

SURVEYING METACOGNITIVE READING STRATEGIES AWARENESS OF FIFTH-SEMESTER ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This article aimed at exploring metacognitive awareness level of reading strategies used in academic reading by English department students of Syiah Kuala University (Unsyiah), Banda Aceh. The relevant data were collected by using the inventory survey designed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) called SORS (Survey of Reading Strategies). A total of 46 fifth semester students of Unsyiah English Department became the respondents. The result of data analysis showed that the respondents possessed a medium level overall tendency of metacognitive reading strategy awareness. Meanwhile the strategies such as “getting back concentration” and “re-reading” when a text was difficult were used most frequently. The result also revealed that the problem-solving reading strategies was the most preferred subscales among the other two subscales, indicating the respondents’ preference to use during-reading strategies.

Keywords: *metacognitive, awareness, academic reading, reading strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Reading strategies are in particular important for EFL university students because they help deal with various academic texts. The students can learn by themselves through journals, articles, and papers in English for their courses. Grabe and Stoller (2002) point out that the

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readers who begin to learn English language will most likely encounter difficulties in constructing and interpreting meaning and understanding of the text. Wen (2003) they mostly struggle from the lack of vocabulary and grammar comprehension to the lack of metacognitive strategies.

As these students learn reading in a course, they have been exposed and taught many reading strategies. They already know a variety of reading strategies and its definition. Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) say that the use of reading strategies in English have drawn a lot of interest due to the apparent relevancy of reading ability in English as an international language.

One of the ways that reading skill experts recommend readers to do to cope with difficult and complicated academic reading is to have metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. As defined by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), metacognitive reading strategy awareness is the conscious planning, monitoring, and evaluating done by a reader to comprehend a text he or she is reading. A characteristic of good readers is they tend to be aware of why and what they are reading and how they can solve the problems during reading and monitor their comprehension. According to Tavakoli (2014), readers with metacognitive strategy awareness know when and how to employ a specific cognitive reading strategies according to text difficulty. He further says that effectiveness of metacognitive strategy awareness in reading strategies affects reading comprehension. The result of his research reveals that the students who used more metacognitive strategies scored higher on reading comprehension test than the students who used fewer metacognitive strategies.

University students are expected to do a lot of self-learning because they will have to continue reading and learning when they are no longer in a formal classroom situation. In this case, metacognitive reading strategies help students to manage their own learning (Paris & Winograd, 1990). A number of previous research have shown that having awareness of metacognitive strategies and utilizing them contributes to the students' successful learning. Pammu, Amir, Rizan, and Maasum (2012) did a case study on metacognitive reading strategies of less proficient learners. The result confirms the researchers' hypothesis that less proficient learners did not do the previewing, skimming, and scanning process in order to get the general picture of what they would read about and what the main idea of the text was. They were also less critical about information they found in the text.

Batang (2015) also conducted a research on pre-service teachers about the correlation of their metacognitive strategy awareness and reading comprehension. The result shows that the students who achieved high scores applied repair strategies such as reviewing the difficult part of text and looking up unknown words in the dictionary. In addition, they also applied effective reading strategies, such as activating background knowledge and relating the text topic to what they already knew. This study revealed that the longer their period of learning was, the better students' reading comprehension level got.

Students of English department in Syiah Kuala University (Unsyiah) have been taught the reading strategies in their courses. These students are sometimes required to read academic texts in English in order to successfully gain access to new information for academic purposes. However, we have yet to know how aware they are of the reading strategies applied while reading a text. As an English teacher and fellow students, it is essential to find out whether the students' metacognitive reading awareness is high, moderate, or low and the students' preference in their use of reading strategies.

Research Questions

Based on the importance of knowing the students' metacognitive awareness strategies during reading and their preferences on such strategies, this study sought to answer the following questions.

1. What is the general tendency of metacognitive awareness of reading strategies used by fifth semester students of the Unsyiah English department in academic context?
2. How does the tendency differ based on the students' reading course grades?
3. Which reading strategy subscales and items of SORS are most used and least used by the students?

Research Objectives

1. To find out the general tendency of metacognitive awareness of reading strategy used by the Unsyiah English department students as a foreign language in academic text
2. To find out how the tendency differs based on the students' reading course grades.
3. To find out which reading strategy subscales and items of SORS are most used and least used by the students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Metacognitive Reading Strategies and Awareness

Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) define metacognitive reading strategies as the reader's higher order performance in reading that includes planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Meanwhile, metacognitive reading strategy awareness is the reader's consciousness of when and how to employ a specific reading strategy according to the text difficulties, situation, and reader's abilities. Metacognitive reading strategy awareness not only focuses on the result of reading but also the process of reading itself. Metacognitive reading strategy awareness would help to achieve good comprehension in academic reading tasks because readers know when and how to employ certain reading strategies according to text difficulty and reader's ability. Thus readers will also easily adapt to various new text contents (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Readers are advised to plan, monitor, and evaluate their reading before, during, and after the activity.

The planning, monitoring, and evaluation in metacognitive reading not only help students' reach comprehension of the text, but may also help students to be independent learners. Paris and Winograd (1990) highlight that metacognitive strategy can foster learning and motivation, because students are aware of their own thinking. It is possible because readers with metacognitive awareness will have critical thinking, and hence they are aware that they should review the materials from a text to enable them to remember the material for a long time.

There are quite considerable difference of achievements between skilled readers and poor readers in studying. Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) point out that the main differences between poor and skilled readers are on their ingenious use of reading strategy and continuous self-monitoring. For example, poor readers are lacking in consistency because they are unable to monitor their comprehension during reading. Their research on metacognitive awareness reveals that that skilled readers usually use more strategies in reading than less skilled readers because of their high metacognitive awareness of the variety of reading strategies. Furthermore, skilled readers do not only translate meanings but also monitor and evaluate the texts. Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) agree that those with higher metacognitive awareness will read reponsively and efficiently. Santana (2003) also supports this argument as she says effective and ineffective readers are distinguished by their awareness on metacognitive strategies. In addition, Mokhtari and

Reichard (2002) state that poor readers are not aware of the use of strategies to monitor their comprehension of the text.

The awareness of how to employ many reading strategies into the appropriate task has been constantly mentioned by experts and supported by results of research. It can be perceived as the growing need to learn metacognitive reading strategy awareness.

The distinction of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies lies in their function. As Schraw (1998) elaborates that it is important to carry out reading activities by using cognitive strategies (such as activating background knowledge, taking notes, skimming, etc), meanwhile to know how the activity has been performed, it requires metacognitive reading strategy awareness.

There has been extensive research on the awareness and use of conscious and intentional strategies, as well as its impact on reading comprehension, such as Alexander and Jetton (2000), Pressley (2000), Alhaqbani and Riazzi (2012), Mokhtari and Reichard (2008). They all reached similar results that if students know when and how to use the reading skills, it would positively affect their reading comprehension tests. Experts, such as Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) express that metacognitive should not only be regarded as the ultimate purpose of learning, but also as the students' management of their own learning because foreign language reading involves much more than just translation, adequate vocabulary, and good memorization of what has just been read.

Metacognitive Strategies in the Academic Reading Process

Zhang and Seepho (2013) as well as Zimmerman and Pons (1986) propose three skills of metacognitive reading strategies namely planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

The beginning stage of reading is planning. Therefore, planning process usually starts with thinking, selecting suitable strategies and organizing the activities that are required to achieve the goal. Activities in planning consists of linking prior knowledge with the reading topics to get prepared, choosing appropriate strategies to complete the task, setting the reading objective, making guesses, and surveying.

The process of analyzing information as the activity of reading goes on is called monitoring. In the case of this study, monitoring is done to improve efficiency and effectiveness of a learner's reading. This is the stage where the reader monitor how well they understand the tasks.

Activities such as paraphrasing, vocabulary comprehension, making inferences and connections are examples of monitoring.

The next stage in metacognitive strategies that comes after monitoring is evaluating. Evaluation is regarded as reviewing our own learning. During the evaluation stage, students look at what they plan to do, what they have achieved, and how they have achieved it. Readers summarize their own comprehension of the text.

Effective readers who evaluate after reading usually summarize the ideas they get from the reading and are able to determine whether they need more information from other resources. Meanwhile, ineffective readers who do not evaluate their reading, they do not check their comprehension after reading.

Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS)

Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) design a questionnaire called SORS that can measure the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies for adolescent and adult students who have English as their second or foreign language. It is specially designed to assess EFL students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategy use in academic reading context.

The SORS consists of thirty questions. The questions has three categories, namely Global Reading Strategies (13 questions), Problem-Solving Strategies (8 questions), and Support Reading Strategies (9 questions).

The examples of global reading strategies are guessing what the reading material is about, setting a purpose for reading, and previewing the text, and etc. It is basically what readers should do before reading. Problem-solving strategies are strategies used when the reader is faced with difficulties in understanding information in the text. The examples of problem-solving strategies are re-reading when losing concentration or for better understanding, pausing and thinking to process what they are reading, and etc. Lastly, support reading strategies involves using other tools to help reading process such as highlighting important parts in the text, using dictionaries or other resources, etc.

This questionnaire applies a 5-point Likert scale. The higher the number of the participants apply one strategy, the more frequent the use of that particular strategy will be reflected in the result. The advantage of using Likert scale is to know the frequency level of the participants on the statements in the questionnaire. Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) set the standard to interpret the mean score for each question and overall

tendency of metacognitive reading strategy awareness using the SORS. A mean score ≤ 2.4 considered as low usage, 2.5 – 3.4 as moderate usage, and ≥ 3.5 as high usage. This research also follows the same standard.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Using quantitative approach, the study examines the students' overall tendency of the awareness in using metacognitive strategies while reading. The study also compares the tendency of awareness of the metacognitive strategy use based on the students' reading scores or grades to see whether the students with better performance in reading had better awareness of the use of the metacognitive strategy. Moreover, this study explores which strategy is used the most and least frequently. Therefore, to this end, this research used questionnaire to collect the data.

The research was conducted at English Department of Universitas Syiah Kuala. The population was all the fifth-semester students in Unsyiah English Department. These students were divided into three classes which consisted of 65 students altogether. This research used all the population as the respondents and applied census sampling. Census sampling is a sampling method where all the population are taken as the sample (Sugiyono, 2014). All participants' first languages are Bahasa Indonesia or Bahasa Aceh, and they regard English as a foreign language. The participants' gender, age, and learning experience were not identified.

To measure the students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies, this research applied a questionnaire, called The Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS). This questionnaire is specifically designed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) to assess metacognitive awareness of reading strategies for EFL students. The questionnaire was seen to be suitable for the objective of this research because it was particularly designed to assess EFL students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategy use in academic reading context (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002).

Prior to data collection, the researcher conducted a pilot survey to three respondents in order to see how much time they took to fill out the questionnaire. They were selected randomly from the fifth semester students of English Department. This pilot survey was to see whether there were any adjustment needed on the survey. The questionnaire was to be answered based on the students' actual academic reading experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of this research was based on the data gathered on January 8th, 9th, and 10th, 2018. It was found that, from all the 5th semester students, about 14 students had not taken Reading 3 course, and 5 respondents did not return the questionnaires that had been given. As a result, only 46 questionnaires were completed and could be analyzed for the purpose of this study.

Overall Tendency

A mean score lower than 2.4 is considered as low usage, a mean score between 2.5 to 3.4 as moderate usage, and a mean score higher than 3.5 as high usage. From the result of the questionnaire, the mean score of each respondent ranged from 2.4 to 4.4. The overall tendency of fifth-semester students of Unsyiah English Department is at the moderate level with overall mean score $M = 3.4$. This indicates the high to moderate use of metacognitive reading strategies when reading academic texts.

In Table 1, it can be seen that the students' mean score is dominant in high to medium level. More than half of the respondents (54.3%) achieved high mean scores, and 41.3% achieved medium level of mean scores. This means that the students were aware that they used a wide variety of reading strategies.

Table 1. Mean Score's Percentage

Participants' level of metacognitive awareness	N	%
High	25	54.3%
Medium	19	41.3%
Low	2	4.3%

To see the difference of the students' metacognitive awareness based on their reading course achievement, the score of reading course was obtained through the respondents. It was found that the students' reading scores ranged from A to B. Then, each respondent's mean score was clustered based on their reading score of A, B+, and B and the average of their mean scores based on reading score cluster was

calculated. Using the standard given by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), the students who got A and B+ in reading course had 3.6 and 3.5 of mean scores respectively. It is indicated that the students use reading strategies on high to moderate level in reading academic materials.

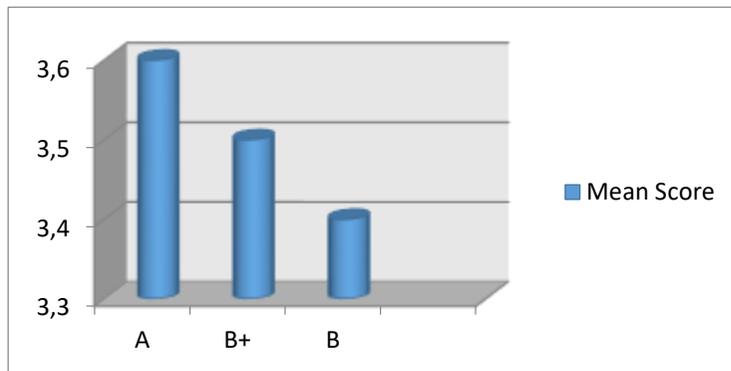


Chart 1. Overall Mean Score

Meanwhile, the students who got B in Reading course (mean score 3.4) use reading strategies on moderate level in academic reading. In other words, the students with higher grade used reading strategies slightly more often. This is in line with theories from Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) that say good readers tend to utilize more reading strategies when they read. With the result, it can be concluded that the students who got A and B+ in Reading did not have significant differences in the use of reading strategies.

For the mean score of each subscale, the Problem-Solving Reading Strategy subscale obtained the highest mean score of all three subscales. The mean score for Problem-Solving Reading strategy was 3.6, which indicates a high usage of this subscale.

Table 2. Mean scores of each subscale

Subscale	Mean score
Global Reading Strategy	3.4
Problem Solving Reading Strategy	3.6
Support Reading Strategy	3.4

The Most and Least Used Strategies

To answer the third research question regarding the most and least frequently used metacognitive strategy, the researchers calculated the frequency and percentage.

a. Global Reading Strategy (GLOB)

The most used item in GLOB was #3 about “activating background knowledge”. This item was used 71% and there were no respondents who never used this item. It indicates that the students were aware that they often activated their background knowledge to help them grasp the content of what they were reading.

Among the GLOB items, the least used item was #21 about “analyzing and evaluating the information from text”. The questionnaire result showed that 13% of the respondent never or almost never applied this item in academic reading. It can be an indication that the respondents were reluctant in evaluating what they had and had not known from the text.

b. Problem Solving Strategy (PROB)

The respondents showed a considerably significant preference in using in PROB based on the result of their percentage use. Most of the items showed medium to high usage. Among the PROB items, the most used one is item #9 about “trying to concentrate when text got harder”. The percentage of use amounted to 73.9%. It should be mentioned that all respondents have used this item in medium to high level of usage. There were no respondents who have never or barely used this item.

Meanwhile, the least used item in PROB is item #19 (I try to picture of visualize information to help remember what I read). Only 8.7% of respondents that never used or almost never used this strategy. As PROB are strategies that are mostly applied in whilst-reading stage, it indicates that the respondents tended to pick and use the strategies during the reading activity.

On the contrary, the least used item in PROB is #19 about “visualizing information to help them remember about what they already know” with 8.7% of respondent never or almost never used this strategy in academic reading.

c. Support Reading Strategy (SUP)

The moderate usage is the most dominant in this subscale, with 50% of the respondents showing their awareness in techniques used in SUP.

About 23 respondents fell under this moderate usage of reading strategies. Item #13 “about using other references” showed the highest tendency of usage among all other items in SUP subscale. This indicates that other reference materials, such as dictionary, is likely a support material most students preferred in foreign language academic reading. Meanwhile, the least used item in SUP is item #5 (When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read). Even, the result recorded 6 respondents have never used this strategy.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

The result of the survey shows that most of the students got high to average mean score for metacognitive awareness. The students were capable of wisely choosing which strategies were needed for which texts and reading condition. Some of the strategies mentioned in the questionnaire can be double-edged. Not all of them were suitable for all reading conditions. Thus, it is understandable that they did not use them as often. This is an exception that does not indicate they have lower ability of English academic reading.

Specifically, the data from the questionnaire showed that 54.3% (25 respondents) of the students had high level of metacognitive awareness, followed by 41% (19 respondents) who obtained a medium level and only 4.3% (2 respondents) got low level of metacognitive awareness.

From 30 items in the questionnaire, item #9 “trying to get back concentration” was the most used among all other items. As many as 18 respondents said that they usually applied this, and 16 respondents said that they always applied this strategy in academic reading. There were two items that obtained the same result. Item #5 and #21 both got 13%, making these two items as the least used items. Item #5 was about “reading the text aloud when it gets difficult to help them reach comprehension”. Item #21 was about “analyzing and evaluating the information in the text.”

In conclusion, the students were mostly aware of what strategies they used when they were reading EFL academic texts. These texts commonly use low-frequency words and many terminologies. One can easily lose their concentration when reading academic texts due to its difficulty. However the finding reveals that the students put effort by using reading strategies in order to comprehend the text.

Suggestions

The researchers would like to offer some suggestions to teachers, students, and other researchers. To students, academic reading in foreign language is tricky, and thus they are expected to use both cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies to make the text easier to understand. They should also be aware of what strategies they use so that they can evaluate their own reading. It helps them to overcome problem they encounter when they are reading.

It can be seen from the survey findings that these students have applied strategies related to utilizing background knowledge from medium to high level of use. It is already a good sign because, as suggested by the experts, background knowledge plays a role in achieving comprehension.

To English teachers and instructors, it is suggested that they should be aware of their students' reading ability and quality. The result findings show that the students used reference materials such as dictionary. The teachers could teach them how to use other resourceful materials. In the newest 2013 curriculum, teachers are required to mention the purpose of the meeting before the lesson starts. Giving clear goals to students before the lesson begin will help them understand what they will read. Another way is asking questions before, during, and after reading. This will help students focus on the points that they need to pay attention. Teachers can also ask students to summarize what they have read to check their understanding of the text.

It is also important that the EFL teachers and instructors accommodate the students with interesting reading materials so that the students will develop a high interest in reading and improve their reading awareness. There are many activities which can be done in EFL reading classrooms. It is also good that the teachers not only teach the various reading strategies but also encourage and make them to practice the reading strategies since beginner level. It would be better if the students are taught to be aware of reading strategies soon.

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