The Effects of Reading Purpose on Reading Comprehension and Perceived Difficulty

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Despite a large amount of research on reading, little attention has been paid to experimental studies on the effects of purposeful reading. This study explored the effects of reading purpose on reading comprehension and perceived difficulty. 71 high school students participated in this study and were randomly assigned to three groups – graphic organizer (Purpose 1), key sentence (Purpose 2), and control. The learners’ reading comprehension was measured through pre-, post- and delayed tests. The participants’ perceived difficulty for the texts was also checked with a seven-point Likert scale. The result demonstrates no immediate effect of establishing reading purpose, though immediate reading purpose effects might be found if a longer treatment period is set. The results also reveal the sustained effect of reading purpose on reading comprehension. In perceived text difficulty, the Purpose 1 group found the reading passages the easiest among the three groups. This suggests that learners establishing a reading purpose can gain greater ease in reading than those without a reading purpose.

**Key words:** purposeful reading, reading comprehension, perceived difficulty

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading has been generally considered as one of the most fundamental skills and accounts for a considerable amount of instruction in the field of English education. Although in recent years the number of reading research articles has tended to decrease,
as shown in representative international journals such as *TESOL Quarterly, Language Learning* and *The Modern Language Journal*, (Choe & Ma, 2013; Noji, Ford, & Silva, 2009), this does not mean that reading does not play a pivotal role in developing students’ English proficiency any more. Reading still holds an important position in English education in that it acts as a major source of input. We read magazines, newspapers, advertisements, posters, e-mails and text messages throughout the day. In more formal settings, in academic contexts or workplace environments, we also engage in reading to gain information, which could be quite a demanding process. The ability to read well, therefore, is thought of as one of the most important language skills in modern societies for many different purposes (Grabe, 2009)

In teaching reading, one of the major concerns of instructors is how to make students more active when processing texts. In order to induce readers into reading more actively, teachers need to provide guidance in helping them to become engaged in reading through the use of effective classroom techniques: establishing a purpose for reading, tapping prior knowledge, setting up expectation, or modeling reading strategies. Anderson (2014) suggests five characteristics of engaged readers: reading purposes, fluent reading, reading comprehension, metacognitive awareness of reading strategies, and motivation. Among them, the present study focuses specifically on reading purposes; that is, whether having a reading purpose in mind has effects on reading comprehension. Although some researchers insist that purposeful reading has positive effects on reading comprehension, supporting evidence is not so strong, due to a lack of previous experimental research. Only a few studies have focused on reading purpose, and in many cases, they do not primarily discuss its relationship with reading comprehension, but include other factors such as reading rate, inference generation, and passage difficulty (DiStefano & Noe, 1981; Linderholm & van den Broek, 2002; Narvaez, van den Broek, & Ruiz, 1999; Samuels & Dahl, 1975). In addition, most of the previous research dealt with reading purpose in a limited scope, in two or three separate areas: reading for study, reading for information, or reading for pleasure.

Considering the aforementioned limitations, the present study aims to explore the relationship between purposeful reading and reading comprehension, and additionally to try to ascertain whether having a reading purpose affects readers’ perceived difficulty on texts. In this study, participants in the two experimental groups were asked to perform different types of purpose activities: one group for completing graphic organizer tasks (Purpose 1 group), and the other for finding key sentences (Purpose 2 group). Even though both experimental groups developed their reading purpose at the early stages of instruction, they had different points where they performed their purpose activities; the Purpose 1 group performed their purposeful activities after reading whereas the Purpose 2 group did so while reading. This study also focuses on how learners perceive reading
texts based on whether they establish their reading purpose since the investigation of learners’ perceptions may provide potential pedagogical suggestions as to the students’ affective aspects and L2 learning. For the current study, the following three research questions were formulated:

1. What are the immediate effects of purposeful reading—graphic organizer and key sentence—on L2 learners’ reading comprehension?
2. What are the delayed effects of purposeful reading—graphic organizer and key sentence—on L2 learners’ reading comprehension?
3. What are the effects of purposeful reading—graphic organizer and key sentence—on L2 learners’ perceived difficulty in reading texts?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of Reading Purpose

Knutson (1997) notes “having a purpose means having a reason to read and approaching a text with a particular goal in mind, whether that goal involves learning or entertainment” (p. 49). In Knutson’s broader sense, as noted by Knutson, reading purpose can be divided into studying (or learning) and entertainment (or fun). Anderson (2014) also mentions three typical purposes for reading: reading for pleasure, reading for information, and reading to learn something new.

Such distinctions, however, divide reading purpose rather simply and limit its boundaries. Intuitively, with this simple division it seems likely that readers, in many cases, do already know their purposes when reading. For instance, it is quite obvious that students in EFL class settings read for studying to obtain better grades in the subject, and people often read interesting novels or magazines for leisure.

With the broad concept of reading purpose, providing readers with a purpose would have pedagogical implications in English education in that most students find their own reading purpose in studying and are already aware of this. In fact, a range of studies have based their definition of reading purposes on this distinction (Brannon, 1998; Narvaez, van den Broek, & Ruiz, 1999; van den Broek et al., 2001). The results of these studies, however, showed limited educational benefits for using reading purposes in class, since they were carried out with only one type of reading purpose, learning, without considering different types of reading purpose. Additionally, in several previous studies (Linderholm & van den Broek, 2002; Narvaez, van den Broek, & Ruiz, 1999), the participants did not have real purposes for reading but were asked to imagine their
reading purposes, which could lead to results differing from those in reality.

To map out the comprehensive effects of purpose on reading, Lorch and his colleagues (Lorch, Kluzewitz, & Lorch, 1995; Lorch, Lorch, & Kluzewitz, 1993) categorized reading types based on different reading purposes. They include reading for an essay exam, reading to prepare for class, reading selectively, reading to apply information, reading to search, reading to challenge a position, and light reading. Even though this classification defines reading purpose in greater detail, these would be considered reading situations rather than specific reading purposes.

To find more practical implications in institutional settings, we defined reading purpose more specifically in this study by utilizing classroom activities or tasks. For instance, as noted by Anderson (2014), the following reading activities can be said to be purposeful: reading for completing a task (e.g., filling out a graphic organizer), reading in preparation for talking with peers, reading and gathering information to support their opinions, and reading for writing summary sentences. Knutson (1997) also provided tips for developing more detailed reading purposes: having students write a list of some form, such as places, events, activities, or even facts or ideas the students find interesting. These kinds of classroom activities could provide students with a real sense of reading purpose.

2.2. Previous Studies

Despite much interest in reading skills in second language (L2) learning, few studies on the effects of reading purpose have been performed internationally or domestically. Even among a small amount of research related to reading purpose, very little attention has been paid to experimental studies on the effect of purposeful reading on reading comprehension. Research into reading purpose, in many cases, has focused on the relationship between reading purpose and various other areas such as working memory capacity (Linderholm & van den Broek, 2002), flexibility of reading rate (DiStefano & Noe, 1981; Samuels & Dahl, 1975), word learning (Swanborn & Glopper, 2002), and reading tasks (Green, 2005; Knutson, 1997). A different line of studies demonstrates that reading different text types (genre) has influence on reading purpose, which leads to promoting appropriate processing in reading and imposing different kinds of demands on readers (Grabe, 2002; McDaniel, Blischak, & Einstein, 1995; McDaniel, Einstein, Dunay, & Cobb, 1986). Even though these studies do help corroborate the benefits of reading purpose, they are not directly linked to the effect of reading purpose on reading comprehension.

Researchers theoretically or experimentally emphasized the importance of reading purpose by relating it with task or literature (Alvermann & Moore, 1991; Carlisle & Rice,
2002; Grabe, 1989; Green, 2005; Guthrie et al., 2006; Knutson, 1997; Narvaez, van den Broek, & Ruiz, 1999; Noji, Ford, & Silva, 2009; Pichet & Anderson, 1977; Sweet & Snow, 2002). They supported the claim that having a reading purpose increases learners’ reading ability or comprehension, and fluent readers are mostly aware of their reading purposes as they are reading. Sweet and Snow (2002) showed a close relationship between reading ability and its purpose, stating, “Reading does not occur in a vacuum. It is done for a purpose, to accomplish some task” (p. 27). Hudson (2007) also pointed out that reading comprehension could be enhanced when reading purposes exist in that readers try to achieve their goals when engaged in purposeful reading, and added that purposes should be considered when it comes to planning L2 reading methods, materials, and instruction. Reading for a purpose and accomplishing such a purpose were also considered important in reading comprehension of literature (Pichet & Anderson, 1977). Grabe (1989) studied the influence of purposeful reading in an elementary school setting and found that more able readers with reading purpose more accurately pointed out where goal-relevant information was located and answered comprehension questions than did less able readers. Only four elementary students, however, participated in this study, revealing a low level of external validity. In the study of Knutson (1997), the reading purpose activities in the classroom were introduced with a communicative task such as drawing a picture based on a text, reconstructing a text, reading slightly different versions of the same story and discovering the differences, and doing an information gap activity using brochures, timetables, or maps. He argued that reading texts with a particular reason or perspective plays an important role in the reader’s motivation, interest, and comprehension. Narvaez, van den Broek, and Ruiz (1999) investigated the influence of reading purpose (entertainment or study) on inference generation and comprehension, and concluded that reading purpose and possibly text type (especially expository text) could affect inference types readers generated. Concerning reading comprehension, however, no significant difference was found between the two purpose groups.

Green (2005) insisted on the integration of reading purpose and extensive reading in the context of task-based curriculum, arguing that extensive reading should be applied and executed in the task-based curriculum, which requires clear and attainable purposes in all language learning activities. Tovani (2005) discussed the merits of having purpose when reading: it not only allows readers to sort information, but also gives the mind a task as well, so as not to be distracted by other unrelated contents in the texts. Additionally, he added the importance of educators’ role in providing a purpose, writing that “we have a responsibility to be clear about our instructional purposes” (p. 51). In the same vein, Conner and Farr (2009) also emphasized the teachers’ role in helping students realize the importance of having purpose. Noji, Ford, and Silva (2009) distinguished
‘learning to read’ including finding the main idea and identifying the relevant details from ‘reading to learn’ or purposeful reading. They tested 300 students divided into three groups on their possibility of choosing the same information from reading passages. They concluded that when learners have a purpose, they are more able to cluster around the same information; that is, they are more likely to read and comprehend material in the same way.

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 71 students of a high school located in Gwangju, South Korea. All of them have studied English as a compulsory subject for about seven years and have no experience studying abroad. They were selected from advanced English classes as classified by students’ academic records, and were randomly assigned to three groups—two experimental groups (26 students each): graphic organizer (hereafter, Purpose 1) and key sentence (hereafter, Purpose 2) groups; and one control group (19 students). The gender ratio in the two experimental groups was 50 to 50 (thirteen males and thirteen females each), and ten male and nine female students participated in the control group.

Their English reading proficiency is considered to be advanced at the high school level, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Achievement (NAEA). Under the government educational policy, since 2010, all students in 11th grade in Korea are to have taken the NAEA, which consists of three subjects—Korean, mathematics, and English. According to the 2013 NAEA result reports, to determine students’ academic attainments, this test uses a distinct scoring system in which scores can be compared with those of previous NAEA tests. The scores are adjusted based on the relative ease or difficulty of the tests, which consist of different items every year, much like achievement tests in the U.S. such as SAT, TOEFL, and TOEIC. In the English section, the test results show achievement rates in all four skills, i.e., listening, reading, speaking, and writing. All the participants took the NAEA in 2013 and achieved more than 70% in the reading section, which means they are at a relatively high level, at least in reading skills. The total sum and mean achievement rate of the three groups were the following: Purpose 1 (2,060, 79.231%), Purpose 2 (2,065, 79.423%), and control (1,510, 79.474%), which indicates that the three groups are homogeneous in terms of their reading ability.
3.2. Materials

The participants read four expository texts which were selected from *More Reading Power* by Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004). Two of them are about ‘life today in various African countries’ with six paragraphs each: (1) Africa Today and (2) The Internet in Africa. The other texts are about ‘issues and problems that the whole world faces’ with five and six paragraphs each: (1) The Global Crisis and (2) Where Have All the Frogs Gone? All four passages are about 500 words long, and are of the same grade-level difficulty.

To measure students’ reading comprehension for the texts, multiple-choice questions were administered to the students. The comprehension questions were adapted from the *More Reading Power* and several new questions were formulated; a total of 40 items, ten items on each text, were created. All of the comprehension check questions were solved and reviewed by two Korean teachers of English, one with a doctorate degree and one with a master’s degree, and one native English-speaking teacher (NEST). After disagreements were resolved through discussion, the finalized version of the questions was distributed in regular classes as a post-test. In addition, we surveyed the participants’ perceived difficulty by using a seven-point Likert scale.

3.3. Procedures

First, we identified and selected students proficient at English reading based on the 2013 NAEA English results. The criterion for choosing students was an achievement rate of greater than 70% in the reading comprehension section. To obtain permission from the participants as volunteers for this study, a consent form assuring voluntary participation and anonymity of participant identities was distributed. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the three groups: Purpose 1, Purpose 2, or the control group. In order to determine whether their initial reading levels were identical before treatments, all the participants were given the identical NAEA conducted in 2011 for the pretest, and they answered 19 multiple-choice reading questions.
During the treatment period, one Korean teacher of English taught the three groups to set up a systematic teaching procedure and eliminate any possibility of establishing different instructional settings. All the groups met twice a week (Tuesday and Thursday) for two weeks. For each treatment time, 30 minutes were given to both purpose (experimental) groups; reading and performing the activity for 20 minutes, and solving comprehension questions for ten minutes (see the Appendix for the questions). For the control group, however, we adjusted treatment time to approximately 25 minutes for reading and solving the same comprehension questions, considering that they did not need to perform purposeful activities related to reading.

For the Purpose 1 group, before students read the assigned reading text, the instructor stated the purpose-imparting remarks to develop a purpose. All the statements imparting purpose for reading were made in Korean, the participants’ native tongue, to ensure that they all clearly understand the statements.

The following is what the instructor said in class:

Attention, please. Now, we are going to read a six- (or five-) paragraph reading text. The purpose of reading is to complete a graphic organizer worksheet for the reading text given. Again, after reading, you will be asked to fill out the graphic organizer worksheet. What is your reading purpose?

In order to reduce any possibility of participants’ forgetfulness or unawareness of their reading purpose, the teacher made students produce their reading purpose at the end of the statements by questioning “what is your reading purpose?” After reading the text, the Purpose 1 group did the purposeful activities, completing the graphic organizer (see the Appendix). Twenty minutes were allowed for the participants to read and perform the assigned activity, and then ten reading comprehension questions about the passage were given to the group for another ten minutes. After that, self-perceived difficulty for each reading text was checked on a seven-point Likert scale.

The Purpose 2 group was told to read the passage given and to underline one main idea or key sentence per paragraph; in total, five or six sentences were underlined for each reading story. As with the case of the Purpose 1 group, twenty minutes were allowed for this group to read and do the activity; while reading the text, the Purpose 2 group did the purposeful activity (underlining the key sentence in each paragraph):

Attention, please. Now, we are going to read a six- (or five-) paragraph reading text. The purpose of reading is to find a key sentence in each paragraph. Again, while reading, underline the key sentence in each paragraph. What is your reading purpose?
Next, the instructor gave out the same ten comprehension check questions, which took ten minutes. The perceived difficulty of the reading texts was also checked on a seven-point Likert scale.

The control group was not given any treatment, but was asked to read the given text and answer the same comprehension questions for twenty minutes. Self-perception for reading difficulty was also checked after reading.

Finally, a delayed posttest was administered to all the three groups after two weeks from the last treatment day. The delayed posttest was comprised of 19 multiple-choice reading comprehension questions in the 2010 NAEA test.

3.4. Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected, we used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 17.0. First, the pretest scores of the three groups were compared with a one-way ANOVA to ensure that no significant difference was found in their reading comprehension ability. Next, a repeated-measures ANOVA was used for comparing within-groups independent variables, the four posttest results in this study, and a Bonferroni post hoc test was also conducted for finding differences among groups. Among various post hoc tests, the reason we employed the Bonferroni post hoc test is that it can be used even when sample sizes are small and different (Baek, 2012). The alpha level was set at .05, nondirectional, for all statistical tests. The data for perceived difficulty of the three groups were also analyzed in order to see whether having a reading purpose helps the participants in finding reading and comprehension to be easier.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To ensure the internal consistency and reliability, Cronbach α coefficients were computed for the four posttests. The results for the four posttests were .980, .971, .975, and .991 respectively. This indicates that the reliability of the comprehension questions of each test is nearly certain. After the posttests, as a quantitative extension of this study, we also asked the participants to rate the difficulty of the passages on a scale of 1 (easy) to 7 (difficult) immediately after taking the reading comprehension tests as a posttest.

Even though we selected similar-level students according to reading achievement rates from the 2013 NAEA (they showed achievement rates of above 70% in the reading comprehension section), we double-checked the homogeneity of the three groups by conducting a pretest, consisting of nineteen multiple-choice reading items extracted from the 2011 NAEA. Each item was counted as one point and so the range of test score was
from 0 to 19. Table 2 shows the results of the pretest scores among the three groups.

According to the results from the one-way ANOVA (refer to Table 2), the mean scores for three groups were 15.23, 15.08, and 15.16 out of 19, and no significant difference was found \((F = .963, p = .466)\), indicating all the three groups were homogeneous in terms of their reading comprehension capability.

### Table 2
Results of Group Comparison on Pretest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>ES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15.23</td>
<td>1.904</td>
<td>.963</td>
<td>.466</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15.08</td>
<td>2.038</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.16</td>
<td>2.089</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.1. Immediate Effects of Purpose on Reading Comprehension

In order to identify the effects of reading purpose on learners’ performance, four immediate posttests were analyzed by a repeated-measures ANOVA. The results of the Sphericity test revealed that the sphericity for posttest scores is not assumed \((p = .004)\), and so the results of the Greenhouse-Geisser were applied to this analysis. The results show a significant main effect of having purpose on the posttest scores \((F = 4.539, p = .007, \text{Partial } \eta^2 = .063)\), but no significant difference among groups \((F = 1.616, p = .206, \text{Partial } \eta^2 = .045)\). An interaction effect was not observed between the two variables (see Tables 3 and 4).

### Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Reading Comprehension Posttests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Posttest 1</th>
<th>Posttest 2</th>
<th>Posttest 3</th>
<th>Posttest 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>1.944</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>1.436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>2.092</td>
<td>6.96</td>
<td>1.777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>2.294</td>
<td>6.21</td>
<td>1.960</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4
Repeated-measures ANOVA Results for Reading Comprehension Posttests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Partial (\eta^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>42.612</td>
<td>2.534</td>
<td>16.816</td>
<td>4.539</td>
<td>.007*</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest*Group</td>
<td>10.105</td>
<td>5.068</td>
<td>1.994</td>
<td>0.538</td>
<td>.749</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>10.006</td>
<td>2.000</td>
<td>5.003</td>
<td>1.616</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td>.045</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\*\(p < .05\)
The result of no immediate purpose effect on reading comprehension seems to be caused by rather a short treatment period, when considering all the four posttests were administered within two weeks. When the descriptive statistics of the results in Table 3 are considered, it could be inferred that the two purpose groups slightly better comprehend the reading texts than the control group, even though this is not statistically significant. Except for the first posttest results, which is the only instance where the mean score of the control group exceeds that of the Purpose 2 group (control group: 6.47, Purpose 2 group: 6.15), all the other mean scores of the purpose groups are higher than those of the control group (a total of seven times out of eight), suggesting the importance of reading purpose and the possibility for its short-term effects. In other words, though it is not significant overall, over time, the purpose groups show better performance in reading comprehension. If the treatment is practiced over a longer period of time, therefore, it is likely that short-term effects of reading purpose on understanding reading texts might be demonstrated.

4.2. Long-term Effects of Purpose on Reading Comprehension

In order to ascertain the effects of reading purpose on reading comprehension from a longer perspective, two weeks after all the treatment sessions, all participants of the three groups were asked to answer 19 multiple-choice reading questions from the 2010 NAEA test. While no immediate effect of reading purpose was found in posttest analyses, a significant main effect of purpose on reading comprehension as a long-term effect was found in the delayed posttest analyses. In order to determine long-term effects of reading purpose, delayed posttest scores among the groups were analyzed via a one-way ANOVA, and the results are summarized in Table 5. The results show significant differences in delayed posttest scores among the three groups \( F = 5.116, p = .009 \). For delayed posttest scores, more specifically, the two purpose groups are significantly different from the control group, between Purpose 1 and the control group \( (p = .022) \), and between Purpose 2 and the control group \( (p = .014) \), whereas there is no statistically significant difference between the two purpose groups (refer to Tables 5 and 6). This finding proves that having a reading purpose, whether it is completing a graphic organizer as a post-reading activity, or finding key sentences as a reading activity itself, clearly has a sustained effect on reading comprehension.

The long-term effect of reading purpose might be explained by the following procedure. First, the reading purpose is explained to the participants, and then students more actively work to accomplish the purpose suggested. As a consequence, they associate the necessary information in the reading texts with the purpose. This could make the information pertinent to the reading purpose meaningfully connected and more
durable compared to non-purpose reading, where much information is to be dealt with and is thus easily forgotten. This perspective corroborates Schraw and Dennison’s (1994) view that the effect of reading with a particular purpose enhances purpose-driven interest and has an effect on retention.

### TABLE 5

**Descriptive Statistics for Delayed Reading Comprehension Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17.42</td>
<td>1.501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17.50</td>
<td>1.449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16.24</td>
<td>1.868</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 6

**Results of Group Comparison on Delayed Posttest**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>ES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delayed Posttest Between Groups</td>
<td>25.674</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.837</td>
<td>5.116</td>
<td>.009*</td>
<td>.131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>170.636</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2.509</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>196.310</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05

### TABLE 7

**Bonferroni Post Hoc Test Results for Delayed Posttest**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MD</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 1</td>
<td>Purpose 2</td>
<td>-0.77</td>
<td>.439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 1</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>1.318</td>
<td>.478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 2</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>1.395</td>
<td>.478</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05

### 4.3 The Relationship Between Reading Purpose and Difficulty Perception

Table 8 shows the results of the group comparison for perceived difficulty of reading texts, which was rated on a seven-point Likert scale (the higher, the more difficult). This indicates that the Purpose 1 group felt reading passages easiest among the groups, followed by the control group and Purpose 2 group (the means of the Purpose 1, the Purpose 2, and the control group were 3.5769, 4.2308, and 4.1053 respectively). The similar findings were presented in Noji, Ford, and Silva’s study (2009); as indicated by difficulty ratings on a ten-point Likert scale, reading purpose made it easier for the learners to read the passages given. In their study, the means of the purpose group, main idea group, and control group were 3.25, 5.0, and 4.3 respectively. A one-way ANOVA
was also performed to compare the three groups’ perceived difficulty, which revealed significant differences in their perceptions ($F = 9.738, p = .000$). Bonferroni post hoc test results indicated that difficulty perceptions of the Purpose 1 group are significantly different from those of the other two groups, the Purpose 2 and control group.

**TABLE 8**  
Results of Group Comparisons on Perceived Difficulty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$ES$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.577</td>
<td>0.582</td>
<td>9.738</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>.223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.231</td>
<td>0.435</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.105</td>
<td>0.673</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05

**TABLE 9**  
Bonferroni Post Hoc Test Results for Perceived Difficulty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MD</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower Bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 2</td>
<td>-.654</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>.000*</td>
<td>-1.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>-.528</td>
<td>.169</td>
<td>.008*</td>
<td>-.944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- .290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.126</td>
<td>.169</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05

These findings could be explained by different attributes of the activities in each experimental group, i.e., when the reading purpose activities are performed: after reading or during reading. Even though the two purpose groups are seemingly similar, in that the participants have a reading purpose, the characteristics of the purposes could differ in terms of when the reading purpose activities are carried out. In the first purpose group, the participants read the texts with their reading purpose and then did a post-reading activity of filling out the graphic organizer worksheet. On the other hand, the participants in the second purpose group read the texts while underlining the key sentences, and thus, both the reading purpose and the activity occur simultaneously. This result might be attributed to the amount of cognitive processing workload when reading; during the reading, the Purpose 2 group participants need to process both reading purpose performance and reading passages simultaneously, while the control group participants can focus on only the reading itself. It could be inferred that the greater the cognitive load that learners have to process, the more difficulty they experience when reading texts.

In sum, learners establishing a reading purpose could feel more comfortable and experience greater ease while reading than those with no purpose. The differences in
purpose activities, however, might also lead to the conclusion that even if a reading purpose is established, the degree of text difficulty can be different according to the types and attributes of purpose activities. In other words, it is possible that participants performing a post-reading purpose activity perceive reading texts as less difficult than those who doing a purpose activity while reading.

5. CONCLUSION

The present study was designed to explore the effect of reading purpose on reading comprehension and learner’s perceived difficulty on reading texts. The major findings are as follows.

First, the three groups show no difference in posttest scores, implying that, for high proficiency students, there is no immediate effect of establishing purpose for reading on reading comprehension. Given that most posttest scores of the two purpose groups are numerically higher than those of the control group, however, there is much room for the possibility that a difference between the purpose groups and the control group might appear if a longer treatment period is used.

Next, significant differences in delayed posttest scores are found between the Purpose 1 group and the control group, and between the Purpose 2 group and the control group. This finding means that having reading purpose, irrespective of type of purpose activity, has a sustained effect on reading comprehension. That is, learners, who could be categorized as high performers in reading, can benefit from reading purpose development in terms of long-term effects, whether the purpose activity is completing a graphic organizer (post-reading) or underlining main idea sentences (while reading).

Lastly, comparisons of difficulty perceptions in reading texts show that the Purpose 1 group is significantly different from the other two groups (Purpose 2 and control). That is, the Purpose 1 group participants found the reading texts to be much less difficult than those in the other groups. This finding may be caused by different attributes of the purpose activities, a post-reading activity (filling out a graphic organizer) or an activity while reading (underlining key sentences). While a post-reading activity does not entail much cognitive burden for learners, a concurrent reading activity demands a greater cognitive processing workload, requiring simultaneous processing of reading purpose and reading texts.

The present study is limited by characteristics of the sample size and treatment period. This study needs to be replicated with more experimental groups with different reading purposes and activities, with a larger size, and over a longer treatment period, to obtain a clearer picture whether developing reading purpose effects reading comprehension. This
study makes contributions to ascertaining means of enhancing reading comprehension ability through classroom instruction, and provides learners as well as teachers with guidelines on how to approach reading texts more effectively.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX
Examples of Reading Comprehension Check Questions

Reading Text: Africa Today
1. According to this passage, the main factor preventing a solution to Africa’s problems is
   a. disease. b. poverty. c. war. d. international aid. e. natural disasters.

2. Wars are more violent in the twenty-first century partly because
   a. modern weapons are more destructive.
   b. valuable natural resources are lacking.
   c. of the lack of education and health care.
   d. European powers try to take Africans’ property.
   e. there has been an increase in natural disasters.

3. In the past, European powers
   a. did not understand African traditions.
   b. fought over control of the government.
   c. tried to help the Africans economically.
   d. took and sold Africans to Native Americans.
   e. could not find any valuable resources in Africa.

4. In many countries, different groups are fighting for control over the government so they can
   a. control the spread of the HIV virus.
   b. change the borders of their country.
   c. establish a unified, independent country.
   d. free their country from European rulers.
   e. become richer and control food supplies.
5. According to this passage, there is a close connection between
   a. African tribal traditions and poverty.
   b. war and the spread of the HIV virus.
   c. access to wealth and new technology.
   d. the spread of AIDS and level of wealth.
   e. international aid and the spread of disease.

   Examples of Graphic Organizer for Purpose 1 Group

1. The crisis of the Earth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>causes</th>
<th>results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. How are people affected by the destruction of the environment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>in the industrialized environment</th>
<th>in the other areas (including developing countries)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. The influence of Hurricane Mitch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>causes</th>
<th>results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4-1. Characteristics of coral reefs

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4-2. The results of reef death

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Applicable levels: Secondary

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