

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN READING COMPREHENSION: AN INSIGHT FROM EFL GOOD READERS

Armin Fani, Reni Andriani, & Alpian Husna

Amin.fani12@gmail.com, reniandriani26.ra@gmail.com, hasanalpian@live.com
State University of Malang

Abstract

The existence of metacognitive strategies is prominent in reading comprehension. Metacognitive strategies enable readers to improve the effectiveness of reading comprehension process and readers' reading comprehension achievement (Zhang & Shepo, 2013; Iwai, 2011). This study aimed to investigate the use of metacognitive strategies by EFL readers in reading comprehension. Case study approach with in-depth investigation was employed to answer the objective of this study. The participants of this research were 7 students enrolled in Graduate Program of ELT of Sate University of Malang. The participants were selected based on criteria of good readers that include reading achievement of Reading course program when they were undergraduate students. Readers who consistently got letter grade A in all Reading level were considered as good readers. To collect the data, this research was equipped with means of instrument of semi-structure interview and retrospective verbal report. The data which are in the form of participants' utterances were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively. Member checking technique was conveyed to avoid misinterpretation in the transcription process. The finding of this research indicates that the use of metacognitive strategies by EFL good readers in reading comprehension is high in certain strategies but not in all strategies. Therefore, to tackle the problems, explicit teaching of metacognitive reading strategies is necessarily important.

Key words: *metacognitive strategies, good readers, reading comprehension.*

1. Introduction

Being able to read with good comprehension ability is critical for lifelong learning. It is apparent, in broader or particular context of education, reading comprehension is important to improve learning process (Oakhill, Cain & Elbro: 2015). In particular context especially English learning, reading comprehension is more prominent for two reasons. First, reading comprehension provides students with comprehensive information in target language. Second, in reading comprehension language learner can implicitly get abundant input of target language such grammar, new vocabulary, idioms, and so forth(Richard & Renandya: 2008).

Regarding the importance of reading comprehension in academic context, the teaching of reading comprehension should develop more than just isolated skills of reading comprehension. The reading instruction in school need to emphasize the main thing of teaching reading that is motivating students to read (Duffy: 2009). Blachowich and Ogle (2008) assert that reading comprehension includes a process that is motivated and

purposeful in the beginning of reading, skill and strategies to comprehend the text during reading, and self-monitored and self-regulated in evaluation. Therefore, to help students become good reader, teaching reading must cover all aforementioned factors.

Will be apparent soon, the requirement of being a good reader will inspire teacher or instructor to improve their reading instruction. On their review of teaching reading in Indonesia context, Cahyono and Widiati (2006) they found that the quality of teaching reading in Indonesia context still not yet adequate to establish good learning to read context. They also emphasized that there are constraints that hinder the teaching reading of being effective and efficient. To tackle the problem they propose that teaching reading in Indonesia should be geared up with the objective to develop students become strategic reader. Become strategic reader is critical for the reasons of that readers sometimes do not realize whether or not they completely understand the text, or the fact that readers have an illusion of comprehension when they read, and in university context or adult readers they usually have problems to comprehend expository text (Graesser, 2007). One strategy that is must integrated in teaching reading is that metacognitive strategies (Cahyono & Widiati: 2006).

Metacognitive strategies could be simply defined as a process of monitoring cognitive progress in completing particular task (Flavell, 1992: Nelson & Narrens, 1992: Oxford, 1991: Chamot & O'Malley, 1990: Proust, 2013:4). Monitoring is happened when meta-level uses the ability to judge the success of cognitive process using information given by object-level, and controlling means meta-level uses judgment to modify cognitive enterprise of object-level (Son & Schwartz, 2004). The controlling process happens in from the very beginning of the process, during the process, and after the process of cognitive enterprise in completing particular task (Chamot & O'Malley, 1990). Therefore the existence of metacognitive strategies has been acknowledged as an aid to help students learn effectively and efficiently.

With respect to reading, metacognitive strategies produce active reading for students. Baker and Brown (1980) elaborate that metacognitive strategies as an active and ongoing activity to solve problem during learning process includes checking the outcome of any attempt to solve problem, planning action to respond the problem, monitoring the effectiveness of any attempt, and testing, revising, and evaluating one's strategy for learning. Thus, metacognitive strategies give readers a better understanding through providing the readers with a chance to solve the problem they encounter during reading (Griffith & Ruan, 2005), to provide more learning-oriented reading activity (Donndelinger, 2005), and to get back or recall what they are missing from the text to create complete comprehension (McKeown & Beck, 2009).

To clear the ground, understanding the definition of metacognitive reading strategies is necessary to narrow the direction of metacognitive strategies in reading process. Zhang & Sheepo (2013: 55) define metacognitive strategies in reading as "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 reading strategies is classified into three groups of planning (pre-reading), monitoring (while reading), and evaluating (post-reading), and each group consist of different subcategories of processing (Zhang & Sheepo, 2013; Iwai, 2011).

A number of researches have been conducted to investigate the role of metacognition in reading and how they perform metacognitive reading strategies. Zhang and Wu (2009), Alhaqbani & Riazi (2012) used survey of reading strategies (SORS) questionnaire as the instrument to investigate students' metacognitive awareness in reading. However, theoretically the use of questionnaire to investigate the role of metacognitive reading strategies in reading has limitation in term of the reliability of the responses from questionnaires. It is difficult to know whether their responses represent the actual strategies they use while reading comprehension activity (Zhang & Wu, 2009). Therefore, the use of retrospective think-aloud in this study is necessary to differentiate this study from the previous studies, and to solve the limitation of the previous studies. Verbal data has been traditionally accepted as a window to investigate students' mental process while undertaking to a certain task (Anderson, 2008).

Try to sum up, regarding the theories and previous studies, this study try to bridge the existing gaps in reading comprehension by investigating the role of metacognitive reading strategies employed by the readers to support reading comprehension. To get the best and efficient result, the trail of this research is constructed based on case study principles to have in-depth investigation and choose good EFL readers as the participants. Since metacognitive strategies is a mental process, the investigation of metacognitive strategies in concern on cognitive enterprise of the readers by applying retrospective verbal report and in-depth interview. The gaps between previous studies and present study inspire the researcher to have research problems as following:

1. What are metacognitive strategies employed by EFL good readers in reading comprehension?
2. How are metacognitive strategies employed by EFL good readers in reading comprehension?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The participants of this study are students in offering E class A of graduate program in ELT of UM. 7 students are chosen as participants and considered as good readers based on their reading comprehension achievement in their undergraduate program. Only students who got letter grade A in all Reading courses was taken as participant of this study. The participants also considered as a good language learners, since they have above 3.5 for GPA form all previous semesters.

2.2 Instruments

This study has two main instruments to collect data from participant namely retrospective verbal report and semi-structured interview. First, in retrospective verbal report participant were given particular passage to read. Soon after participants complete reading session, they were required to report how their cognition were working during reading the passage and whatever came into their cognition during reading process. Second instrument that was semi-structured interview consist of a series of questions developed first before interview session, then can be developed for probing. This interview was

divided into three categories: planning (before reading) strategies, during (while reading) strategies, and evaluating (after reading strategies). The later instrument was intended to elicit in-depth data concerning on the use of metacognitive reading strategies in reading comprehension.

2.3 Data collection

Before the process of data collection began, all participants were informed that the data in this study were confidential and never given to other party without legal permission from the participant. To answer the first research problem retrospective verbal report was administered. Each session of retrospective verbal report only have one participant and each participant is free to choose the time and the place for conducting retrospective verbal report. The processes of retrospective verbal report were audio-recorder, transcribed, and analyzed to answer first research problem. To address second research problem, the data were collected through interview. The interview session was conducted right after participants have had completed retrospective verbal report and either video-recorded. Both data were transcribed verbatim and completely analyzed qualitatively. To avoid misinterpretation of the data by the researcher, member checking strategy was administered. Member checking is a process to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of the data by inviting each participant to validate and to give feedback to the transcription to avoid misinterpretation of, clear up miscommunication, minimize inaccuracy of data interpretation, and help to get additional useful data (Ary, Jacob, & Sorensen, 2010:500).

3. Finding and Discussion

Two major themes were developed to answer two research questions in this study: kinds of metacognitive reading strategies and applying metacognitive strategies. Kinds of metacognitive reading strategies were developed to answer problem number 1 and applying metacognitive strategies to answer research question number 2.

Kinds of metacognitive reading strategies

Empirically, this finding of this study supports the theory of others study regarding the important of metacognitive strategies for readers. The data from retrospective and interview apparently show that all participants employed metacognitiive strategies in reading comprehension but vary in frequency. In this study, "Advanced Organizer" strategies are appear in all retrospective verbal report session in the Planning phase of reading comprehension. It shows that "Advanced Organizer" always used (100%) by good readers to support their reading comprehension. Next strategy that most appear in the Planning phase of reading comprehension is that "Organizational Planning" with 70% appearance. Selective only have 42% appearance and followed by self-management with 28% appearance. This finding shows that good readers in this study always plan their reading comprehension process. It is important for readers to plan their reading comprehension process by setting the purpose, previewing the text, setting reading objectives, and chose appropriate strategies (Blachowicz & Ogle, 2008; Cahyono & Widiati, 2006)

This finding also supported by the data from interview that shows all good readers in this study agree that “Advance Organizer” is important to make reading comprehension easier. It can be seen from interview assertion by one of the participants:

“...hmm.. it is important for me to set purpose of my reading activity, chose particular strategies that I am going to use in my reading activity. This can make reading is easier to me”. (INT.P2.4. PLAN)

The assertion indicates that the participant aware to start his reading comprehension by deciding what is going to be achieved and plan how to complete the goals of reading activity. In nutshell, metacognitive reading strategies is exist in Planning phase of reading comprehension of good readers, yet it is not maximal. Because only one strategies that is employed by all participants.

Next, the finding of this study shows that during reading process good readers always employ metacognitive strategies to monitor their understanding of the text. Participants of this study consistently employ comprehension and production monitoring to keep them on the right track of their comprehension progress. Participants are successfully find strategies as soon as they realize they are out of the track of their comprehending process. They also successfully identify problems then solve it using production monitoring strategies. One possible answer to this finding is that participants of this study are adult high-proficient readers with sufficient knowledge of reading strategies. Likewise, as graduate program students with a vast amount of experience of reading comprehension, thus they can easily solve the problems they encounter in reading activity.

The most surprising finding from this study is in evaluating phase of reading activity in retrospective verbal report. The findings indicate metacognitive strategies rarely found in reading activity. Interestingly the finding is different from the data gathered from interview. In interview, participants explained that they do self-evaluation in reading activity when they have reading comprehension test and rarely do so if they only involve in outclass reading activity. Following assertion from interview can give insight why status of reading activity can influence the use of strategy:

Participant 6: “honestly I rarely do self-evaluation for my reading activity if I read outside classroom. But sometime I also do so, for instance in classroom when I have reading comprehension test.”

Interviewer: “Please explain why you do it only when you have reading comprehension test?”

Participant 6: “hmm.. because in reading comprehension test I have to answer the questions. So I think self-evaluation is critical to make my answer is correct.”

Participant’ consideration of reading comprehension test emphasizes that readers associate the use of strategies with reading objective. To provide more learning-oriented reading activity readers need to employ metacognitive reading strategies in all phases of reading with different reading objectives (Donndelinger, 2005).

Try to sum up, the finding of this study explains that good readers use metacognitive strategies in their reading comprehension. In the Planning phase or before reading, unfortunately only “Advance organizer” strategy was the most frequently used by

good readers among other strategies. In the monitoring phase or during reading, comprehension monitoring and production monitoring strategies were completely employed by good readers to monitor their understanding during reading activity. In the evaluating phase or after reading, this study, indicating by data in retrospective verbal report, surprisingly found that almost all metacognitive strategies were rarely used by the good readers. The logical reason to explain this finding is that the good readers think that it is no need to evaluate their reading activity regarding the fact that reading session in this study is not going to be assessed.

Employing metacognitive reading strategies

Besides describing kind of metacognitive reading strategies employed by good readers, this study also aims to investigate how are metacognitive reading strategies employed by good readers. The finding of this study shows that good readers employ metacognitive strategies accordingly and respectively. Good readers associate the use of metacognitive reading strategies with the objective of reading comprehension. The following description is noteworthy:

“... it really depend on the objective of my reading activity, if the objective is to find information in newspaper article, I will not employ a complicated strategies such metacognitive strategies. I think scanning is enough. I think metacognitive strategies are appropriate if the objective is to comprehend passage.” (INT. P7.2 RES)

In this fashion, readers' motivation and reading purpose respectively influence the use of reading strategies (Blachowicz & Ogle, 2008: 26). This finding signify the fact that the good readers are able to modify their reading strategies especially metacognitive strategies (Naeni & Rezaei, 2015)

In addition, the finding of this study portray that good readers employ metacognitive reading strategies by activating their knowledge of cognition. By activating knowledge of cognition readers able to identify what strategies to use to solve reading problem, know how to orchestrate strategies to solve reading problems, and know why these strategies are appropriate to solve reading problem and know when these strategies are best employed by the readers to solve reading problem they encounter in reading activity (Paris, Lipson & Wixon, 1983). In nutshell, to employ metacognitive reading effectively readers are required to have sufficient knowledge of what, how, and why and when reading strategies are best employed.

4. Conclusion and Pedagogical implications

In conclusion, the finding of this study gives insight on what and how EFL good readers employ metacognitive reading strategies in reading comprehension. The finding portrays that although most of metacognitive reading strategies were employed by EFL good readers but they are vary in frequency. Only metacognitive reading strategies which have significant impact to ease the process of reading comprehension are highly used by EFL good readers. The finding of this study can inspire reading instructors to include metacognitive reading strategies in their teaching learning process to introduce metacognitive reading strategies to readers with different level of reading proficiency.

Thus readers become familiar with metacognitive reading strategies and can employ it effectively in all purpose of reading activity. Another finding of this study indicates that readers have to acquire knowledge of how effectively employ particular strategy to solve their reading problem. This knowledge includes know what strategy to be employed, how to employ, and why particular strategy effective to solve problem and when particular strategy effectively solve reading problem. This knowledge can be acquired through explicit teaching and learning in classroom and countless training in reading comprehension activity. Good reading instruction should include how to teach this knowledge to EFL readers.

References

- Alhaqbani, A., & Riazi, M. (2012). Metacognition Awareness of Reading Strategies Use in Arabic as a Second Language. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 24 (2) 231-255.
- Anderson, J. N. (2008). Metacognition and Good Language Learners. In C. Griffiths, (Ed.), *Lesson from Good Language Learners* (99-109). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ary, D, Jacob. L.C., Sorensen, C. (2010). *Introduction to Research in Education*. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.
- Baker, L., & Brown, A. L. (1984) Metacognitive Skills and Reading. In P. D. Pearson, M. Kamil, R, Barr, & Mosenthal (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research* (Vol.1, pp. 353-394). New York, NY: Longman
- Blachowicz, C. & Ogle, D. (2008) *Reading Comprehension: Strategies for Independent Learners*. London. The Guilford Press.
- Cahyono, Y. B., & Widiati, U. (2006) The Teaching of Efl Reading in the Indonesian Context: the State of the Art. *TEFLIN Journal*. Vol. 17 No. 1 (36-57).
- Donndelinger, J. S. (2005) Integrating Comprehension and Metacognitive Reading Strategies. In E. S. Israel., C. C. Block., L. K. Bauserman., & K. Welsh-Kinnucan, (Eds.), *Metacognition in Litaracy Instruction* (pp. 3-17). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Duffy, G. G. (2009). *Explaining Reading: A resource for Teaching Concepts, Skill, and Strategies*. London. The Guilford Press.
- Flavel, J. H. (1992). Metacognition and Cognitive Monitoring: A new Area of Cognitive-Development Inquiry. In O. T. Nelson (Ed.), *Metacognition: Core Reading* (pp. 3-8). Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon.
- Flavel, J. H. (1992). Metacognition and Cognitive Monitoring: A new Area of Cognitive-Development Inquiry. In O. T. Nelson (Ed.), *Metacognition: Core Reading* (pp. 3-8). Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon.
- Griffith, L. P., & Ruan, J. (2005). What is Metacognition and What Should be Its Role in Literacy Instruction?. In E. S. Israel., C. C. Block., L. K. Bauserman., & K. Welsh-Kinnucan, (Eds.), *Metacognition in Litaracy Instruction* (pp. 3-17). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers
- Iwai, Y. (2011). The Effects of Metacognitive Reading Strategies: Pedagogical Implications for EFL/ESL Teachers. *The Reading Matrix*. Vol. 11. No 2 (pp. 150-159)
- McCormick, C. B. (2003). Metacognition and Learning. In I. B. Weiner (Series Ed.), W. M. Reynold & G. E. (Vol. Eds.), *Handbook of Psychology: Educational Psychology* Vol. 7, pp. 79-102. Hoboken, NJ: Jhon Wiley & Sons Inc.

- Naeni, B. M., & Rezaei, R. (2015) Examining and Dealing with the issue of Reading Strategies use by Iranian EFL Learners. *The Reading Matrix: An International Online Journal*. Vol. 15 No.2 (182-195)
- Nelson, O. T., & Narens, L. (1992) Metamemori: A theoretical Framework and New Finding. In O.T. Nelson (Ed.), *Metacognition: Core Reading*. Needham Height: Allyn and Bacon Press.
- O'Malley, J.M., & Chamot, U. A. (1990). *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Oakhill, J., Caen, K., & Elbro, C. (2015). *Understanding and Teaching Reading Comprehension: A handbook*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Paris, G. S., Lipson, Y. M., & Wixon, K. K. (1983). Becoming a Strategic Reader. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*. 8, 293- 316
- Proust, J. (2013) *The Philosophy of Metacognition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Son, K. L., & Schwartz, L. B. (2004). The Relation Between Metacognitive Monitoring and Control. In J. T. Perfect, & L. B. Schwartz, (Eds.), *Applied Metacognition* (pp. 15-38). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zhang, J. L., & Wu, A. (2009). Chines Senior High School EFL Students' Metacognitive Awareness and Reading Strategies use. *Reading in a Foreign Language*. 21 (1) 37-59.
- Zhang, L., & Sheepo, S. (2013). Metacognitive Strategies Use and Academic Reading Achivement: Insight from Chinese Context. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*. 10 (1) 54-69.