

# The Use of Metacognitive Strategies in EFL Reading Comprehension

Muhammad Nafi Annury\*, Januarius Mujiyanto, Mursid Saleh, Djoko Sutopo

English Education Department  
Universitas Negeri Semarang  
Semarang, Indonesia  
\*fattan355@gmail.com

**Abstract**—The following study aims to find out which is the highest use of metacognitive reading strategies among the academic learners majoring ELT students, Faculty Education, and Teacher Training UIN Walisongo Semarang. There is only one class which administered to this study. It consists of forty-three students; ten male and there are thirty-three female ones. First of all, metacognition discusses the process of an individual in planning and managing oneself in order to achieve his or her goal. In other words, metacognitive strategies are steps take for improving their language performances. Based on the MARS (Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies) questionnaire, three categories are being scored in metacognitive strategies. They are global reading strategies, problem-solving strategies, and support reading strategies. The result shows that academic learners mostly apply problem-solving strategies, followed by global reading strategies, and support reading strategies.

**Keywords**—metacognitive strategies; EFL learners; reading comprehension

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) era, the needs for international language mastery for Indonesian workforce cannot be avoided. The government has to find some efforts to excel the English mastery of the workforce in order that we Indonesian will not lose in the economic competition among ASEAN countries. Having good English proficiency can add nation competitiveness; in turn, it brings the country prosperity [1]. English proficiency is urgently required for boosting Indonesian economic development. The English subject has been taught informally in primary school and formally in secondary school above up to college, but the result is not satisfying [1].

Reading is one of the necessary required skills that every well-educated person needs to acquire to a considerable extent both in their native language and their second or foreign language. Reading is not just a skill which can be acquired naturally or in an automatic way, but it must be seriously learned and practiced through particular instructions and experiences. Therefore, a conscious effort is required in order to analyze and comprehend the ideas within the continuous development of a text. We may look at the literature, there are several studies have been conducted so far in various educational contexts in order to find an answer to the

questions: How to increase reading comprehension skills of learners in second language acquisition or foreign language learning process and what factors lead to a successful comprehension? The idea of the present research has been motivated by these studies which will be mentioned in the literature review part of the paper. Since this study has been designed as action research, it has been aimed to increase the efficiency of reading lessons by integrating metacognitive activities in the pre-reading phase of the lesson, testing their effects and getting feedback from the learners.

Reading academic texts in English is an essential ability to survive in university lives mainly for EFL students and English as a Second Language (ESL) since they have a responsibility to carry a vast range of assignments that depend on reading [2].

The proficiency of reading goes beyond the ability of merely recognizing letters and sounding them. The essential step in the skill of reading is the comprehension of the material. Relatively, Goodman proposes two views on reading; with the first one he accepts it as “matching sounds to letters,” and with the second one he indicates that it is a mystery, that “nobody knows how reading works” [3]. Probably, Goodman was under the sway of MacLeish who asserted that “readers of all written languages are ‘getting’ sounds from the printed page” [4].

Besides, a good reading skill will help very much for those who want to continue their study to a higher level or to get a job. As stated by Harris; they said that technology advances more occupations tend to require higher level education or specialized training in which improved reading ability plays a vital role [5]. Automation has eliminated the job of many unskilled or semi-skilled workers, many of whom were not even functionally literate and became unemployed or chronically unemployable because they did not process in other positions.

According to Westwood that several factors of poor reading comprehension include less of vocabulary acknowledgement, less of fluency, less of familiarity with the subject matter, readability in text level, inadequate use of active reading strategies [6]. The undergraduate students where the researcher teaches fit with the above problem. It means they find that reading comprehension is difficult. The last aspect interests the researcher in conducting research related to teaching reading strategies to improve comprehension of the learners.

The reading English text, as a foreign language is not the same as reading in our first language. The reading activity needs a certain process by which people try to comprehend what they read. The process happens when he faces written symbols, and he also looks at them through his eyes, then his mind will process it. Therefore, the process can be called a cognitive process [7].

There are five factors that are identified as the primary determinants of reading comprehension in the figure: background experience, language abilities, thinking ability, affection (interest motivation, attitude, feeling) and reading purposes. These factors really influence the students' reading comprehending ability [5].

Reading involves comprehension. In the comprehension process, students should not read the material for a long time to get thorough comprehension. Consequently, reading in that way may not lead the reader to a full understanding of what s/he reads, it is wasting time. Therefore, students should improve their reading speed and skim in all reading course.

Therefore this project is designed to know the participant's difficulties in reading academic texts and give instructional interventions which focus on teaching some metacognitive reading strategies in order to solve the participant's problems in reading comprehension, particularly in academic English texts.

Wenden and Rubin define that learning strategies consist of several following preparations, operations, and steps, plans used by the learner to facilitate obtaining the use of information available [8]. It was argued by Richards et al. that learning strategies are intentional behavior which involving thoughts that learners use during learning in order to develop reading understanding among students, learn, or remember new information" [9]. Learning strategies are also illustrated by O'Malley et al. as personal thoughts including behaviors used by learners to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information [10].

Learning strategies viewed as peculiar ways of processing information that improve comprehension of the information. Whereas previous descriptions of learning strategies paid more attention to products of learning and behaviors reflecting the unobservable cognitive process, definitions eventually provided a clearer understanding of learners think and during language learning. Hence, it is stated by Cohen that "learning strategies are processed of learner's selection in solving their problems and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or use of second or foreign language [11]. through storage, retention, recall, application of information about the language."

Learning strategies are the total effort that students need to process, understand, and adopt the information introduced in learning-teaching processes or their proper preparation [12]. In other words, we need certain information in cognitive and affective processes [13]. As it is understood from definitions, learning strategies include more than one activity. Different classifications of these activities are seen [14,15]. Learning strategies that underline this study are classified as cognitive and practical by Gagné and Driscoll [16,17]. Cognitive strategies consist of five components as attention strategies,

storage strategies in short time memory, coping strategies, restoration strategies and monitoring strategies.

Reading requires specific language comprehension, some semantic processing information, and also the ability to understand the meaning of the visual symbols which provide the form of language to be comprehended. Reading, per se, must involve not only a particular type of language behavior but also a unique form of non-verbal thinking (i.e., metacognition) [18]. Furthermore, the crucial issue of the role of metacognitive awareness in reading will be stated by knowing and understanding two dimensions of metacognitive ability, which have discussed above. Therefore, it is expected to make a student aware of reading strategies.

It is also asserted that the student will be able to conceptualize the reading process by thinking about what she is doing in reading [19]. Forrest-Pressley and Waller suggested that in term; of metacognition, reading is not merely decoding process from print to sound and comprehending the written material, but it also involves advanced reading strategies and knowledge about those skills and how to control them [20]. When skilled readers decide to read, they usually have a particular purpose in mind. Therefore, they do more than decode a word; the skilled readers know that there are various ways to decode and can do something on their decoding activities, such as monitor them, change and then predict their sufficiency.

There are two main reasons for studying metacognitive reading strategies. Firstly, metacognition and metacognitive knowledge enable learners to be active and constructively responsive individuals who could take charge of their learning process [21]. Secondly, previous studies have shown that metacognitive strategies play a more significant role than other learning strategies because once a learner understands his/her learning strategies, language acquisition could proceed at a faster rate [22].

Flavell John states that metacognition refers to the knowledge, awareness, and control of one's thinking and learning process [23]. He described metacognition as the awareness of how the learning process happens; awareness of when one does or does not understand information; knowledge of how to use available information for better understanding; ability to judge the cognitive demands of a particular task; knowledge of what strategies to use for what purposes; and assessment of the whole learning process. Brown and Baker mentioned that metacognition plays a vital role in reading [24,25]. By using metacognitive reading strategies, readers can plan before the reading, monitor and solve problems during reading, and evaluate after reading. As a result, these strategies can lead to a better understanding and interpretation of the written words.

Successful L2 readers appoints in a high level of metacognition, or monitoring of their thinking, during the process of reading. They decide predictions, test hypotheses, and monitor their comprehension while extracting meaning from text for instance. Low proficient L2 readers, tend to take account on difficult words in recognition and word-for-word translation [26-28]. As a result, they may employ fewer higher-

order thinking processes while reading and may tend to be less metacognitively aware [28-29].

The strategy instruction procedures and recommendations presented in this article can be applied to the teaching of other metacognitive strategies, such as Semantic Mapping, T-List, or Split Page Note Taking [30]. They are also adaptable, as they can be modified at several points to suit various topics, student needs, and teacher preferences. For example, in the preparation stage, successful former English language learners can be invited as guest speakers to discuss the importance of strategy use, to promote student motivation. Also, in the practice stage, teachers can work with lower proficiency students while other learners work in groups or individually. This structure allows for needed differentiation, particularly for multi-level classes.

In their study entitled *The Importance of Metacognitive Reading Strategy Awareness in Reading Comprehension* claimed that metacognitive strategy awareness plays a significant role in reading comprehension and educational process [31-33]. Despite its importance, the metacognitive strategy has long been the ignored skill in English language teaching, research, learning, and assessment. This lack of good metacognitive reading strategy skill is exacerbated by the central role of reading comprehension in education success.

There is one solution to solve the problem for the poor readers namely metacognitive reading strategies awareness. Metacognitive reading strategies awareness ability need to be acquired in English language learning and teaching after all. The present study is focused on whether "meta-cognitive reading strategies awareness" play the important role for EFL students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, it attempts to detect the relationship between metacognitive reading strategy awareness and reading comprehension.

## II. METHOD

The study employed a quantitative research design using a questionnaire. The students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies was assessed by using the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARS) which was designed by Mokhtari K and, Reichard CA [34]. This inventory was designed to measure adolescent and adult students' awareness and use of reading strategies while reading academic or school-related materials.

This study administered with 43 male and female of EFL learners with the ten male students and thirty-three female students UIN Walisongo Semarang. Commonly, "experiments are carried out in order to explore the strength of relationships between variables [35]. This research is categorized as experimental research since it attempts to provide treatment to the experimental group and maintain control over all factors that may affect the result of an experiment.

The students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies was administered by employing the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARS) which was designed by (34). The researcher used a Likert scale which ranges from 1 to 5 for scoring it. The instrument was administered during a regular class in reading comprehension subject.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data was analyzed quantitatively. The descriptive statistical analysis for students' perceived use of individual strategies and the overall mean of each of the three categories of metacognitive reading strategies were also included.

The component of global strategies, that majority of the students had high and frequent use of 11 out of 13 global strategies whereby the mean score was 3.7 and above. These students used 'previewing text before reading as one of the highest usage' ( $M=4.19$ ). The result showed that these students demonstrated a capacity of planning for reading. Two out of the 13 global component strategies relating to the 'use of typographical aids and italics to identify key information' ( $M=3.37$ ) and 'analyzing evaluating the students used the information presented in the text' ( $M=3.23$ ) at a moderate level. The findings of this study were in line with the findings of Wen Q and Johnson, who stated that globally, all learners consistently used guessing as a strategy when they were reading in context [36].

The supporting strategies were used by students to enhance understanding and memory. The result showed that the learners' use of support strategies were in the range of moderate to high, for example, the frequent use of reference materials such as dictionaries ( $M=3.38$ ,  $SD=0.93$ ) and finding relationships ( $SM=3.62$ ,  $SD=0.99$ ). Within the category problem-solving strategies, all eight strategies were reported to be of high usage. The result showed that learners were generally conscious of their comprehension process and were able to take appropriate actions when comprehension breaks down. Based on the high range of strategy use ( $M=3.38-4.43$ ), it can be said that these students used problem-solving strategies to solve their comprehension problems when the text was ambiguous.

Based on the category of problem-solving strategies, all eight strategies were reported to be of high usage. The result showed that learners were generally conscious of their comprehension process and were able to take appropriate actions when comprehension breaks down. For example, when a text became difficult, they 're-read to increase understanding' ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ) 'and 'pay close attention to what they are reading' ( $M=4.53$ ,  $SD=0.68$ ). When they faced unknown words or phrases, they 'tried to guess the meaning' ( $M=4.15$ ,  $SD=0.76$ ). Based on the high range of strategy use ( $M=3.66-4.45$ ), it can be said that these learners used problem-solving strategies to solve their comprehension problems when the text was ambiguous.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Learners made use of the metacognitive reading strategies in order to plan, arrange and evaluate the success of their learning process. They were conscious of their cognitive process during reading and were able to utilize a wide array of metacognitive reading strategies to achieve comprehension. These findings supported many other studies Block EL [37], Sheorey R and Mokhtari K [38], Jun Zhang L [39], Dabarera C, Renandya WA and Zhang LJ [40], indicated that competent or ESL readers, like their native counterparts, were aware of a multitude of reading strategies available for use. The present

study examined that ESL undergraduate students' use of global, support and problem-solving reading strategies to comprehend their reading text. Previous studies revealed a relationship between global strategy use and language proficiency level [37]. Carrell PL findings also implied that informed training in the use of global strategies for problem-solving in reading comprehension for unsuccessful readers could be useful in helping them improve their reading ability, with a potential of leading to improvement their overall English proficiency [19].

Metacognitive reading strategies made students aware of their goals. They were able to monitor the reading process, check their reading comprehension, arranging strategies, evaluate their strategy application and after evaluation, adjust their choice of strategy if needed. Learners will be more motivated in using metacognitive strategies in reading comprehension through effective monitoring of comprehension process which was considered important in developing skilled reading.

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