METACOGNITIVE AWARENESSOF READING STRATEGIES USEAMONG UNDERGRADUATESOF DIFFERENT NATIONALITIESIN LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This study investigated metacognitive awareness of reading strategies employed by international undergraduates. It aims to investigate the frequency of different categories of metacognitive reading strategies employed by the respondents when reading academic texts in English. It also examines the hypothesis whether there is any difference between respondents' nationalities and their metacognitive reading strategies employed. The sample of the study were thirty international engineering undergraduates from three countries, Yemen, Indonesia and Palestine. The instruments used in the study was a questionnaire which comprised thirty items developed from MARSI (Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory). Results showed that the respondents employed more supporting strategies than global and problem-solving metacognitive reading strategies. Yemenis were found to employ more metacognitive reading strategies than Palestinians and Indonesians. However, there was a little or nearly no significant difference between learners' nationalities and their metacognitive awareness of reading strategies employed. All respondents showed positive attitudes towards employing metacognitive reading strategies when learning English. Henceforth, every ESL learner should attempt to employ more metacognitive reading strategies in ESL learning as they can be employed regardless the nationalities.

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1. Introduction

Reading is one of the crucial skills which challenges language learners inmany countries. The main reason why reading strategies are important in education field is because employing reading strategies helps in efficient comprehension of texts written in the target language (Carrell, 1998). In fact, Harison (2008) pointed out that since comprehension is the ultimate objective of reading, second language teachers should therefore put in effort to create good readers by teaching them reading strategies in the academic context such as reading textbooks and journal articles.

A number of students especially students who are going to sit for public examinations tend to read and memorize. This somehow neglects the authentic meanings of the texts and also their metacognitive skills. Learners should therefore be more actively involved in the reading process by employing suitable metacognitive aspect of reading strategies based on their preferences. The term "metacognitive awareness of reading strategies" refers to metacognition aspect or knowledge of reading strategies use in processing academic English texts.

This research is carried out in the hope that language learners of different nationalities studying at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) will be aware of the use of metacognitive reading strategies when learning English. Hence, this paper seeks to address the following research questions:

1.   What is the frequency of different categories of metacognitive reading strategies employed by undergraduates when reading academic English texts?
2.   Is there any difference between learners' nationalities and their metacognitive awareness of reading strategies use?

The main contention of this paper is to pave for a better understanding of the reading strategies employed by undergraduates in general and UTM international engineering undergraduates, in particular. The findings of the research is possible to help improving the way lecturers teach English courses and to assist learners with limited proficiency in English reading.

1.1 Background of the Study

The population of English language learners has significantly increased at university level in Malaysia today. It is a requirement for all students in public or private universities to enrol in English courses. Learning to read in a second or foreign language is indeed a complicated process which takes time and requires concentrated effort particularly as an ESL learners. It is crucial for them to master how to read in order to be excel in English (Dubin, Eskey & Grabe, 1986). In fact, Block (cited in Nisbet, 2012) asserts that ESL learners are required to repair more language gaps when trying to understand others, ifcompared to reading in their native language. Much research has been conducted discussing the various problems international students face when learning English, but there has been very little attention paid to the ways of solving these reading problems. Thus, further research needs to be conducted to identify how these reading strategies can be employed effectively.

2. Literature Review

Reading is defined as ''an active, purposeful process which involves several word level processes included decoding, fluency and vocabulary skills'' (Dhanapala., 2010). Also, reading involves higher level of language skills such as ''activation of prior knowledge, self-questioning, comprehension monitoring, inferring, predicting'' and so forth to achieve better reading comprehension. In other words, reading is a skill which learners make connection to integrate between the schema which already exists in readers' mind and the readers' required information. Consequently, learners are required to be actively involved instead of merely passively accept in the reading process to achieve their purpose of reading successfully.

Reading strategies, therefore, need to be employed in the reading process as Oxford (1990, cited in Noor Zainab, 2000) defined, ''Learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations''. In fact, second language learners are found to be successful in reading when they employed a number of different reading strategies (Nishini, 2007; Zhang & Wu, 2009; Kem, 1989; Carrell, 1998; Dhanapala, 2010).

Metacognitive awareness or metacognition was first defined by Flavell (1979) as ''one's ability to understand, control, and manipulate his own cognitive process to maximize learning''. Jacob and Paris (1987) then developed the Index of Reading Awareness to measure the four main aspects of metacognitive awareness in reading which included evaluation, planning, regulation and conditional knowledge. Schmitt (1990) also developed the Metacomprehension Strategy Index to determine the students' levels of strategy awareness namely predicting and verifying, previewing, purpose setting, self-questioning, drawing from background knowledge summarizing and employing fix-up strategies.

Metacognitive awareness was then defined as knowledge about the appropriate actions one takes in order to achieve a specific goal. (Carrell, Pharis & Liberto (1989), cited in Ahmad & Mehdi, 2012) For instance, learners might be aware of employing reading strategies to comprehend the meaning of a text in reading activity. In order to achieve this goal, readers have to control their self-awareness of cognition throughout the reading process to improve the comprehension. There is a need to point out that, most of the reading comprehension activities implemented by efficient readers actually take place in their metacognitive level as shown by certain studies carried out earlier (Carrell, 1998; Hudson, 2007; Wenden, 1998, Dhanapala, 2010).

On the other hand, Ahmad & Mehdi (2012) asserted that metacognitive awareness of reading strategies can assist language learners to comprehend not just what reading strategies they can use (declarative knowledge) or how they should employ those reading strategies (procedural knowledge), but also why, when, and where they should use the reading strategies in a specific reading context. Besides, there is a great need for readers to evaluate their efficacy (conditional knowledge), along with awareness of the objective of reading which might be able to trigger certain reading strategies (Anderson, 2002 & Carrel, 1989, cited in Ahmad & Mehdi, 2012).

In 2002, a self-report measure named the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) was designed by Mokhtari & Reichard to measure students' metacognitive awareness of the reading strategies they employ while they read in the academic contexts. The

MARSI includes items related to three categories or three subscales of reading strategies to assess comprehension process and actions of the readers. The thirty-item inventory has included three subscales which are global reading strategies, problem solving strategies and supporting strategies.

Global reading strategies (GLOB) are strategies oriented toward a generalized or global analysis of text, such as prediction, making connection of the prior knowledge to the text, critical evaluation and so on. Problem solving strategies (PROB) are defined as localized, focused problem-solving or repair strategies employed when learners face problems in understanding textual information. For instance, checking one's understanding upon encountering conflicting information, re-reading for better understanding, adjusting reading speed and so forth. Supporting strategies (SUP) involved the use of support mechanisms or tools aimed at helping learners in comprehending the texts. This included the use of reference materials such as dictionaries, taking notes and other support systems.In short, successful readers are aware of a variety of reading strategies, more specifically they have metacognitive strategic knowledge, which according to Wenden (1998) is the "general knowledge about what strategies are, why they are useful, and specific knowledge about when and how to use them".

3. Methodology

This study adopts both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. Triggered by Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) by Mokhtari & Reichard (2002), this study is designed to elicit ad describe the metacognitive aspect of reading strategies employed by international students at UTM.

3.1 Participants

The participants were selected based on their nationalities and their willingness to participate. The participants for this research included thirty volunteered undergraduate international students from Engineering faculties at UTM. There was a demographic distribution of ten undergraduates from Palestine, ten undergraduates from Yemen and ten undergraduates from Indonesia which contributed to a total of thirty respondents. They learned English as a foreign

language in their countries. They were between 19 to 25 years old. Both male and female were included and they represented the international students at UTM.

3.2 Research Instruments

Two types of research instruments were used in the present study. Quantitative data were collected through survey questionnaire and qualitative data were collected through interview.

3.2.1 Questionnaire

The aim of the survey questionnaire was to obtain detailed information on the frequency of metacognitive reading strategies employed by the respondents. The questionnaire was adopted from Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) by Mokhtari & Reichard (2002), which included 30 items in the present study. The rating scale included strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), agree (A) and strongly agree (SA). The first part of the questionnaire gathered demographic information about the respondents' gender, age, nationality, faculty, year of study, languages spoken, starting age of learning English and their intention after graduation. The second part consisted of thirty items in order to rate the frequency and the effectiveness of the use of metacognitive reading strategies.

3.2.2 Interview

An interview section was conducted after collecting the survey questionnaires to validate if there is any difference between participants' nationalities and their metacognitive awareness of English reading strategies use. Six undergraduates from the 30 respondents of the questionnaires were randomly selected by the researcher in order to further investigate the last research question which is to examine if there is any difference between participants' nationalities and participants' metacognitive awareness of English reading strategies use. Two respondents were selected from each of the nationalities (Indonesia, Palestine and Yemen) and contributed to the total number of six interviewees.

3.3 Data Analysis

After the questionnaires were completed and the interviews were conducted, the data were analysed using SPSS software. Chi-square analysis was chosen to analyse the nominal data used

in this research. In this research, the three nationalities and three metacognitive aspects of reading strategies were compared and analyzed to investigate if there is any relationship between participants' nationalities and their metacognitive awareness of reading strategy employed. After analyzing the data through SPSS, the results were discussed based on the research questions of the present study.

The qualitative dimension, on the other hand, was conducted through interview. The data obtained from the interview was analyzed based on the true responses and opinions of the respondents. The data collected was used to support and validate the results of the survey questionnaires. It was recorded and analysed based on the respondents' actual opinions in the interview. It helps to examine the second research question of the present study, which is to examine whether there is any difference between students' nationalities and their metacognitive awareness of reading strategies employed.

4. Results and Discussion

In this section, the discussion is organized based on the questionnaire and interview:

4.1 Findings Based on Questionnaire

The overall reading strategies employed by Palestinian, Yemeni and Indonesian respondents based on the questionnaires were calculated and inserted into a table as shown in the table below to see the overall pattern of reading strategies employed by respondents of different nationalities. This helps to test the hypothesis of the research whether there is any difference between the respondents' nationalities and the reading strategies employed.

Overall, the percentage of respondents employing global strategy is 60.77 percent, percentage of respondents who employ problem-solving strategy is 59.17 percent and percentage of respondents employing supporting strategy is 62.22 percent. Hence, we can conclude that supporting strategy is more frequently employed by the respondents of this research. This might be due to the fact that supporting strategy is easier to be employed with the help of tools such as dictionaries, if compared to other reading strategies.

Table 4.1 Reading Strategies Employed by Respondents of Different Nationalities

Metacognitive Reading Strategies	Palestinian	Yemeni	Indonesian	Total
Global	86	85	66	237
Problem-solving	45	54	43	142
Supporting	61	59	48	168
Total	192	198	157	547

From the table, we can see that generally, the populations of Palestinian (a total of 192 reading strategies employed by Palestinians) and Yemeni (a total number of 198 reading strategies employed by Yemeni)employed slightly more metacognitive aspect of reading strategies than Indonesian (a total of 157 reading strategies employed by Indonesian). This could be due to the different cultural backgrounds of people from different regions including their education background, learning styles, learning attitudes and so forth. Palestinian and Yemeni might be exposed or get used to employ reading strategies throughout their students' life when they were in their countries.

We can also see that Indonesian respondents employed the least metacognitive aspect of reading strategies, in terms of global, problem-solving and also supporting strategies. This might be due to the lack of awareness about when and how to employ reading strategies when they read academic texts in English. It could be also due to the lack of interest in reading as shown by some of the respondents and interviewees. Thus, when they show no interest in reading, they do not even try to understand it but simply read without understanding.

Besides, the statistics of Palestinians and Yemeni respondents regarding the strategies they like to use when they read academic texts in English has shown not much difference. This might be due to both Palestinians and Yemeni respondents lived and had their education in Middle East area, more specifically in Saudi Arabia. Thus, they might have the similar education background, learning strategies and learning styles. For instance, respondents from both

Palestine and Yemen showed higher usage of global strategy, problem-solving strategy and supporting strategy than respondents from Indonesia.

On the other hand, based on the statistics shown in the table, it can be concluded that the thirty respondents from Palestine, Yemen and Indonesia prefer supporting strategy the most (62.22 percent) followed by global strategy (60.77 percent) and problem-solving strategy (59.17 percent). This might be due to the fact that both global strategy and problem-solving strategy are quite abstract and they involve higher level of conscious, critical thinking. It can be difficult to the students to not just employ but also to realize that they are actually using these kinds of reading strategies either consciously or subconsciously. Some examples of reading strategies which are considered too abstract to be realized or to be conscious of are such as, "I have a purpose in mind when I read.", "I try to guess what the content is about when I read", "I try to get back on track when I lose focus.", "I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading.".

However, if compared to global strategy and problem-solving strategy, supporting strategy is more substantial as it involves supporting tools such as dictionary and notes to help readers to understand or remember the facts. And also, supporting strategy involves not merely language input, but also language output included writing and speaking. For instance, readers who employ supporting strategy write when they take notes of the key expressions and ideas, underline or circle the main points. Moreover, readers also speak when they employ supporting strategy such as read aloud to help understand what they read, paraphrase (restate ideas in their own words), ask themselves questions, summarize what they read, and also to discuss what they read with others to check on their own understanding.

4.2 Findings Based on Interview

In this section, the findings are discussed based on global reading strategies, problem-solving reading strategies and supporting reading strategies.

4.2.1 Preferences on Global Reading Strategies

When reading academic texts in English, most of the readers have a purpose in mind before and when they read. When they were asked whether they have any purpose in mind before they start reading, five out of six of the respondents indicated that they have clear purpose in mind before they read.Apparently, more than half of the interviewees have the common purpose to read, which is to obtain knowledge required to answer their assignment or complete their projects assigned by their lecturers.

Although some of the respondents were not quite sure about their specific purpose of reading, they just stick to the objective of getting information pertaining the assignment. Hence, it is considered a kind of purpose of reading. However, almost all of the respondents showed no interest in reading at all and that they read only when they are asked to read.Besides that, most of the respondents tend to preview the texts before they begin reading.

Five out of six of the respondents employed the global reading strategy when they scan through the text overall before they start to read the text. This helps them to have a rough idea of the text regarding its length and content. Besides, they can also get to know the general theme of the text so that they can ensure that they are reading the right text. Only one of the interviewees read a text word by word from the beginning until the end of the text without scanning through the text.

On the other hand, during the process of reading a text, the respondents tend to use different metacognitive reading strategies when they encounter problems. When they were asked about their reactions if they do not understand certain vocabulary in a text, some of the interviewees employed global reading strategies, some employed problem-solving reading strategies while some others employed supporting strategies.

4.2.2 Preferences on Problem Solving Reading Strategies
When facing a problem in the reading process, the interviewees seem to be able to solve the reading problems efficiently. When they were asked about the reading speed and whether or not they pause while reading, the answers of all the six interviewees showed that theyemployed problem-solving reading strategies. Apparently, all the interviewees know how to adjust their reading speed and they have their own reading speed to suit their reading habits. For instance,

interviewees read slowly to try to understand one paragraph before they move on to the next paragraph. They read paragraph by paragraph, pause or stop from time to time, reread the previous paragraph to understand the meaning of the text.

The two intervieweesemployed problem-solving reading strategy whereby they re-read a difficult text, instead of replacing it with another text, to increase their understanding on the selected text. Other interviewees simply give up trying to read the text if they think that a text is too difficult for them, some interviewees still read it but without understanding of the text, some skip the difficult parts and just read the easier parts. And also, some of them ask their friends to explain to them or find a similar text to replace the difficult one.

4.2.3 Preferences on Supporting Reading Strategies

Only two out of six of the intervieweesemployed supporting strategies when they read academic texts in English. However, most of the interviewees do not feel the need of taking note while reading as some of them think that it is a waste of time to take note while reading. On the other hand, when the interviewees were asked about whether or not they discuss with others during the reading process, the responds of the interviewees indicated that all of thememployed supporting reading strategy.

All the interviewees tend to discuss with others before, during or after reading. For instance, before reading, they discuss with their course mates about issues or topics which might come out in the exam, and then only they start reading. During the reading process, they also discuss with their friends or study in group when they don't understand the meaning of some sentences. Besides, after reading, they discuss to share the knowledge and points which they read and also they share their opinions and views on the issues they read on the texts.

Moreover, when the interviewees were asked whether they paraphrase or restate the ideas they read in the text into their own words to have better understanding of what they read, all the interviewees indicated that they do paraphrase after they read. Their responds showed that most of the interviewees prefer to paraphrase the text into their mother tongue when they try to understand it better. Many of them read in English but restate the ideas in their mother tongue to

check or show their understanding on the ideas. Besides, some other interviewees did not paraphrase or translate the words into their mother tongue. Instead, they paraphrase the English text they read into English as well, but with simplified English words. They tend to find easier words in English to comprehend the same idea with too complicated word choice.

5. Conclusion

Returning to the first research question of this study, which is to identify the frequency of different categories of metacognitive reading strategies employed by undergraduates of different nationalities when reading academic English texts, it is now possible to state that engineering undergraduates in UTM employ more supporting strategies (62.22 percent) than global (60.77 percent) and problem-solving strategies (59.17 percent).

The global strategy they tend to use the most is using their prior knowledge (such as knowledge about the theme of the text, or grammar knowledge) to help them better understand what they read. The most frequent employed problem-solving strategy is by rereading the text when the text becomes difficult, to increase their understanding. The most frequent supporting strategy employed is to discuss what they read with others to check their understanding. However, almost all of the respondents and intervieweesemployed the three reading strategies at different time, before, during or after reading to improve the understanding and to help them in remembering the points.

Based on the data analysed from the questionnaire, Yemeni seem to employ more metacognitive reading strategies than Palestinian and Indonesian. The percentage of Yemeni who employed metacognitive aspect of reading strategies is 66 percent, followed by Palestinian (64 percent) and Indonesian only 52.33 percent. Yemeni employed more problems-solving strategies (67.5 percent), Indonesian also tend to employ more problem-solving strategies (53.75 percent) if compared to other reading strategies. However, Palestinian prefers to employ supporting reading strategies (67.78 percent) than global strategies and problem-solving strategies.

The findings of both questionnaires and interviews revealed that there is not much difference between the students' nationalities and their reading strategies employed. Based on the observed

data obtained from the questionnaire and the expected data calculated statistically, there is only a little or not much difference between the respondents' nationalities and the metacognitive aspect of reading strategies employed by them. Therefore, the reading strategies employed by both the respondents of the questionnaire and interviewees in the interview do not merely depend on their nationalities. It could be due to other variables such as their age, gender, year of study and so forth.

5.1 Recommendation Based on the Study

Based on the research, there is not much difference between students' nationalities and their reading strategies employed. Hence, reading strategies can be employed in any country, not just in the EFL countries such as Palestine, Yemen and Indonesia which were chosen in this research. It is proven that people from different countries are aware and able to employ different types of reading strategies. Thus, it should be able to be applied in the Malaysia ESL context as well.

Besides, based on this research, it is identified that students prefer to employ supporting reading strategies and problem-solving strategies. Thus, this result is recommended to be applied in Faculty of Engineering in UTM to encourage more students of different age range to employ these reading strategies when reading academic texts in English. It can help them to comprehend the texts more efficiently and effectively, at the same time helping them to remember facts and equations required in their major more successfully.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The awareness of employing reading strategies needs to be advocated and encouraged among students of different ages. Reading strategies has been proven by many researchers throughout the years that it is beneficial in helping language learners to have a better comprehension of the academic texts. However, not all language learners employ all the existing metacognitive reading strategies. Thus, there is a need to educate or facilitate language learners to be aware and encouraged to employ more reading strategies when they read.

Besides, it is also significant in the education field that teachers and teacher trainees may wisely select the most frequent employed reading strategies to certain group of students. It would leave

a greater impact to the target students if an appropriate type of reading strategy is chosen. It could probably evoke students' thinking skills, accelerate organization of memory, build up good reading styles and also enhance the effectiveness of reading. Nonetheless, teachers mist care about the processes involved in reading and must be willing to devote more instructional time to the students through different methods such as direct strategy-instruction and modelling.

However, when trying to implement reading strategies in the school contexts, teachers must present reading strategies as applicable to as many tasks and texts as possible, at least not just in a single content. Only then the particular strategies can be employed in a variety of reading situations and contexts by the students themselves. And also, teachers are encouraged to teach reading strategies over an entire year, not merely in an isolated lesson or chapter to allow strategic instruction to permeate the educational curriculum.

Moreover, when implementing reading strategies in school context, teachers have to analyse the strategies to be taught. In other words, they have to think properly regarding how a particular strategy can be best employed to the students and in what kind of contexts. Pertaining this, teachers may probably observe students when they read to identify their strengths and weaknesses in terms of strategies use. This might in turn help in providing more effective and efficient strategy instruction.

According to Miller (2007), reading is not a passive activity. It actually involves readers' cognitive thinking skills as well as their logical thinking skills when reading a text. Therefore, students have to take active steps to try to comprehend the text they read instead of simply memorizing it without understanding at all. One way to achieve this is to implement appropriate types of reading strategies when they read. For instance, before they read, they can quickly scan through the text to have a rough idea of what is it about (global strategy). When they do not understand a vocabulary, they can check a dictionary (supporting strategy). When they do not understand a point, they can re-read or pay closer attention to the text to try to understand it thoroughly (problem-solving strategy). Teachers should also help students by providing them opportunities to practice strategies learned.

Based on the finding of the research, a good way to enhance the effectiveness of reading is by conducting a discussion among the readers (supporting strategy). Teachers can facilitate students in conducting discussions in pairs or in small groups to share opinions and ideas on a topic they read. Another way to do this is by allowing students to teach one another about reading and the studying process. In this way, the reading activity will be more substantive and the readers will understand the reading materials much better. Hence, reading strategies are applicable in the education field as an accelerator for students to read and comprehend what they read.

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