

EFL Teachers and Learners Perception of Metacognitive Reading Strategy and Academic Performance: A Survey of Undergraduate Students in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Metacognition is an integral part of effective reading. Expert readers and highly skilled readers use specific metacognitive strategies before, during, and after reading to aid their comprehension and understanding of the texts read. The behaviors that good readers use helps them to construct meaning while reading, makes evaluations of text, and make connections with prior knowledge and experiences. Metacognitive strategies increase a reader's ability to construct meaning and to evaluate the text he or she is reading. In spite of its importance, the metacognitive strategy has long been the ignored strategy in English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh. The present study attempts to find out whether the EFL teachers and students have the awareness that metacognitive reading strategy enhances EFL students' reading comprehension. The article describes the development and validation of a new self-report instrument, the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory, designed to assess adolescent and adult readers' metacognitive awareness and perceived use of reading strategies while reading academic or school-related materials. There were 3 strategy subscales or factors: Global Reading Strategies, Problem-Solving Strategies, and Support Reading Strategies. The reliability and factorial validity of the scale will be demonstrated. In addition, directions for administering and scoring the instrument will be provided, and suggestions for interpreting the results obtained will be offered. Finally, the scales' implications for reading research and instruction will be discussed.

Keywords: Meta-cognitive competence, meta comprehension ability, reading strategy

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Introduction

At first, the word “metacognition” may sound something sophisticated or complex, or even intimidating. Actually, we all engage in metacognitive activities every day. Metacognition enables us to be successful learners and has also been associated with intelligence (Sternberg, 1986). It is often referred to simply as thinking about thinking. Cognition refers to thinking, while metacognition is the ability to look at our thinking. It is like getting out of our heads and looking at the way we think (see Figure: 1). somewhat like an “out of body experience.” Metacognition is a critical aspect of effective learning and refers to higher-order thinking that a person engages in and involves active control over the cognitive processes engaged in learning.

Metacognition is an integral part of effective reading. In their famous study, Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) found that expert readers and highly skilled readers use specific metacognitive strategies before, during, and after reading to aid their comprehension and understanding of the texts read. The behaviours that good readers use helps them to construct meaning while reading make evaluations of text and make connections with prior knowledge and experiences. Metacognitive strategies increase a reader’s ability to construct meaning and to evaluate the text he or she is reading.

It is known that metacognitive strategies are important for successful second/foreign language readers. Researchers have found that there is a significant positive correlation between metacognitive strategy use and English reading achievement. Though all four skills of language learning are equally important, many EFL students may not need to speak English in their daily lives, whereas they need to access a lot of information in English in their various academic reading (Eskey, 2005). Levine, Ferenz, and Reves (2000) mentioned that the ability to read academic texts is one of the most important skills of EFL learners. Specifically, academic reading is often associated with the requirement to perform identifiable cognitive and procedural tasks such as taking a test, writing a paper, or giving a speech (Shih, 1992). As a result, academic reading comprehension has become a major challenge for undergraduate EFL students. Considering metacognition has crucial learning and pedagogical implications, the present study has tried to explore the perception of EFL learners’ and teachers’ regarding the metacognitive reading strategy and its relation to academic performance in Bangladesh.

Literature Review

Metacognitive strategies have been defined by many scholars such as Chamot and O’Malley (1990), Oxford (1990), Ellis (1994), and Cohen (2005). In short, metacognitive strategies are regarded as high order

executive skills that make use of knowledge of cognitive processes and constitute an attempt to regulate ones' own learning by means of planning, monitoring, and evaluating. In reading, metacognitive strategies are self-monitoring and self-regulating activities, focusing on both the process and the product of reading. They include the readers' awareness of whether or not they can comprehend what they read; their ability to judge the cognitive demands of reading task; and their knowledge of when and how to employ a specific cognitive reading strategy according to text difficulty, situational constraints, and the reader's own cognitive abilities (Baker & Brown, 1984; Gourgey, 2001; Hamdan, Ghafar, Sihes, & Atan, 2010). To put it simply, metacognitive strategies in reading are those strategies designed to increase readers' knowledge of awareness and control, to improve their reading comprehension, and to evaluate whether their attempt at comprehension has been achieved.

Metacognitive processes have been understood to play an essential part in achieving comprehension (Phan, 2006). The use of metacognitive strategies in the reading process has been generally supported as a valuable aid for its cognitive, social, linguistic benefits. Many studies (Carrell, 1995; Wenden, 2001; Chamot, 2005) have addressed the positive effects of utilizing metacognitive strategies in the reading process. They illustrate the positive relationship between metacognitive strategies and reading comprehension. Research on metacognition and reading has shown that when faced with reading difficulties in reading comprehension, learners tend to use some metacognitive strategies to cope with these difficulties (Wen, 2003).

Reading proficiency in an L2 does not develop fully or easily as it apparently does in one's first language (L1). Grabe and Stoller (2002) stressed that to become a highly proficient L2 reader is very difficult. Snow (2002) found that many learners have difficulties in understanding what they read, especially academic texts. Instead of having adequate language competency, academic second language readers still have difficulties to some extent in comprehending the academic texts thoroughly (Eskey, 2005). Wen (2003) asserts that lack of grammar and vocabulary knowledge is the major cause of the difficulty of academic reading comprehension. In fact, lack of proper metacognitive strategies is the prime reason for not doing well in academic reading. Students are uncertain of what metacognitive strategies are and how to use them (Wen, 2003). Poor readers, especially, do not know what methods are efficient for academic reading, nor do they know how to improve their reading ability (Young & Yoke, 2001). In academic reading comprehension, if students lack metacognitive knowledge, they feel puzzled in adopting the appropriate reading methods and reading strategies (Shokrpour & Fotovatian, 2009). As a result, they cannot self-

plan, self-monitor, self-regulate, and self-evaluate their own reading skills properly. In our undergraduate classrooms, students still cannot read effectively and strategically by consciously using metacognitive strategies.

Though metacognition is an integral part of effective academic reading, no single investigation and analysis have been performed on the use of metacognitive strategy of undergraduate English major students in Bangladesh. Therefore, the present study can provide us with in-depth insights into the complexity of reading process and give us ideas about how to help learners to develop their reading competence and how to assess their metacognitive strategy use. Since the metacognitive strategies are mental processes, the assessment of metacognitive strategies in reading comprehension focuses on modeling the readers' cognitive processes by applying the approaches of think-aloud, self-report (survey), questionnaire, and interview (Kendall, 1983). Meanwhile, the students' metacognitive strategy use is still dependent upon a host of factors, such as students' values and motives, their perceptions of task demands, and teaching (Pintrich, 1990). In addition, it is worth knowing whether the students' metacognitive strategy use has any relationship with their reading comprehension achievement. The gap in literature leads to the exploration of the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of teachers and learners regarding the metacognitive reading strategy?
2. What metacognitive strategies do undergraduate English major students use in achieving their academic reading comprehension?
3. Does the students' use of metacognitive strategies have any relationship with their English reading comprehension achievement?

Research Methodology

Participants

The present study was conducted with 36 fourth-year, and 28 first-year English majored undergraduate students who have taken a course on "Critical Reading and Academic Writing" at Bangladesh University of Professionals in Bangladesh. These students have also completed a Basic English course as "Freshman English" where they have learned the basic reading skills principles. Total 5 teachers have been participated in the survey and interview questionnaire who have taught the participating students.

Instruments

Two instruments were used in the study: a Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI) and a semi-structured interview. The MAI was

composed of two main sections: metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive control processes. The first one refers to what learners know about cognition and the second one refers to how learners use that knowledge to regulate cognition (Brown, 1987; Baker, 1991). Accordingly, Brown (1987) said that knowledge of cognition can be defined as what one's know about his/her own cognition. It usually consists of three types of metacognitive reading strategy awareness: 1) declarative knowledge, 2) procedural knowledge, and 3) conditional knowledge. Metacognitive reading strategy regulatory skills have three essential skills: planning, monitoring, and evaluation (Jacobs & Paris, 1987). Instructors and educators agree that regulatory competence promotes performance in a number of ways, involving better use of cognitive resources such as attention, better utilize of strategies, and a greater awareness of comprehension breakdowns. Researchers stated (Cross, & Paris, 1988; Brown & Palincsar, 1989) that if students know when and how to utilize regulatory skills and use them as one of the instructional programs in the classroom activities would positively affect their improvement in their comprehension tests. The regulator process (planning, monitoring, and evaluation) needs to be emphasized in the learning process and would motivate learners to control their improvement in reading comprehension (Swanson, 1994).

However, this present study mainly focused on the metacognitive awareness of the participating teachers and students. In detail, the MAI in this study measured three main categories of metacognitive strategies, namely planning, monitoring, and evaluating, and nine sub-categories that the students employed in carrying out reading tasks. Second, the semi-structured interview was used to obtain more in-depth data concerning the metacognitive strategy use in their reading process. It was conducted with the teachers.

Results

Students' Knowledge about Cognition

SL.	Description	Total True Statement	Mean	Total False Statement	Mean	Median
01.	Declarative knowledge	290	4.53	218	3.40	3.965
02.	Procedural knowledge	156	2.44	88	1.38	1.91
03.	Conditional knowledge	225	3.52	102	1.59	2.555

Table 1: Students' Knowledge about cognition

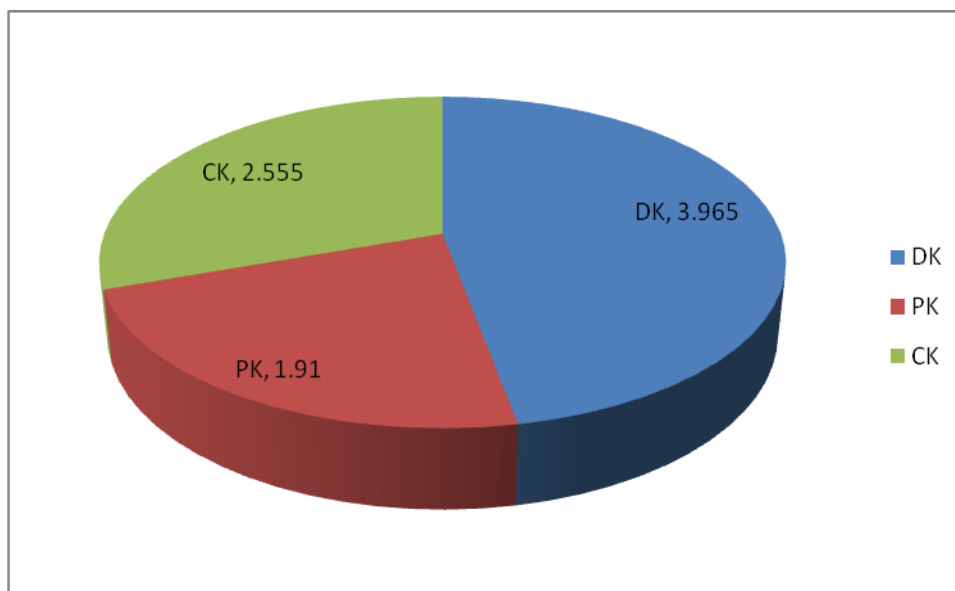


Chart 1: Frequency scale of students' knowledge about cognition

The items were all positive statements; therefore, the higher score means higher metacognitive awareness. It is not important, however, to create interval scores to classify the metacognitive awareness of the participant in this study as low, moderate, or high. The students' metacognitive awareness knowledge was demonstrated in terms of the mean scores of the students' self-reporting for three sub-categories of metacognitive strategies. The mean scores and median are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows the mean scores of three metacognitive strategies used by the students. The mean scores of declarative knowledge ranged from a high of 4.53 to a low of 3.40 for the students (median = 3.965), indicating a medium use of declarative knowledge. It shows that almost half of the students had more knowledge about their own memory. It means the rest half had lack of declarative knowledge which affects their academic performance.

The mean scores of procedural knowledge ranged from a high of 2.44 to a low of 1.38 for the students (median = 1.91), indicating almost a medium use of procedural knowledge. Again it shows that almost half of the students had knowledge about the execution of procedural skills and use qualitatively different strategies to solve problems. It means the rest half had lack of procedural knowledge which affects their problem solving performance.

The mean scores of conditional knowledge ranged from a high of 3.52 to a low of 1.59 for the students (median = 2.555), indicating a medium use of conditional knowledge. Eventually, it shows that half of the students had knowledge to knowing when and why to apply different cognitive actions. Therefore, the rest half had lack of conditional

knowledge which stated that bad readers indicated to have less information about their own cognition and do not able to explain that knowledge.

Teachers’ Knowledge about Cognition

SL.	Description	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
01.	Declarative knowledge	0	1	2	14	3
02.	Procedural knowledge	0	0	3	12	5
03.	Conditional knowledge	0	1	3	11	5

Table 2: Teachers’ Knowledge about cognition

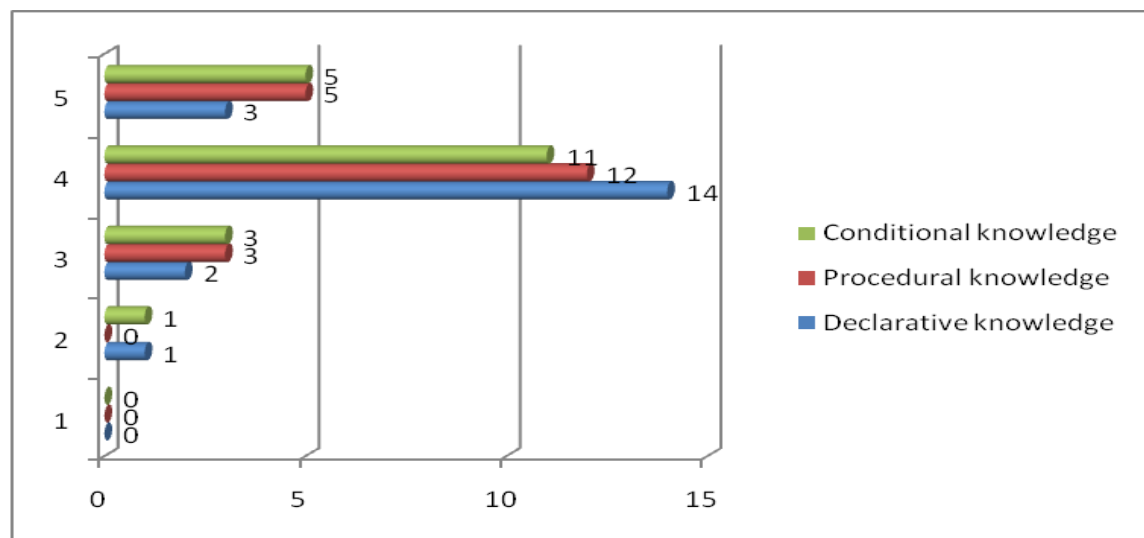


Chart 2: Teachers’ knowledge about cognition

Table 2 revealed that though maximum teachers’ had metacognitive awareness still some of them have to achieve this goal. Metacognitive awareness is a key for a teacher to reflect their own work and the support they give to their students particularly.

Findings

The results of the study revealed that Bangladeshi undergraduate English major students mostly possessed similar awareness of reading strategies. This could be seen as an indication that the undergraduate level is successful in teaching metacognitive strategies to the students and thus preparing them for tertiary education. The overall metacognitive reading strategy awareness of Bangladeshi undergraduate students seemed to be average high for both younger and older students. This suggests that at least the participants in question possess necessary metacognitive awareness of reading skills to succeed in tertiary education, assuming that their other academic skills and language skills are also at a similarly high level.

The types of metacognitive strategies used by the students largely belong to the group of Problem-Solving Strategies, which is more in line with previous findings on strategy use by EFL students and differs from the strategies used by ESL students (Karbalaeei 2011, 174-175). However, the types of English texts that the students read are almost exclusively designed for language instruction. The students likely encounter other types of texts as well, and will encounter challenging academic English texts in tertiary education.

In conclusion, the present study found out that Bangladeshi undergraduate students with aspirations for tertiary education may use metacognitive reading strategies frequently. Although the individual differences were significant, the pattern of results indicates that students were not inclined to use support reading strategies as much as other types of strategies. The results suggest that reading strategy instruction in Bangladesh should be investigated further to gain a more thorough understanding of the development of reading strategies during EFL studies. Such studies could find practical application in the design of reading strategy instruction.

Conclusion

Reading comprehension can be one of the most important parts for a language learner to master and one of the least favorite topics for teachers to address in the classroom. But most of the students have difficulty with constructing meaning from the written texts. So, as researchers conducted studies in the field of metacognitive reading strategy awareness, they found that metacognitive reading strategy is one of the main important factors to facilitate students' reading comprehension. It can be concluded that universities and schools need to be actively improve metacognitive reading strategies among all students. Research indicates that metacognitive reading strategy awareness promotes both performance and understanding of one's reading comprehension. Research further supports the claim that metacognitive strategies facilitate students' reading comprehension. This study corroborates the view that explicit instruction of metacognitive reading strategies is a feasible tool to enhance students' reading comprehension and benefited most from explicit reading instruction supplemented by

practice in metacognitive reading strategy activities. However, it may be challenging for instructors to practice metacognitive strategy in the conventional way, it is worthwhile because this form of metacognitive strategy was the most effective. Above all, it is important to say that after a relatively short time of reading comprehension instruction, students become self-regulated readers and they can be a proficient reader after finishing this strategy instruction learning. So, then they know when and how to utilize strategy while reading.

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