](#); [Warschauer, 1999](#)). Technology-enhanced literacy activities make reading more enjoyable and motivate readers to read more actively. Furthermore, they encourage readers to improve their fluency in reading. Readers can access new tools, resources, and communities, as well as learn traditional reading skills, when reading online texts ([McNabb et al., 2002](#); [McPherson, 2005](#)). However, they frequently waste time navigating irrelevant websites or lose the thread of the topic they were following ([Heller, 1990](#); [McPherson, 2005](#)).

### 2.3. Online reading strategies

Online texts consist of nonlinear hypertext, multimedia texts, and interactive texts, and these can either support readers' comprehension or provide new challenges in the reading process ([Coiro, 2003](#)). When reading online texts, language learners both develop new reading strategies and transfer paper-based text reading strategies to their online text reading ([Park, 2012](#); [Park & Kim, 2011, 2016](#); [Chou, 2012](#); [Coiro & Dobler, 2007](#); [Elshair, 2002](#); [Foltz, 1993](#); [Hsieh & Dwyer, 2009](#); [Huang, 2013](#); [Huang, Chern, & Lin, 2009](#)). They modify the features of online texts, navigate and evaluate the texts, personalize their behaviors, and react to problems ([Elshair, 2002](#)). In addition, readers use maps and other signals, such as titles and nodes, to facilitate the problem-solving process in hypertext learning environments ([Foltz, 1993](#)). However, among existing studies about online reading strategies, there is a heavy focus on cognitive aspects of reading, and few studies have used sociocultural perspectives. In addition, ELLs' reading across diverse learning contexts, such as homes and schools, has not been a focus of research. The current study will fill these gaps.

## 3. Research questions

To have a better understanding of L2 learners' varied patterns of using reading strategies when reading online texts at home and in school, we addressed the following two research questions:

1. What factors influence five elementary level ELLs reading of online texts at home and in school?
2. What are the similar and different patterns of strategy use when these ELLs read online texts at home as opposed to in school?

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