

DEVELOPING VOCABULARY AND READING COMPREHENSION OF THE ESL STUDENTS EMPLOYING METACOGNITION READING STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

This article aims how to enhance the reading comprehension and vocabulary of the UG students (ESL) using the prescribed English text under Mahatma Gandhi University, Nalgonda, Telangana state. In the recent years, the researchers have been focussed on reading skill as a strategy to enhance reading comprehension and vocabulary of the ESL students. In this context, metacognition reading technique could be the best way in learning new vocabulary of the target students. Use of this metacognition strategy helps he students “to think about their thinking”- before, during and after they read. In their study, the researchers have taught metacognitive strategies to the UG students in lieu of traditional teacher reading skill within their prescribed English textbooks. The students have been given the reading comprehension activities in parts from their English text book and which have resulted with higher note of improving not only their reading comprehension skills but also enriched vocabulary.

Keyskills: Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary, ESL students, Metacognition Strategy

I. INTRODUCTION

It is usually known that reading is one of the most important skills of English language learning particularly to the English as Second Language learners (ESL). The ability to read and learn what one reads is very important to get succeed in our education system. The eventual goal of reading skill is nothing but comprehension. It makes the reader to sense of what the text or matter is about. For this, as a teacher we must make our students achieve their both academic and personal goals through the reading activity. Strategic reading or methods of reading refer to a planned or established route of reading. The basic of reading comprehension is the ability to decode the information through techniques and activities to cater the needs of the students for becoming active and purposeful readers. These strategies and methods vary according to the manifold assessment tools. Most of the young students find difficulty while reading as there are variety of reasons viz., limited experience with books, phonemic awareness, phonics, new vocabulary, comprehension and fluency.

Most of the ESL students fall under one step behind in mastering reading comprehension. They score below the basic level in reading compared to the other students as they weren't given proper reading skills throughout their primary and schooling levels. If we generalize the reading strategy could help a student to improve or build new vocabulary, learn language items, to know and assess sentence construction and try to locate a new word in place of the other word based on the need.

The basic aim of reading skill is not only to comprehend the exact information but also to comprehend its implied ideas. According to Anderson (2003), reading is the interaction of four things including the reader, the text, the fluent reading or —the ability or read at an appropriate rate with adequate comprehension, and strategic reading, or —the ability of the reader to use a variety of reading strategies to accomplish a purpose for reading (p. 8). The main purpose or goal of the reading strategy is to find the best method or approach or process by the learner to deal with. Research has resulted that reading comprehension levels of ESL students have manifold issues in view of mastering the skill. For example, an ESL student’s background of L1 knowledge, semantics, text schema, lexical and grammatical awareness and their personal experiences and assumptions towards L1 could play a major role in acquainting the reading comprehension and vocabulary of the text. Moreover, the readers’ views and nature of reading are always collided with their personal, social and cultural histories.

Regarding the importance of reading comprehension, it should be pointed out that it is specifically the basic goal for ESL/EFL students to gain an understanding of the world and of themselves, enabling them to think about and react to what they read (Tierney, 2005). According to Grabe (1991), reading is an essential skill and probably the most important skill for second language learners to master in academic contexts. As reading comprehension has been particularly important both in first and second/foreign languages, reading strategies are of great interest in the field of reading research. Reading research has also shed light on metacognitive awareness of reading strategies, perception of strategies, and strategy training and use in reading comprehension.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Metacognition is defined as —thinking about thinking (Anderson, 2002, p. 23). This term was first coined by Flavell in the mid 1970s. According to Byrd, Carter, and Waddoups (2001), it is accounted as self-awareness of mental process. Oxford (1990) believes that metacognitive strategies —provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process (p. 136).

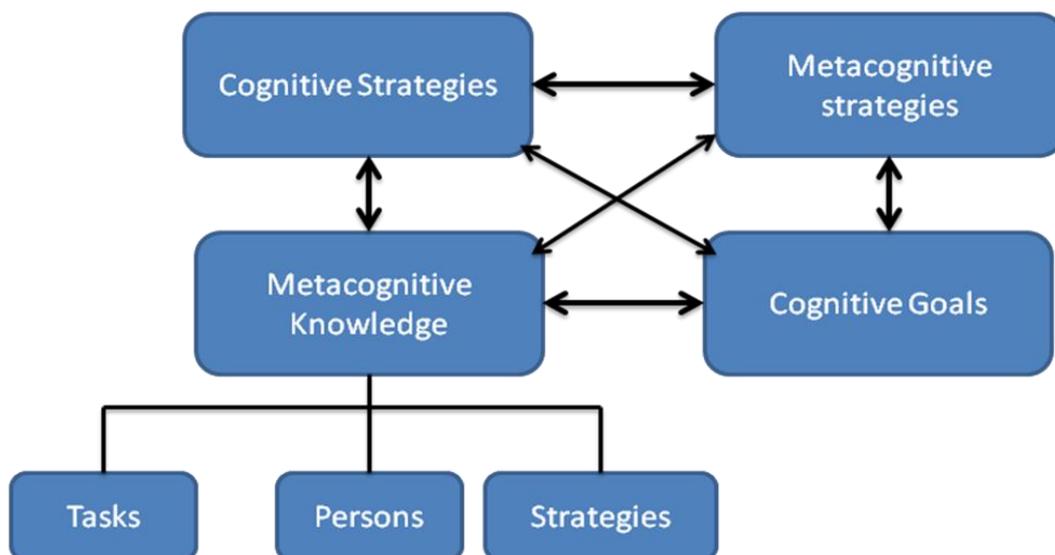


Figure: 1 Flavell’s Model of Metacognition

Although metacognition has become a buzz word in education, it seems that the meaning is often assumed. For clarification purposes this study adopted the definition offered by Kuhn (2000). Kuhn defined metacognition as,

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“Enhancing (a) metacognitive awareness of what one believes and how one knows and (b) metastrategic control in application of the strategies that process new information” (p. 178). This awareness is developmental and lies on a continuum. Proficient readers use one or more metacognitive strategies to comprehend text. The use of such strategies has developed over time as the reader learns which ones are best suited to aid in comprehension (Pressley, Wharton-McDonald, Mistretta-Hampston, & Echevarria, 1998).

Pressley et al. (1998) found that students’ comprehension was not enhanced by merely reading more text. If the students used even one of the strategies, for example summarizing, comprehension was improved. If students were given a host of strategies that they could apply at their discretion, comprehension was greatly improved.

In other words, many scholars advocate for an interactive (constructive) type of reading model (Alderson, 2000; Clapham, 1996; Haenggi & Perfetti, 1992; Carrell, 1992, 1988, 1984, 1983; Grabe, 1991; Bernhardt, 1991; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1989, 1983; Alderson & Urquhart, 1985; Perfetti and Roth, 1981; Meyer, Brandt and Bluth, 1980; Perfetti, Goldman & Hogaboam, 1979; Stanovich, 1980; Rumelhart, 1977). This research on the reading comprehension process, both in the mother tongue and in second or foreign languages, has been found to be closely related to the research carried out on good and poor reading skills (Perfetti and Roth, 1981; McConkie & Zola, 1981; Meyer, Brandt and Bluth, 1980; Just & Carpenter, 1980; Perfetti, Goldman & Hogaboam, 1979).

Research on the relationship between metacognition and reading comprehension has advanced through numerous different stages. During the early stages, research focused on the analysis of the relationship between metacognition and reading comprehension from the developmental perspective. Brown (1980) and Baker and Brown (1984) were among the first influential researchers in this field. They concluded that young students are ignorant of metacognitive strategies in knowing when they are comprehending, knowing what they need to know and what they have comprehended, knowing where they fail to comprehend, and knowing what they need to do in order to repair comprehension failure.

Louca (2003) describes metacognition as cognition about cognition because it entails examining the brain’s processing during the reading / thinking process. Reading as a cognitive process implies that metacognition or awareness and regulation of one’s thinking during the reading process could lead to better comprehension. According to Iwai (2011), metacognition is key to reading comprehension since it is found essential in the development of some linguistic, cognitive, and social skills. In the field of reading, metacognitive strategies are those activities that make students aware of their thinking as they do reading tasks. The New South Wales Department of Education and Training (2010) defines metacognitive reading strategies as planned, intentional, goal-directed, and future-oriented mental activities and processes that help a reader think about and check how he progresses in fulfilling a cognitive task. In fulfilling a task using metacognition, a learner plans and activates, then monitors, controls, reacts, and reflects (Pintrich, Wolters, & Baxter, 2000). Iwai (2011) summarizes the process of metacognition in three steps: 1) Planning; 2) Monitoring; and 3) Evaluation.

In addition, Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) examined differences in the metacognitive and perceived use of reading strategies among 105 United States (US) and English as Second Language (ESL) university students in the US. They draw the conclusion, first, that both the US and ESL students showed a high level of various reading strategies awareness. Second, both groups attributed the same order of importance to categories of reading strategies in the

survey, regardless of their reading ability or gender. Third, both ESL and US high-reading-ability students show comparable degrees of higher reported use for cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies than lower-reading ability students in the respective groups, and while the US high-reading-ability students seem to consider support reading strategies to be relatively more valuable than low-reading-ability US students, ESL students attribute high value to support reading strategies, regardless of their reading ability level.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

Participants are the first and second year students in the government degree college, Huzurnagar, under Mahatma Gandhi University, Nalgonda, Telangana State. 80 students (35 males and 45 females) joined the study voluntarily and took metacognitive instruction for two weeks.

3.2 Design

This study had a combined group with pre-test and post-test. The subjects were already assigned in groups by the researchers. The students were selected for this study were randomly assigned to the various activities using along with the prescribed text book activities. The homogeneity of the students in terms of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension was checked using a vocabulary achievement test and the comprehension test respectively.

3.3 Instrumentation

Two instruments were used in this study. The first one was a 10 item multiple-choice test of vocabulary, which was developed by the researcher. The vocabulary items in the test were mainly selected from the lexical items taught and exposed to during the course from their prescribed textbooks. The test was used as the assessment tool in the pre-test and the post-test phase of the study. Two internal consistency estimates of reliability which included coefficient alpha and a split-half coefficient expressed as Spearman-Brown corrected correlation were computed for the vocabulary test. For the split-half coefficient, the test items were split into two halves based on odd and even numbers to nullify the effects of unwanted factors such as tiredness of the test takers. The value for coefficient alpha was .85 and the value of the split-half coefficient was .90, each indicating satisfactory reliability.

3.4 Metacognitive approach Instruction

The students received 50 minutes of reading comprehension instruction a week for 2 weeks. The passages were taken from the prescribed textbooks. In each class hour they were taught two metacognitive strategies and they applied them to the passages. The strategies which were taught were:

- a. *Using strengths*: While reading, I develop my personal strengths in order to better understand the text. If I am a good reader, I focus on the text; if I am good at figures and diagrams, I spotlight on that information.
- b. *Inferring meaning* (through word analysis or other strategies): While I understand, I try to verify the meaning of unknown words that seem critical to the meaning of the text.
- c. *Using background information*: While I am reading, I reassess and improve my background knowledge about the topic, based on the text's content.

- d. *Evaluating*: As I am reading, I assess the text to conclude whether it contributes to my knowledge/understanding of the subject.
- e. *Searching according to the goals*: I search out information applicable to my reading goals.
- f. *Reading goals*: I assess whether what I am reading is significant to my reading goals.
- g. *Distinguishing*: As I am reading, I distinguish between information that I already know and new information.
- h. *Deciding on the difficulty*: I note how hard or easy a text is to read.
- i. *Revising*: While I am reading, I think again and modify my previous questions about the topic, based on the text's content.
- j. *Guessing the later topics*: I look forward to information that will be presented later in the text.

IV. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the present study have implications for learners, teachers, and teacher educators in the area of TESL or TEFL in particular and education in general. It helps teachers in accomplishing their challenging task of teaching English in ESL or EFL contexts where learners have less experience to language compared to ESL or EFL contexts. Teachers can help learners use different metacognitive strategies to make possible their vocabulary learning. This study provides further support for the benefits of metacognitive strategy training. All the students, especially those who have comprehension problems, now have tools that can help them comprehend what they read. The experimental group achieved notably better results than the control group. The results of the present study have confirmed that reading comprehension could be developed through systematic instruction in metacognitive language learning strategies. Systematic open instruction about the concept of metacognition and learning strategies helped students of the experimental group to better comprehend this new approach and how to apply it to different learning tasks on reading. The model of instruction provided for teaching and applying each one of the ten metacognitive language learning strategies included in the suggested training program helped the students to know why, when, and how to use the strategies. Gradually, they started to think metacognitively about the strategies they could use to improve their reading comprehension to become not only better listeners and readers, but also autonomous and strategic learners.

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the respondents are strategic readers employing moderate use of metacognitive reading strategies. Though they are able to moderately plan, monitor, and evaluate their reading performance when reading an academic text, there seems to be an imperative need to integrate explicit instruction of metacognitive reading strategies in the classroom. Having the Problem Solving Strategies as the most frequently used strategies, it means that they can deal with any difficulty they encounter in reading a text. This characteristic influences reading interest and motivation as well as confidence and persistence in managing a challenging reading task.

The respondents are very much interested in any reading material that is with humour, fun, enjoyment, and pleasure. This means that they prefer reading for entertainment purposes to education purposes. This implies that teachers need to amalgamate fun in reading instruction. Implementation of Extensive Reading Program can be practicable approach to shift from learning to read to reading to learn with fun. With regards to their motivation to read, the

students seem to have a right perspective in reading as they recognize its value as essential to success. This could be a good benchmark to develop in them the ability and willingness to read.

Despite the self-reported use of metacognitive reading strategies in reading academic texts, the respondents are still below average in comprehending academic reading text. This performance can be attributed to the result of the previous research question showing the respondents' strong liking of fun and enjoyable reading materials over at times lengthy and boring academic texts. The low reading comprehension performance of the respondents may also imply that teachers and researchers do not have to focus only on instructing metacognitive strategies to improve reading comprehension performance. Instead, they also have to look into other cognitive, psychological, social, and linguistic factors affecting students' performance and do the necessary interventions.

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