Metacognitive Reading Strategies Employed by Al-Hussein Bin Talal University Students in Jordan

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore the metacognitive reading strategies used among Al-Hussein Bin Talal university students. For the collection of data, 42 Jordanian university students completed the reading journal. The data collected were statistically processed by using frequencies, ranks, and percentages. The results obtained showed that: (a) the top five strategies that students used most while reading in English are: using dictionary when unknown words could not be inferred from the context, underlining important and difficult parts of the text, guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context, reading over the text again if there is contradictory information, and skipping unknown words which do not contribute to understanding and (b) the during-reading strategies received the top rank then the pre-reading strategies. Finally, the last ranked strategies were the post-reading strategies.

Keywords: Metacognitive Reading Strategies, Pre-reading Strategies, During-reading Strategies, Post-reading Strategies.

Introduction

The reading skill is a fundamental skill among language skills in learning a foreign language. Reading is an extremely important tool for acquiring information. It is also needed to read for academic purposes and careers since most books, journals, and academic websites are written in English (Nampakati, Kaewsombut, Akwaree, Wongwayrote, & Sameepet, 2013). Similarly, Anastasiou and Griva (2009) and Mehrdad, Ahaghar and Ahaghar (2012) believe that reading skills are necessary for students who need to read either at home or in class. Therefore, reading comprehension is an important skill for university students.

Bernhardt (2000) defined reading as the interaction and construction of a message from written language. Urquhart and Weir (2013) stated that reading is the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in written language. Anderson (2002) regarded that readers actively interact with reading texts in the reading process, so meaning exists not only on the written language, but also in the head of the reader. Anderson (2002) added that readers in their reading process construct the meaning by combining the words in the printed texts and their background knowledge and previous experience.

One of the skills that Jordanian researchers work on (e.g.: Safadi & Rababah, 2012; AlOdwan, 2012; Al-Jamal, Al-Hawamleh & Al-Jamal, 2013, and Baniabdelrahman, 2013) is reading comprehension. Even though Jordanian students learn English from the very beginning stage of kindergarten, they still have reading comprehension problems. This might be related to the inadequate instructions of how to read effectively. This weakness makes it difficult for learners to deal with written texts since they are not aware of the reading strategies that can promote the ability of acquiring information.

Teachers, therefore, have to be aware of this problem and have to find ways to help students to develop their reading comprehension ability (USAID, 2012; and Baniabdelrahman & Al-shumaimeri, 2014).

According to Mehrdad, Ahaghar, and Ahaghar (2012), metacognitive strategies are effective strategies in enhancing reading ability. Students need to develop their reading ability using their prior knowledge, strategies of predicting, and metacognitive strategies to comprehend a text. Specifically, metacognitive strategies function when readers think about what to do while reading, to plan how to use the effective strategies, to monitor the effectiveness of the plan, and to evaluate their learning strategies (Salataci & Akyel, 2002).

Problem of the Study

In Jordan, university students face difficulties in English reading comprehension even though they study English for twelve years at schools (Freahat & Al-Faoury, 2014). As an EFL instructor, the researcher observed that most students find difficulty in reading comprehension. The researcher also observed that most of the instructors use the conventional methods while delivering lectures. One source of the difficulty that the learners face may be due to their lack of knowledge of reading strategies that may help them to improve their reading comprehension or the conventional methods being used (Al-Alwan, 2012; Bani Abdelrahamn, 2014). Consequently, the researcher tried to investigate the metacognitive reading strategies employed by EFL learners at Al Hussein Bin Talal University.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed at finding out which metacognitive reading strategies employed by Al-Hussein Bin Talal University Students.

Question of the Study

The study addressed the following question:

1. What are the reading metacognitive strategies employed by EFL learners?

Operational Definitions

The following terms are operationally defined to clarify usage:

Metacognitive reading strategies*:* Flavell (1979) defined metacognition as the conscious awareness of one's own cognition and the conscious control of one's own learning and thinking.

In this study, the term is used to refer to the strategies that guide a reader to become more aware of one's self-understanding during reading, to become more in control of what understanding, to create images related to contents, to make graphic representations, to summarize, and to make up questions.

Significance of the Study

The study focuses on reading strategies which, as indicated earlier, still need to be investigated more in the Arab world as well as in Jordan. This study may give more insights into reading strategies research and inspire researchers to conduct more studies on language learning strategies in general and reading strategies, in particular. Findings of this study may help the English department and language instructors to focus on reading strategies during teaching reading courses. Moreover, it may benefit other academic courses to improve the students' reading strategies that will affect positively their academic progress.

Literature Review

Metacognition consists of two distinguished components; knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition.

Knowledge of cognition refers to what individuals know about their own cognition or about cognition in general. It includes three different kinds of metacognitive awareness: declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge (Schraw & Moshman, 1995). Declarative knowledge refers to knowledge about oneself and about what factors influence one's performance. Procedural knowledge refers to the knowledge about how to do things. Much of this knowledge is represented as heuristics and strategies. Conditional knowledge refers to the knowledge about when and why to use declarative and procedural knowledge (Schraw & Moshman, 1995).

Schraw and Moshman (1995) explained that regulation of cognition refers to a set of activities that help students control their learning or thinking. The three essential skills are planning, monitoring, and evaluation. According to Paris and Winograd (1990), metacognition of a person's cognition includes activities of planning, monitoring or regulating, and evaluating. Planning activities involve identification and selection of appropriate strategies, allocation of resources, goal setting, activating background knowledge, and budgeting time. Monitoring or regulating involves being aware of comprehension, task performance, and self-testing. Evaluation includes revisiting and revising one's goals (Schraw, Crippen, & Hartley, 2006).

Oxford (1990) offered a useful classification scheme of 200 strategies used by learners in reading. In the Oxford model, strategies could be classified into two general categories that are direct and indirect strategies. The direct strategies include memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Cognitive strategies include note taking, formal practice with the specific aspects of the target language such as sounds and sentence structure, summarizing, paraphrasing, predicting, analyzing, and using context clues. The memory strategies are another type of strategies that help the learner to remember and retrieve information. They include creating mental images through grouping and associating, using keywords, employing word associations, and placing new words into a context. The compensation strategies include inference, guessing while reading, or using reference materials like dictionaries. The second category is the indirect strategies that include metacognitive, effective, and social strategies. The metacognitive strategies are behaviors undertaken by the learners to plan, arrange and evaluate their own learning. Such strategies include directed attention and self-evaluation, organization, setting goals and objectives, mapping concepts, seeking practice opportunities, asking deep questions, self-monitoring, and correction of errors. The affective strategies are strategies used by readers as self-encouraging behavior. The social strategies are those that involve asking for correction.

Flavell (1979) defined cognitive knowledge as knowledge about person's own cognitive strengths and limitations. This knowledge includes the internal and external factors that may interact in order to affect cognition. He classified such knowledge into three types; person knowledge that includes anything a person believes about the nature of human beings, task knowledge that includes the demands of different tasks, and strategy knowledge which is knowledge about the types of strategies that can be useful. According to Flavell (1979) also noted that these different types of knowledge could interact.

Anderson (2002) defined metacognition simply as thinking about thinking. He claimed that the use of metacognitive strategies could enhance learning and improve performance. Whereas, Kuhn and Dean (2004) defined metacognition as the awareness and management of one's own though. They also added that metacognition is what enables a student to retrieve and deploy a particular strategy that s/he has been taught in a particular problem context in a similar but new context.

Zare-ee (2008) expressed that metacognitive strategies are used to check, monitor, and evaluate performance. They promote and facilitate reading comprehension. In this sense, Ahmadi, Ismail, and Abdullah (2013) found that proficient readers use metacognitive strategies while reading more than less proficient readers do.

Pressley (2002) expressed that metacognitive reading strategies can be classified in planning, monitoring, and evaluating strategies. Planning strategies are used before reading to activate learners' background knowledge to get prepared for reading is an example of planning strategies. In addition, previewing a title, picture, illustration, heading, or subheading can help readers grasp the overview of the text. Learners could preview the general information in the text and its structure. Furthermore, setting the purpose for reading is also categorized as a planning strategy (Pressley, 2002). Monitoring strategies are the strategies used during reading such as comprehension of vocabulary, self-questioning, summarizing, inferring the main idea of each paragraph, identifying and focusing on key information or key words, and determining which part of the passage can be emphasized or ignored based on the purpose of the task (Pressley, 2002).

Baker and Brown (1987) mentioned the metacognitive strategies that learners of English as a foreign language can use in reading. The strategies are used to establish the purpose for reading, modify reading due to variations in purpose, identifying important ideas, activate prior knowledge, evaluate the text for clarity, completeness, and consistency, compensate for failure to understand text, and assess the level of comprehension.

Many studies had been conducted on the reading strategies. The results of such studies indicated the important and effective role of reading strategies in the process of reading comprehension (e.g., Abu Shmais, 2002; Al-Saraireh & Abul-Haija, 2007; and Anastasiou & Griva, 2009).

In order to explore which metacognitive strategies were applied, metacognitive awareness questionnaires were used (Amer et al., 2010; Mesgar et al, 2013). Other studies combined the use of a questionnaire and pre/post tests (Alshraah, 2014; Sen, 2009), and other studies used think-aloud protocols (Abu Shmais, 2002), which was replicated in this research.

Metacognitive strategies could affect reading comprehension of both print and online texts (Ahmadi et al., 2013; Anastasiou & Griva, 2009; Tuan-siri & Teo, 2012; Sen, 2009). Moreover, using metacognitive strategies varies according to students' levels (Alshraah, 2014; Anastasiou & Griva, 2009; Mehrdad et al., 2012) and ages (2010; Mesgar et al, 2013).

Students could vary regarding using metacognitive strategies when they read from moderate (Khdeer et al., 2012) to weakly (Ghbari & Abu-Sheirah, 2010). Students could also use a variety of metacognitive reading strategies (Alshraah, 2014; Tashtoush, 2008) or they could use some strategies more than other strategies (Abu Shmais, 2002).

Methods and Procedures

Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 42 Jordanian students studied English as a foreign language in the second semester of the academic year 2015/2016. The students were informed that their responses to the reading journal would be kept confidential and only for the research purpose. The completed journals were collected right after the subjects completed them.

Instruments

1. **A Metacognitive Reading Strategies List**

The reading metacognitive strategies list that was used for this study was adapted from the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) for Mokhtari & Sheorey (2002). The list was used to find out the degree to which the metacognitive reading strategies were used by the learners when reading.

2. **A Reading Journal**

The journal was used to ask students to reflect upon their thinking, make note of their awareness of ambiguities and inconsistencies, and comment on how they have dealt with difficulties. Students were asked to determine which strategies they use from the metacognitive reading strategies.

The five texts were adapted from the Interactions 2 Reading fourth edition. They were approximately 150-200 words each. In order to prompt the subjects to write their thoughts while reading the texts, dots were put after every text as an indication to start writing.

The subjects were told about the aim of the study and were given instructions on how to reflect on their reading. They read the same text and were asked to write what they were thinking about using Arabic, English or both languages. The sessions took 60 minutes. When the sessions were over, the material was transcribed for analysis.

To insure the validity of the instruments, a jury of nine EFL university professors was asked to write their comments on the suitability of reading journal and metacognitive reading strategies list. Their comments were taken into consideration in preparing the final draft of the instruments. The reliability of the metacognitive reading strategies list was established by using Holsti formula. The result was found to be (0.85) for the metacognitive reading strategies list which was satisfactorily reliable.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using the SPSS statistical program for windows. Descriptive statistics; means, rank, and percentages were utilized to analyze the overall frequency use of each strategy subscale (pre-, during, and post-reading strategies) and of each individual strategy.

Discussion and Results

As indicated above, this study sought to explore Al-Hussein Bin Talal University students' use of metacognitive reading strategies. The results and discussion are reported on the bases of the key question that was formulated earlier.

What are the metacognitive reading strategies which EFL learners use?

Three reading strategy categories were surveyed in this study: pre-reading strategies, during-reading strategies, and post-reading strategies. All 31 strategies fall within one of these types of reading strategies.

The researcher used the reading journal with both groups of the study before conducting the study. The frequencies and ranks of the used strategies were calculated and presented in Table 2 below.

Table (1)

Frequencies, Rank, and Percentage of Frequency of the Used Metacognitive Reading Strategies on the Reading Journal

	No.	Strategy	Freq.	Rank	Percentage of Freq.
Pre-reading strategies	1	Looking at the visual organizers accompanying the text	1	31	0.31%
	2	Utilizing visuals (e.g. graphs, tables, pictures)	2	30	0.62%
	3	Understanding the topic by reading the title, subtitles, and the first sentence of each paragraph	46	9	14.33%
	4	Activating and using prior knowledge to interpret text (generating hypotheses about text, predicting text content)	57	6	17.76%
	5	Guessing the topic of the text by looking at the title and subtitles	49	8	15.26%
	6	Deciding on which points to focus	43	10	13.40%
	7	Developing a reading plan	31	16	9.66%

	8	Visualizing what is being written in the text	16	29	5%
	9	Going back to earlier parts of the text whenever distracted	29	18	9.03%
	10	Looking for important information in the text and paying greater attention to it than other information (e.g. adjusting reading speed and concentration depending on the perceived importance of the text to the reader's goals)	18	28	5.60%
	11	Guessing the time needed to go through the text	29	18	9.03%
Total			321	2	100%
During-reading strategies	12	Underlining important and difficult parts of the text	90	2	14.5%
	13	Skipping unknown words which do not contribute to understanding	59	5	9.5%
	14	Using dictionary when unknown words could not be guessed from the context	115	1	18.6%
	15	Refraining from verbal translation	34	13	5.5%
	16	Using other clues (e.g. punctuation, bold type, italics, transitions) to guess unknown words	26	21	4.20%
	17	Reading over the text again if there is contradictory information	62	4	10%
	18	Guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context	70	3	11.30%
	19	Taking notes to use later and to remember	39	11	6.30%
	20	Predicting what is going to be written and making guesses during reading	24	23	3.9%
	21	Making connections between previous knowledge and knowledge acquired from the text	28	20	4.5%
	22	Asking and answering questions for better understanding	23	26	3.8%
	23	Reconsidering and/or revising hypotheses based on text content	25	22	4%
	24	Managing time and pacing	24	23	3.9%
Total			619	1	100%
Post-reading strategies	25	Questioning the appropriateness of the content for the goals of the reading	34	13	14.6%
	26	Reading over the text if it sounds difficult	55	7	23.6%
	27	Summarizing the main idea of the whole text	34	13	14.6%
	28	Discussing the text with others to check whether one has grasped the gist or not	24	25	10.3%
	29	Outlining or charting the main ideas of the text	31	17	13.3%

	No.	Strategy	Freq.	Rank	Percentage of Freq.
Pre-reading strategies	1	Looking at the visual organizers accompanying the text	1	31	0.31%
	2	Utilizing visuals (e.g. graphs, tables, pictures)	2	30	0.62%
	3	Understanding the topic by reading the title, subtitles, and the first sentence of each paragraph	46	9	14.33%
	4	Activating and using prior knowledge to interpret text (generating hypotheses about text, predicting text content)	57	6	17.76%
	5	Guessing the topic of the text by looking at the title and subtitles	49	8	15.26%
	6	Deciding on which points to focus	43	10	13.40%
	7	Developing a reading plan	31	16	9.66%
	8	Visualizing what is being written in the text	16	29	5%
	9	Going back to earlier parts of the text whenever distracted	29	18	9.03%
	10	Looking for important information in the text and paying greater attention to it than other information (e.g. adjusting reading speed and concentration depending on the perceived importance of the text to the reader's goals)	18	28	5.60%
	11	Guessing the time needed to go through the text	29	18	9.03%
	30	Retelling the important ideas deduced from the text	20	27	8.6%
	31	Answering pre-posed questions about the text	35	12	15%
Total			233	3	100%
Sum			1173		

Table (1) shows that the overall sum of 1173 for the thirty-one items would indicate that the learners studying English as a foreign language in Al Hussein Bin Talal University typically use a variety of strategies while reading English texts. The top five strategies that students used most while reading in English are: (during- reading strategy 14), "Using dictionary when unknown words could not be guessed from the context" (Freq. =115) with percentage of 18.6%. The second one was (during- reading strategy 12), "Underlining important and difficult parts of the text" (Freq. =90) with percentage of 14.5%. The third used strategy was (during- reading strategy 18), "Guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context" (Freq. =70) with percentage of 11.30%. (during- reading strategy 17), "Reading over the text again if there is contradictory information" (Freq. =62) with percentage of 10%, and (during- reading strategy 13), "Skipping unknown words which do not contribute to understanding" (Freq. =59) with percentage of 9.5%.

The next five strategies, on the other hand, that students generally used least while reading in English are: (post-reading strategy 30), "Retelling the important ideas deduced from the text" (Freq. =20) with percentage of 8.6%. (pre-reading strategy 10)," Looking for important information in the text and paying greater attention to it than other information (e.g.

adjusting reading speed and concentration depending on the perceived importance of the text to the reader's goals)" (Freq.=18) with percentage of 5.60%. (pre-reading strategy 8), "Visualizing what is being written in the text" (Freq. =16) with percentage of 5%. (pre-reading strategy 2), "Utilizing visuals (e.g. graphs, tables, pictures)" (Freq. =2) with percentage of 0.62%; and (pre-reading strategy 1), "Looking at the visual organizers accompanying the text" (Freq. =1) with percentage of 0.31%.

It can be also noticed that the during-reading strategies got the top rank with frequency of 619, then the pre-reading strategies with frequency of 321. Finally, the last ranked strategies were the post-reading strategies with frequency of 233.

The mostly used strategy within the pre-reading strategies was "Activating and using prior knowledge to interpret text (generating hypotheses about text, predicting text content)" with percentage of 17.76%.The least used strategy within the pre-reading strategies was "Looking at the visual organizers accompanying the text" with percentage of 0.13%. Within the during-reading strategies, the mostly used strategy was "Using dictionary when unknown words could not be guessed from the context" with percentage of 18.6%, while the strategy of "Asking and answering questions for better understanding" was the least used with percentage of 3.8%. The mostly used strategy within the post-reading strategies was " Reading over the text if it sounds difficult" with percentage of 23.6%.The least used strategy was " Retelling the important ideas deduced from the text " with percentage of 8.6%.

The results of the study bear out the hypothesis that learners have different reasons for using the dictionary. When a learner encounters a new word, his/her attention seems to be first drawn to the meaning of the word, usually the meaning related to the context. As the knowledge of the word increases, the learner starts to pay attention to other aspects of the word, such as its pronunciation, usage, and association with other words.

Another finding of this study with regard to the guessing strategy is that guessing word meaning and using a dictionary are not mutually exclusive. Learners can guess word meaning first then consult a dictionary to check on the guess. In this way learners may avoid the negative effects imposed by inaccurate guessing. Moreover, learners can benefit a lot in terms of vocabulary learning from this guessing-and checking strategy. In cases of accurate guessing, the two steps will reinforce learners' impressions of the word. On the other hand, if the guessing turns out to be inaccurate, this will force them to notice the gap between the guess and the correct meaning. Underlining and highlighting were mostly used to remember the desired information better.

The results of the reading journal indicated that students used during-reading strategies more than pre- and post reading strategies. In the researcher's opinion, this could be because of the quality of English as a foreign language textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education at schools. The focus of those textbooks is on the reading strategies that students utilize while reading English texts. For example, students are expected to use dictionaries and content clause to guess the meaning of new words, get out information from texts while reading, and read the text first to have an idea of what it is about. The number of strategies which students incline to use in the while reading stage seems more than other strategies used pre- or post-reading.

The researcher believes that the during-reading stage is the focus of the reading texts, so EFL teachers should help and encourage their students to use a large number of these strategies. Vaezi (2001) asserted that teachers should encourage students to dialogue with what they are reading without coming between them and the text presents a challenge to the EFL teacher. He also emphasized the importance of the during-reading stage for readers.

Moreover, the researcher believes that it could be because of the students' knowledge about these strategies before implementing the reading journal. This seems to agree with the findings of Al-Saraireh and Abul-Haija (2007) and Alshraah (2014) that Jordanian students differ in their use of the reading strategies. It also reveals that students tend to use

pre- and while reading strategies.

The researcher also believes that students' use of reading strategies could be affected by the strategies they use when they read in Arabic. This finding seems to agree with the findings of Yamashita (2004). The results showed that transfer from L1 to L2 reading happens in the reading abilities, strategies, and attitudes.

Conclusions

This study has shown that Al-Hussein Bin Talal University students used a variety of metacognitive reading strategies. Based on the results of this study, explicit instruction of reading strategies can be recommended. This can be accomplished by involving learners in reading texts which resemble what they face in their academic education in terms of authenticity, activities and tasks. Further research is also recommended to find why some students still complain about difficulties in comprehending academic texts. Research may use mixed method such as think-aloud protocol, interviews and a more detailed questionnaire. In addition, further research could focus on cognitive and metacognitive strategies accompanied with reading comprehension tests that are based on texts similar to the academic texts they usually encounter.

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الاستراتيجيات القرائية ما وراء المعرفية المستخدمة من قبل طلبة جامعة الحسين بن طلال في الأردن

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ملخص

هدفت الدراسة لاستكشاف الاستراتيجيات القرائية ما وراء المعرفية المستخدمة من قبل طلبة جامعة الحسين بن طلال، ولتحقيق هذه الغاية قام 42 طالبًا وطالبة بإكمال سجل القراءة، ومن ثم تم تحليل البيانات إحصائياً باستخدام التكرارات، والرتب، والنسب المئوية. وقد دلت النتائج على أن أكثر الاستراتيجيات القرائية التي يستخدمها الطلبة في أثناء قراءتهم للنصوص المكتوبة باللغة الانجليزية هي: استخدام القاموس لاستخراج معاني المفردات التي يصعب تخمين معانيها من خلال السياق، وتحديد المعلومات المهمة والصعبة في النص، وتخمين معاني المفردات من خلال السياق، وقراءة النص مرة أخرى إذا كان هناك معلومات متناقضة، وتخطي المفردات غير المعروفة، التي لا تساعد على فهم النص. وكذلك بينت النتائج أن أكثر الاستراتيجيات استخداما كانت تلك التي يستخدمها الطلبة في أثناء القراءة. تليها الاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمها الطلبة قبل القراءة. وأخيراً الاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمونها بعد القراءة.

الكلمات الدالة: استراتيجيات القراءة ما وراء المعرفية، استراتيجيات ما قبل القراءة، الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة أثناء القراءة، الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة بعد القراءة.

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