

Metacognitive Strategies Importance in Enhancing Reading Comprehension Skills

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Abstract: *Although second language research focuses primarily on L2 learning strategies, recent research has shifted its focus onto language learners metacognitive awareness and use. There has been some progress in improving L2 educational practices, but there is still a need for more research on learners' metacognition in the reading process in EFL contexts. This article examined effective teaching strategies for EFL reading comprehension. Metacognitive strategies are emphasized primarily to enable students to reflect on mental processes occurring before, during, and after reading. Reading comprehension and performance are therefore enhanced when metacognitive strategies are incorporated. This study examined metacognitive strategies as tools for successful reading and related tasks. It aimed at determining how different types of metacognitive reading strategies are used by non-native English speakers at Bluefield State University (BSU). This research was conducted using a survey design. A sample of 34 students was randomly selected for the study. In the sample, 76, 47% of the students were female, while 23, 53% were male. Students were asked to complete a metacognitive reading questionnaire to determine their metacognitive reading strategies. The survey was conducted by the researcher. In order to obtain the percentage and the frequency, the data from these applications were uploaded to the computer, and SPSS 20 was used to do the calculations. In this study, the researcher found that students regularly used pre reading, while reading, and post reading metacognitive strategies. As they read, they pay attention to important parts of the text and evaluate the text and their understanding. The research indicates that metacognitive strategies can assist EFL learners in improving their metacognitive reading comprehension skills. Moreover, metacognitive awareness leads to increased self-efficacy among learners. As a result, they become high achievers in EFL.*

Keywords: Reading strategies, Metacognitive strategies, Reading comprehension.

Introduction

There has been a marked increase in international interaction in recent decades, whether in business, education, travel, or other contexts, and English has continued to be a widely used language in these domains. For this reason, learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) need to master all four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. More importantly, reading comprehension is an integral part of their English language education. One of the most compelling reasons is the fact that all high stakes exams include a reading comprehension component. For instance, the final exams such as TOEFL and the IELTS place a great deal of emphasis on reading comprehension. To get high grades in the exams, a student must possess good reading skills. In this vein, the use of metacognitive strategies can be one way for English learners to enhance their abilities and overcome any reading comprehension obstacles. This is

a process designed to help students understand how they learn; in other words, it helps them think about how they think. There are numerous studies that show that metacognitive strategies improve language performance. The focus of those studies is on language abilities and skills. However, few studies have examined the benefits of metacognitive strategies for second language students. The present study was conducted to examine the metacognitive reading comprehension strategies in teaching EFL and their role in enhancing the students' linguistic abilities.

Literature Review

Metacognitive strategy in reading comprehension

Second and foreign language learners in particular do not acquire a profound understanding of text automatically, but rather they gain it through the use of reading strategies. As defined specifically by reading strategies are deliberate, goal-directed attempts to influence and modify the reader's efforts to decode, understand, and construct meaning from text. They are therefore necessary to provide adequate instruction and learning in order to develop reading skills. According to research, reading comprehension is a complex process and students usually have difficulty deriving meaning from texts. The study conducted by suggests that students who start to learn the English language are most likely to have serious difficulties in constructing meaning and understanding texts. A number of researchers have focused their attention on this difficulty for a long time. As their studies progressed, they shifted the focus from examining what language learners do in order to improve their learning to investigating the processes involved in learning. In this new approach a Learning Strategy (LS) is defined as any choice, behavior, thought, plan and technique used by a learner to facilitate their learning process. In the past, when Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was the most popular teaching method, the main reading activity involved translating from a foreign language and focusing on factual information. As stated by Cahyono and Widiati, "... reading a text in the target language was the central activity in language teaching that placed emphasis on matching words in the text with meanings in the students' native tongue". As a result of this approach to teaching reading, little attention was paid to the process of understanding longer texts. Reading for academic purposes was not supported by this trend, which requires the reader to deeply conceptualize the text and identify the author's message. It has been observed that students, who use GTM approach reading passively, rely heavily on the use of a bilingual dictionary and spend countless hours translating sentence by sentence. However, they still struggle with reading comprehension despite all of their efforts. Recently, there has been a change in the requirements for an effective reader. The act of reading, as stated above, does not only involve reading and translating or focusing on factual information. Comprehending a text requires the ability to understand words, a context, as well as what the author is inferring from the text (words, juxtapositions, lexical combinations, semantic and conceptual network, context and so forth). The majority of students make mistakes when it comes to questions that require them not only to provide factual information, but also to infer meaning, to comprehend an author's message, and so on. Accordingly, reading means understanding every external and internal part of the text. Additionally, teaching students effective reading skills is not only conducive to higher exam scores, but also to success in real life situations where reading skills are very important. Today, reading comprehension is a key component of many jobs. Additionally, by developing reading skills, learners are able to perform better in their language classes. As part of their academic preparation, EFL students are required to learn reading in the classroom in order to gain access to new information. They are also required to take some kind of standardized tests to pursue their further studies at graduate and post graduate levels. By reinforcing their reading abilities, they will be able to make greater progress in all areas of their

academic work. In light of this, academic reading comprehension has become a major challenge. The reason for this is that teachers are currently using outdated methods to teach reading skills. Therefore, students are not prepared for more difficult exams that require greater analytical skills. Furthermore, students are not prepared for the real world, in which reading skills are important in both everyday life and career prospects. Many efforts have been made to develop taxonomies of LLSs, among which Rubin, Oxford and O'Malley and Chamot have attracted the most attention. Although these models are fundamentally similar, they treat LLSs differently. Thus, certain groups of such strategies might be classified under different headings. The Metacognitive Learning Strategies (MLSs) are considered a subset of all such models, based on the research of scholars. The goal of these strategies is to guide the learning process and include strategies to plan, monitor, and evaluate one's own learning. In other words, they are concerned with thinking about thinking skills or learning how to develop skills. There is some variation in the way that language learner strategies are classified depending on the definitions used by the researchers concerned. Several researchers support the classification of L2 learning strategies according to the six dimensions of Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) strategy classification, namely cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. In Anderson, language learning strategies have been divided into seven major categories: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, mnemonic or memory related strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, social strategies, and self-motivating strategies. In contrast, some researchers use fewer variables. Based on O'Malley and Chamot's classification of cognitive categories, there are two major types: metacognitive and cognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategies oversee, direct and regulate the learning process. Learning strategies offer an opportunity to think about learning processes, to plan learning activities, to monitor learning, and to evaluate learning. Cognitive strategies, on the other hand, use techniques to manipulate the material to be learned or to apply a specific technique to learning. Choosing language learning strategies consciously can contribute to active, conscious, and purposeful self-regulation. Therefore, teaching learners how to learn more effectively and efficiently is one way to accelerate academic language learning. In consequence, strategy training aims to diagnose oneself, learn the target language efficiently, develop problem solving skills, experiment with familiar and unfamiliar learning strategies, make decisions about how to approach a task, monitor, and evaluate oneself, transfer successful learning strategies to a new learning context, and help students become more self-sufficient, autonomous, and lifelong learners. Nunan suggests a compelling rationale for explicitly teaching language learning strategies in the language curriculum. For him, "language classrooms should have a dual focus, not only teaching language content but also on developing learning processes as well". Several studies have demonstrated that language learners can learn more effectively when they are taught some of the learning strategies that have been identified as one of the defining characteristics of a good language learner in the literature. Also, metacognitive strategies have been shown to play a more important role in this process than other learning strategies, since learners are more likely to acquire language faster once they understand how to regulate their own learning through the use of strategies. An effective strategic learner is one who possesses metacognitive knowledge about their own thinking and learning approaches, has a good understanding of what a task entails, and has the ability to orchestrate the strategies that best meet both the task requirements and their own learning strengths. The development of metacognition increases learners' awareness of the learning process and the strategies that lead to success. Having this knowledge will provide learners with a better understanding of how they think and learn and, therefore, enable them to oversee the selection and application of learning strategies, plan how to proceed with a learning task, monitor their own performance on a regular basis, find solutions to problems encountered, and evaluate themselves upon completion of a learning task. In order to select

and activate strategies, learners need to have metacognitive knowledge and teachers should work to develop students own metacognition and teach them how to use strategies that are most effective in completing the tasks they have to accomplish in language learning.

Metacognition

Flavell defined Metacognition, as well as having knowledge of the individual's characteristics, the nature of the cognitive processes to be completed, and the structure of the strategies chosen as a solution to these tasks, is defined as an ability that has a controlling role in monitoring and regulating the individual's cognitive process. It also refers to any cognitive process that refers to, monitors, or controls aspects of cognition. Metacognition has been defined as a construct that refers to thinking about one's thinking or the human ability to be conscious of one's mental processes. According to metacognition is knowledge about learning that is present in the student's store of acquired knowledge, is relatively stable, early developing, and abstracts from the student's experiences. In Flavell's definition, metacognitive knowledge refers to "one's knowledge regarding one's own cognitive processes and products or anything associated with them, for example, the learning-relevant properties of information or data". The term metacognition refers to the active control over cognitive processes that occurs during metacognition. It is also considered as the 'seventh sense' and one of the mental characteristics that successful learners use. As a kind of declarative knowledge, metacognitive knowledge can be subdivided according to whether it concentrates on the learner, the learning task, or the learning process. In the literature, these three categories are called person knowledge, task knowledge, and strategy knowledge. Person knowledge refers to information and resources a person requires to undertake a task and the task knowledge refers to the information and resources available to complete a task, and the strategy knowledge. *i.e.*, the knowledge regarding the strategies which are likely to be effective in achieving goals and undertaking tasks. Metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive strategies, as noted are different aspects of metacognition. The concept of metacognitive knowledge refers to how learners learn about their learning, and metacognitive strategies are methods for managing, directing, regulating, and guiding their learning. Oxford outlines four basic metacognitive strategies: Connecting new information to old, selecting deliberate thinking strategies and planning, monitoring, and evaluating thought processes. As a result, learners take control of learning, plan and select strategies, monitor the learning process, correct errors, analyze the effectiveness of learning strategies, and change learning behaviors and strategies when necessary. Metacognition, is "thinking about thinking" or "cognitions about cognitions" Schraw and Sperling Dennison described the metacognition as thinking, understanding, and controlling one's own learning stated that Metacognition refers to being aware of one's own thinking processes. Metacognition recognizes what a person is learning through self-awareness and organizes education and training activities accordingly. There is a simultaneous relationship between cognition and any process or product occurring in the brain. Metacognition designates following and controlling cognition. It is cognition that relates directly to learning goals and facilitates the transformation of learning materials. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to determine whether a product occurring in the mind is related to a cognitive process or a metacognitive process. There are two interrelated aspects of metacognition: knowing what skills, tactics, resources a person needs in a task. Knowing when and how to use these skills, tactics, and resources to make the task a successful outcome. A metacognitive skill enables learning to happen spontaneously. Metacognition is actually a way of learning to learn. Individuals' metacognitive experiences and perceptions determine their ability to perform at different levels. Learning from experience plays a crucial role in developing intelligence and basic skills. However, metacognition plays a major role in using the cognitive abilities of an individual makes it clear that Metacognition is particularly important in learning and teaching as it directly affects many factors such as gaining, understanding, remembering, critical thinking and problem solving.

Meta cognitive reading strategies and comprehension

Metacognitive reading strategies have been recognized as crucial to comprehension and have been linked to the success of learners as a result. Through metacognition, students are able to use reading strategies more effectively and competently than their unsuccessful peers. Sheorey and Mukhtari argue that the difference between skilled and unskilled readers is primarily characterized by conscious awareness of the strategy reading processes and actual use of strategies. A skilled reader uses metacognitive strategies effectively, while a less proficient reader has little metacognitive awareness. According to the primary difference between skilled and unskilled reader's lies in their ability to "engage in deliberate activities that require planful thinking, flexible strategies, and periodic self-monitoring". Based on these findings, researchers have examined the effectiveness of teaching metacognitive strategies to all readers. Barnett investigated the effects of metacognitive awareness and reading strategies. The study findings indicate that strategy use is linearly associated with reading comprehension. There is a greater benefit for students who use different strategies in reading in comparison to those who do not. Many different studies of meta cognition have been linked to an extensive variety of positive academic outcomes for students, including improved test scores and performance on intelligence tests. Students at BSU, who are non-natives, have a lot to read during the limited time of their university education, so it is important to examine how much they are aware of metacognitive reading strategies and how they use them. This study analyzed students' reported awareness of metacognitive strategies and their use of them before, during, and after reading academic texts in English using a questionnaire for that purpose. As well as determining the types of strategies students use when reading academic texts and analyzing whether the reported results reflect their understanding of the text, the research aimed to determine what types of strategies students prefer when reading academic texts. In addition to the questionnaire, students took a comprehension test to determine their level of reading proficiency. Additionally, the researcher tried to investigate whether there are any differences between male and female students in their use of metacognitive reading strategies. Therefore, this article addressed the following questions.

- Do the non-native students of BSU use metacognitive reading strategies in reading academic texts?
- Is there any relationship between the students' strategy use and reading comprehension?

The purpose of this study is to investigate how BSU graduate students use metacognitive reading strategies. This study's results are important because they identify the metacognitive reading strategies used by university students. These results are expected to be helpful to researchers working on reading instruction.

Methodology

Research design

The research method used in this study is survey design. The investigator selects a sample of respondents from a target population and administers a questionnaire to collect data on variables of interest. Surveys are used to learn about people's attitudes, beliefs, values, demographics, behavior, opinions, habits, desires, ideas, and other types of information.

Participants

The population of the study comprises of the graduate non-native students of Bluefield State university. A total of 34 students from different departments: Education, psychology, business, chemistry and science departments. These students from the university of Bluefield were randomly selected as participants for this study. The researcher himself personally administered the questionnaire to ensure the reliability of the results. The age of the students ranged from 16 to 40 years. Of these 76, 47 % were female students while 23, 53 % were male students of the university.

Data collection tool

A metacognitive reading questionnaire developed by Basaran was used to determine the metacognitive reading strategies used by non-native students at BSU. This form consists of four parts: Demographic information in the first part, before reading in the second part; in the third part during reading; the last part is after reading the text. The questionnaire was developed on three point rating scale ranging from 1 to 3 (1=very less strategy use (never); 2=sometimes strategy use (sometimes); 3=high strategy use (always)). The students should read each statement and circle the number that applies to them, indicating how often they use the reading strategy. As such, the higher the number, the more often the strategy is perceived to be used.

Data analysis

The majority of surveys describe the incidence, frequency, and distribution of specific characteristics of identified populations. Application data was uploaded to the computer, and Microsoft Excel was used to calculate percentages and frequency.

Results

Table 1 shows that students frequently use pre-reading metacognitive reading strategies. It indicates that students determine the purpose of reading and control the physical condition of the environment in which they read. In other words, they use fast browsing before reading a text and guess the content of the text by looking at the visual aid out of the text.

Table 1: Metacognitive reading strategies used before reading.

Before reading the text	Never		sometimes		always	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
I determine my reading purpose (study, entertainment, memorization, etc.).	2	5,88%	11	32,35%	21	61,76%
I quickly review the text to understand the type and subject of the text.	1	2,94%	18	52,94%	15	44,12%
I guess the content based on the text images.	1	2,94%	15	44,12%	18	52,94%
I guess the content of the text by looking at the title.	2	5,88%	17	50,00%	15	44,12%
I decide how to read by looking at the type, length and subject of the text.	5	14,71%	15	44,12%	14	41,18%
I prepare questions in my mind about the subject.	3	8,82%	13	38,24%	18	52,94%
I plan on what to do mentally during and after reading before I read the text.	8	23,53%	12	35,29%	41	41,18%

The metacognitive strategies used by BSU students while reading a text are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Metacognitive reading strategies used during reading.

While reading the text	Never		Sometimes		Always	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
I imagine what is told in the text.	3	8,82%	19	55,88%	12	35,29%
I underline important information to better understand.	1	2,94%	18	52,94%	15	44,12%
I take notes about the text.	4	11,76%	9	26,47%	21	61,76%
I read slowly, if necessary, fast when necessary.	2	5,88%	22	64,71%	10	29,41%
I read the parts I do not understand in the text more slowly and carefully.	1	2,94%	27	79,41%	6	17,65%
I try to find the answers to the questions that appear in my mind about the subject in the text.	1	2,94%	14	41,18%	19	55,88%
I connect the information I've already learned with the information I already have.	2	5,88%	20	58,82%	12	35,29%
I try to understand the main idea of the text.	1	2,94%	27	79,41%	6	17,65%
I check how much I understand the text.	1	2,94%	15	44,12%	18	52,94%
I repeat in my mind the part I read from time to time.	8	23,53%	6	17,65%	20	58,82%
I try to find and understand ideas that cannot be expressed clearly in the text.	1	2,94%	13	38,24%	20	58,82%
I try to understand the meaning of the words I do not know using the internet or dictionary.	0	0,00%	17	50,00%	17	50,00%
I guess the meaning of the word I do not know by looking at the sentence in which it is found.	0	0,00%	18	52,94%	16	47,06%
I will not understand.	0	0,00%	11	33,33%	22	66,67%
I think that what I read does not give me new information	22	64,71%	1	2,94%	11	32,35%

From Table 2 we can understand how often students use metacognitive strategies whole reading a text. They do take notes while reading the text and they try to find and understand ideas that are not expressed clearly in the text. Their mental processes work well when they read the text as they repeat that in their minds and check how much they understand. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that students do not distinguish significant from insignificant information when they note important parts of a text (Table 3).

Table 3: Metacognitive reading strategies used after reading.

When I finish reading the text	Never		Sometimes		Always	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
I evaluate my reading performance.	4	11,76%	12	35,29%	18	52,94%
I repeat the important information in the text and try to understand the whole text.	1	2,94%	19	55,88%	14	41,18%
If necessary, I read the text again.	1	2,94%	19	55,88%	14	41,18%

I evaluate whether the content of the text is consistent with its title.	2	5,88%	13	38,24%	19	55,88%
I summarize what I have read to remember the text.	5	14,71%	7	20,59%	22	64,71%
I review the text.	2	5,88%	12	35,29%	20	58,82%

The BSU students metacognitive reading strategies after reading the text are presented in Table 3.

After reading, the majority of students utilize metacognitive reading strategies, as seen in Table 3. Based on these findings, we can deduce that students generally evaluate, review and control the understanding of the text after reading.

Discussion

According to the study I conducted at BSU students frequently use metacognitive reading strategies before reading, during reading, and after reading. In the end, they evaluate the text and their comprehension status based on the important parts of the text. Reading metacognitive strategies is commonly observed before reading by students. In the process of reading, students examine the physical conditions of the environment, make them available for reading, and determine the purpose of their reading strategies during reading the text. In addition to fast browsing, they consider how the information in the text will be utilized before reading the text. The pre-reading stage focuses on how to read and how to succeed at reading. Students often use metacognitive reading strategies during reading. A student's ability to visualize what is described in the text, distractions when reading, etc. In addition, they rewrite the text, read the slower and harder parts, re read the parts they have difficulty understanding, avoid passing over parts without understanding, underline the oblique or dark places, and use more. They take notes, highlight important information, deconstruct complex sentences, read like they're telling complex sentences, and guess the meaning of the unknown. By paying attention to the structure of the text at the time of reading, good readers are able to determine the rate at which they realize their understanding. They can control the understanding process during the reading process and focus more on important points, so as to realize the understanding, connect their predictions to the results appropriate to the text, and try to analyze complex expressions.

Conclusion

Reading strategies are reviewed, appropriate strategies are determined, and an attempt is made to understand the text structure, find ways to make inferences, to be stored in memory, which may be required in subsequent arrangements. In case of need, resources such as dictionaries, spelling guides, encyclopedias and the general Internet can be used. It has been observed that a majority of students engage in metacognitive reading strategies after reading. It is possible to interpret these findings as students evaluating the text after reading and controlling their understanding of it. Besides, using evaluation strategies helps students compare and analyze the information they get from the text. They underline important information, imagine what they have read, take notes about the text and most importantly, they think how to apply what learned in real life. In other words, metacognitive reading strategies are about the reading comprehension and reading activity in which the students evaluate reading activity, determine the methods and techniques that will be adopted in the future readings. Therefore, this study approach aims at preparing students for becoming good readers in the future, as well as raising their awareness of the issue of reading.

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