SELF-REPORTED READING STRATEGIES

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Abstract

It is important for EFL readers to realize that they use certain strategies when they find difficulties in reading comprehension. These strategies have to be explored and selected for training for better comprehension. This exploration administered the MARSI reading questionnaire to identify university students' reading strategies and their frequency of use. The global and support strategies turned to be the strategies of the medium level of use whereas the problem-solving strategies were at the high level of use. An interesting finding is that there was enough familiarity with the global and support strategies. The high-level of frequency of the problem-solving strategies indicate that there were a lot of difficulties in reading comprehension and the problem-solving strategies are worth training. To be more convincing, these findings would have to be supported by think-aloud protocols in real reading.

Key words: *global, support, problem-solving.*

Introduction

Research in EFL reading strategies is interesting it reveals the readers' strategies in managing their interaction with written texts and in making sense of what they read and what they do when they don't understand. It suggests that learners use a variety of strategies to assist them with the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of information (Rigney, 1978) in Meena Singhal (2001). Teachers can explore reading strategies through reading protocols to identify the strategies for training. Protocols are notes written or recorded by the students while they are doing their work and should be relatively free or informal and thereby the recording would not interfere with doing the work. Another design is administering a questionnaire to help the students aware of their own strategies when there are difficulties in processing the text.

For that reason, this study was conducted to explore and classify students' strategies in reading comprehension. The findings would serve as a source of information of strategies for teachers to give the students as an exercise for better reading comprehension.

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Review of Related Literature

Relying on their prior knowledge, EFL readers may think that a reading process starts from the first word to the last word of the reading text and may be busy looking up every difficult word in the dictionary. It implies that awareness of one's comprehension processes in an important aspect. This awareness is often referred to as metacognition or the knowledge of the cognition about reading and the self-control mechanism when monitoring text comprehension (Mokhari and Reichard, 2002, 24). It is also referred to as the "knowledge about cognitive states and abilities which can be said among individual while at the same time expanding the construct to include affective and motivational characteristics of thinking" (Paris and Winograd, 1990, p. 15) in (Mokhtari and Reichards, 2002: 249).

In a similar way, Flavel (1979:906) defines metacognition as "cognition about cognitive phenomena" or simply "thinking about thinking" (Lai, 2011:4). Chen et al. (2009:43), following Flavel's definition, defines metacognition as "one's ability to understand, control, and manipulate his own cognitive process to maximize learning". It is also defined by Cross and Paris (1988, p.131) in Lai (2011, p. 4) as "the knowledge and control children have over their own thinking and learning activities". Lai (2011:5) also quotes the definition by Hennessey (1999, p.4-5) that metacognition is

> Awareness of one's own thinking, awareness of the content of one's conceptions, an active monitoring of one's cognitive processes, an attempt to regulate one's cognitive processes in `relationship to further learning, and an application of a set of heuristics as an effective device for helping people organize their methods of attack on problems in general.

Other definitions as quoted by Lai (2011:5) are taken form Kuhn & Dean (204, p.270) that metacognition is "Awareness and management of one's own thought" and from Martinez, 2006, p. 696) that metacognition is "the monitoring and control of thought. This awareness distinguishes between skilled and unskilled readers. Paris and Jacobs (1984) illustrate the differences between these two types of readers.

> Skilled readers often engage in deliberate activities that require planful thinking, flexible strategies, and periodic self-monitoring. They think about the topic, look forward and backward in the passage, and check their own understanding as they read. 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).

Skilled readers differ from unskilled readers in "their use of general knowledge to comprehend text literally as well as to draw valid inferences from texts, in their comprehension of words, and in their use of monitoring and repair strategies" (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1978:62) in (Mokhtari and Reichards, 2002: 249). Unskilled readers typically young

developing readers and inexperienced adolescent and adults, on the other hand, are quite limited in their metacognitive knowledge about reading (Paris and Winograd, 1990 in Mokhtari and Reichards, 2002, 249).

In a second language study, Hosen (1977) in Singhal (2001) identified reading strategies and reading success, reporting that

> The successful reader, for example, kept the meaning of the passage in mind while reading read in broad phrases, skipped inconsequential or less important words, and had a positive self-concept as a reader. The unsuccessful reader, on the other hand, lost the meaning of the sentences when decoded, read in short phrases, pondered over inconsequential words, seldom skipped words as unimportant, and had a negative self-concept.

Awareness facilitates reading comprehension, i.e., as an opportunity to "provide students with knowledge and confidence that enable them to manage their own learning and improve them to be inquisitive (Paris and Winograd, 1990, 22). Guthrie and Wigfield (1999:199) in Mokhari and Reichards, 2002, 251) argue that "constructing meaning during reading is a motivational act".

> A person is unlikely to comprehend a text by accident. If the person is not aware of the text, not attending to it, not choosing to make meaning from it, or not giving cognitive effort to knowledge construction, little comprehension occurs. (p. 199)…

Baker and Brown (1984: 376) in Chen et al., (2009:43) contend that such awareness is a "prerequisite for self-regulation, the ability to monitor and check one's own cognition while reading. This is referred to as metacognitive knowledge or metacognition defined as one's ability to understand, control, and manipulate his own cognitive process to maximize learning" (Flavel, 1979) in Chen et al., (2009: 43).

Protocols have been employed as a verbal report analysis to produce verbalization. This method requires the subjects to tell the researchers what they are doing in performing a task. It provides researchers with information of learners' strategies in interacting with L2 tasks. To analyse reading processes, it can determine what is happening during reading. A verbal report will be the most direct way to access this reading process.

Protocol analysis can be classified as retrospective or concurrent. In the retrospective analysis, the subjects are required to report what they were thinking after performing a task. The verbal reports are collected aster the learners/subjects have finished the task. They are required to think back and memorize the process. In the concurrent analysis, they are required to report what they are thinking while doing the task. It may interfere with the speed of the reading task. Afflerback (2000) in Yoshida (2008, p. 200) assumes that this analysis has no interval effects and will result in detailed description

There are issues in metacognitive analysis. When the reading text is easy, the reading process will be automatic, and a metacognitive

analysis cannot provide adequate verbalization. Another issue, as stated by Bowles (2008) in Yoshida (2008, p. 201), is that frequent interruptions in concurrent metacognition will lengthen the time for doing the task.

Paris and Winograd (1990: 15) in Mokhari and Reichards (2002, 250) mention the advantages when teachers raise their students' awareness.

> "(a) it transfers responsibility for monitoring learning from teachers to students themselves, and (b) it promotes positive self-perceptions, affect, and motivation among students. In this manner, metacognition provides personal insights into one's own thinking and fosters independent learning"

Paris and Winograd (1990: 15) in Chen et al., (2009: 44) suggest that metacognition improve academic learning and motivation. They caution that awareness should be regarded as an opportunity to "provide students with knowledge and confidence that enables them to manage their own learning and empowers them to be inquisitive and zealous in their pursuits (p. 22).

Carrel (1989) in Hassan (2003) investigated the relationship between metacognitive awareness and reading comprehension in L1 and L2. She administered questionnaire of 4 sections: self-confidence, repair strategies, effective reading strategies and reading difficulties. When reading in L1, top-down strategies were not significantly related to reading ability. For L2 reading, there seemed to be a difference. For the English native speakers learning Spanish, some of the local strategies positively correlated to reading ability. For the Spanish L1 and ESL students, some global strategies were found to be positively correlated with reading proficiency.

Schoonen, Hulstijn and Bosser (1998) in Hassan (2003) investigated the relationship of vocabulary and metacognitive knowledge and reading comprehension in both L1 and L2. Results for L1 reading seemed to show that L1 vocabulary knowledge was a significant contributor to L1 reading comprehension. When results for L2 reading were analyzed, it was also found that L2 vocabulary was a significant predictor of L2 reading comprehension. The findings showed that vocabulary and metacognitive knowledge seemed to be important contributor to L1 and L2 reading ability.

Barnett (1988) in Hassan (2003) investigated the effects of metacognitive awareness and strategy use on reading comprehension. The subjects were required to complete a prior knowledge questionnaire and read an unfamiliar passage and write a recall composition on the passage. After that they read another unfamiliar passage and completed a test which assessed their ability in using contextual information. The findings seemed to indicate that the students who used better strategies in reading performed better than students who did not use effective strategies.

Fauziah Hassan (2003) investigated the relationship between metacognitive strategy awareness in reading. The students responded to a

reading metacognition awareness questionnaire and completed a reading comprehension test. The results indicated that reading metacognitive strategy awareness significantly contributed to reading ability for both L1 and L2.

Mokhtari and Reichard (2004) in Chen et al. (2009: 46) develop the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) to explore metacognitive awareness and perceived use of reading strategies. The MARSI may also provide teachers with the information about their students' reading strategies (Mokhtari and Reichard (2002: 255).

Methods

This study was a descriptive case study to explore or identify different types of strategies in reading comprehension. The data were the types of reading strategies with their frequency of use that were collected from 37 students who willingly filled the questionnaire. This questionnaire was the instrument that lists a number of strategies. For this purpose, the MARSI (Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory) designed by Mokhtari and Reichards (2002) was administered to those 37 students.

The MARSI contains 30 items and was designed to assess metacognitive awareness and self-perception of strategies. It has three factors, i.e., global reading strategies (GLOB) having to do with a global analysis of a reading text; problems-solving strategies (PROB) referring to strategies to cope with text difficulty; and support reading strategies (SUP) related to use of additional materials for better comprehension.

The data of the reading comprehension strategies were classified into the available categories of the MARSI to indicate the three levels of usage: high, medium, and low. The information of these three levels would help teachers in selecting the strategies that were very scarcely used and, therefore, worth training.

Results and Discussion

The results are first presented in terms of frequency of use of strategies in Table 1. The table distributes the 30 questionnaire items into three categories: Global Reading Strategies (13 items), Problem-Solving Strategies (8 items), and Support Reading Strategies (9 items). Each item is assigned to the three levels of use: Low (2.4 lower), Medium (2.5 – 3.4), and High (3.5 or higher). It reads, for example, item 2 in the GRS category belongs to the level of high frequency of use because the average score of that item is 3.6. It also reads that there are two GRS items that belong to the level of frequency of use, i.e., GLOB number 2 and number 12. These two items refer to "I think about what I know to help me understand what I read" and "I try to guess what the material is about when I read".

The distribution of the GLOB items is similar with that of the SUP items in that the items of those two categories are distributed into three levels of use, i.e., high, medium, and low. It is, however, different from that of the PROB items in that the PROB items are only distributed into two levels, i.e., medium and high.

Table 1
Item Distribution by Frequency of Use

No.	Categories	Levels	Number of Strategies
1	Global Reading Strategies (13) (Average use= 2.96)	Low (2.4 lower)	2 (GRS 5; 7)
		Medium (2.5 – 3.4)	9 (GRS 1; 3; 4; 6; 8; 9; 10; 11; 13)
		High (3.5 or higher)	2 (GRS 2; 12)
2	Problem-Solving Strategies (8) (Average use =3.64)	Low (2.4 lower)	
		Medium (2.5 – 3.4)	3 (PSS 3; 5; 6)
		High (3.5 or higher)	5 (PSS 1; 2; 4; 7; 8)
3	Support Reading Strategies (9) (Average use=2.91)	Low (2.4 lower)	2 (SRS 2; 3;)
		Medium (2.5 – 3.4)	5 (SRS 1; 4; 7; 8; 9)
		High (3.5 or higher)	2 (SRS 5; 6)

Most of the strategies of the GLOB category belong to the medium level. They are GLOB 1(I have a purpose in mind when I read), GLOB3 (I preview the text to see what it's about before reading it), GLOB4 (I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose), GLOB6 (I decide what to read closely and what to ignore), GLOB8 (I use context clues to help me better understand what I'm reading), GLOB9 (I use typographical aids like bold face and italics to identify key information), GLOB10 (I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text), GLOB11 (I check my understanding when I come across conflicting information), and GLOB13 (I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong).

These three categories have different average frequency of use: the GLOB has the same level as the SUP category, i.e., the medium level with the averages of 2.96 and 2.91 respectively. The PROB category reaches a higher level, i.e., the high frequency of use of 3.4. In other words, the most frequently used strategies are the PROB strategies, the runners-up being the GLOB and the SUP categories. The strategies that contribute to the high frequency of use of the PROB category includes PROB1 (I read slowly but carefully to be sure I understand what I'm

reading), PROB2 (I try to get back on track when I lose concentration), PROB4 (When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I'm reading), PROB7 (When text becomes difficult, I re-read to increase my understanding), and PROB8 (I try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases). These strategies reach the average scores of 4.03, 4.08, 4.24, 4.14, 4.08, and 3.70 respectively.

Most strategies of the SUP category fall into the medium level (5 out of 10) with the total average score of 2.91, a bit lower than that of the GLOB category. The strategies that contribute to this level are SUP1 (I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read), SUP4 (I discuss what I read with others to check my understanding), SUP7 (I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read), SUP8 (I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it), and SUP9 (I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text).

Second, the results are presented in terms of the number of students, the levels of use, and the three categories of strategies in Table 2.

Table 2
Student Distribution by Scores

Levels	Categories		
	GLOB	PROB	SUP
High	3	25	3
Medium	25	9	25
Low	9	3	9
Number of Students	37	37	37

The table distributes the 37 students by scores and categories. It reads that there are 3 high users, 25 medium users, and 9 low users of the GLOB category; there are 25 high users, 9 medium users, and 3 low users of the PROB category; and there are 3 high users, 25 medium users and 9 low users of the SUP category. It also indicates that most of the users are medium users of the GLOB category, high users of the PROB category, and medium users of the SUP category.

There doesn't seem any pattern between the user distribution by scores and the final scores of those users in reading comprehension. For example, the final scores of reading comprehension of the high users of the GLOB category range from 70 to 76 and 87.5, whereas the reading comprehension final scores of the GLOB medium users range from 63 to 81 and 87, and low users' reading comprehension final scores range from 73.5 to 76 and 80. These data lead to the idea that the higher the level of use in the GLOB category doesn't necessarily lead to a higher score in the final reading comprehension score.

The exploration of the same pattern of the PROB category and the students' scores in reading comprehension results a similar finding. The scores of 25 high users range from 76 to 87.5., excluding the low score of 56, whereas the scores of the medium users of the PROB category range from 63 to 57 and 86. That shows that the higher the level of strategy use

doesn't necessarily lead to the higher score in reading comprehension. Three students who belong to the low level of this PRO category score 75, 76, and 81 in reading comprehension. Such a finding also comes from the SUP category. Most of the students in the SUP category are medium users, whose score range from 63 to 76 and 87.5. The high users' scores range from 63 to 76 and 87.5 and the low users' score range from 67.5 to 73.5 and 83.5.

In summary, a higher score in the three categories in the MARSI does not necessarily lead to a higher score in reading comprehension. This is especially true with the PROB category where there are 25 students are reportedly high users of this category. An attempt has been made to correlate the students' average scores at each of the three categories and their reading comprehension test scores and the results are 0.11, 0.18 and -0.01. These results might haven due to the way the students perceived themselves, i.e.., reporting or pretending to be skilled readers or high users of metacognitive strategies. It is also possible that they filled in the questionnaire very fast as it is very easy to choose the answers that matched their expectation rather than any consideration of whether of whether they really had been practicing those strategies or not. Another reason is possibly that they have never been trained in metacognitive strategies and, therefore, they did not feel responsible with whatever they did with the questionnaire.

Conclusion

The findings as presented in the two tables lead to a conclusion that the subjects claimed themselves to be high users of the PROB strategies that might have made one think that they were almost always aware of difficulties in reading comprehension. This high level use of those strategies might possibly imply that they had experimented on different strategies in text comprehension, regardless of whether they were successful or not.

These findings may, however, be misleading in that the subjects might have wanted to be assessed as high users of the strategies simply by circling the options referring to the corresponding strategies. There is no harder evidence of whether they really had practiced them or not. Further studies are, therefore, worth conducting to obtain harder evidence of what really happens when subjects are answering comprehension questions. Such data would be in the form of think-aloud protocols.

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