

# **IMPROVING EFL STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON METACOGNITIVE READING STRATEGIES**

**Kristina Linda, Regina, Y. Gatot Sutapa, Y.**

Masters Study Program of English Language Education, Teacher Training and  
Education Faculty, Tanjungpura University, Pontianak

Email: [kristinalinda.8090@gmail.com](mailto:kristinalinda.8090@gmail.com)

**Abstract** The aims of this study were improving EFL students' reading comprehension by using Metacognitive Reading Strategies and finding out the students' perceptions on Metacognitive Reading Strategies. The method of the research was a classroom action research. The research subjects were 29 students majoring in Accounting Program class 3 of Year-10. This research was conducted in three cycles to maximize the students' improvement in comprehending the text. The findings of data collecting revealed that integrating Metacognitive Reading Strategies instruction and raising the students' metacognitive reading strategies awareness have successfully improved the students' reading comprehension. Thus, this study implies that Metacognitive Reading Strategies are needed to be integrated in the teaching and learning reading English in the EFL classroom.

**Keywords:** Metacognitive Reading Strategies, EFL, reading comprehension

**Abstrak:** Tujuan-tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah meningkatkan pemahaman membaca siswa EFL dengan menggunakan Strategi Membaca Metakognitif dan mengetahui persepsi siswa tentang Strategi Membaca Metakognitif. Penelitian ini adalah sebuah Penelitian Tindakan Kelas. Subjek penelitian adalah 29 siswa Kelas 10 Program Akuntansi 3. Penelitian ini dilakukan dalam 3 siklus untuk memaksimalkan peningkatan pemahaman membaca siswa. Temuan membuktikan bahwa mengintegrasikan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris dengan Strategi Membaca Metakognitif dan meningkatkan kesadaran Strategi Membaca Metakognitif bagi siswa EFL telah berhasil meningkatkan pemahaman membaca siswa. Demikianlah studi ini menunjukkan bahwa Strategi Membaca Metakognitif perlu untuk diintegrasikan dalam kegiatan mengajar dan belajar bahasa Inggris di kelas EFL.

**Kata kunci:** Strategi Membaca Metakognitif, EFL, Pemahaman Membaca

Reading comprehension for EFL readers is not only the process of understanding the meaning of vocabulary and grammatical structures

presented in a text. EFL reading comprises the interpretation of sign, the realization of complex cognitive operation, the understanding of inherent conventions belonging to different discourse communities (Luchini & Gracia, 2007 p.1).

The researcher found several conditions that happened to students of Accounting Program 3 SMK Negeri 1 Putussibau. Firstly, twenty three (79%) students from 29 students did not have initiative to read. Secondly, twenty five (86%) students mentioned that reading English was difficult because they didn't know the meaning of the text. The aforementioned students' conditions were identified because of the conventional teaching by the teacher and lack of knowledge about strategies that can be applied to help the students comprehend English reading text effectively. Therefore, to fix the conditions of students, the teacher as researcher decided to use 'Metacognitive Reading Strategies' in teaching reading English in the classroom.

The discussion about the importance of metacognitive strategies in reading comprehension has widely spread among educators around the world but, apparently still there has been little discussion about how these strategies actually based on the students' viewpoint. Selamat and Sidhu (2011), Bidabadi & Yamat (2013) had investigated the students' perceptions toward metacognitive strategies used in listening comprehension, while, the researcher found limited information from the students' perception about metacognitive strategies in reading comprehension. Therefore, the main discussion of the present study is not only to investigate the implementation of Metacognitive Reading Strategies for EFL students, but also to raise practical issues that teachers need to consider in teaching reading comprehension at vocational class by using Metacognitive Reading Strategies based on the students' perceptions.

Metacognition is a central part of the contemporary educational paradigm (Donndelinger, 2005, p.243). The term "Metacognitive" was firstly introduced by John Flavell (1976). He has regarded as a foundation researcher in metacognition. John Flavell in his article (1979) entitled *Metacognition and Cognitive Monitoring: A New Area of Cognitive—Developmental Inquiry*, emphasized that metacognition plays an important role in oral communication of information, oral persuasion, oral comprehension, reading comprehension, writing, language acquisition, attention, memory, problem solving, social cognition, and, various types of self-control and self-instruction; there are also clear indications that ideas about metacognition are beginning to make contact with similar ideas in the areas of social learning theory, cognitive behavior modification, personality development, and education.

Karbalaei (2010 p.166) defines metacognition as the knowledge and control that we have over our cognitive processes. Other educator, El-Koumy (2004, p.7) defines metacognition as the conscious awareness of one's own cognition and the conscious control of one's own learning.

Many researches have been conducted to uncover how metacognition is applicable in certain field of language learning like in reading comprehension skill. According to Williams & Atkins (2009, p.29) the concept of metacognition was initially applied to the field of reading by Brown in 1980.

Reading is the most fundamental activity in learning process. The sources of knowledge and the information are gathered easily by reading. Traditionally, reading has been viewed as a cognitive task, regarding research has generally centered on such cognitive processes as language, memory, and attention, and their influence on reading skills (Temur & Bahar, 2011, p.421). Donndelinger (2005, p.243) defines reading as a process of continually comparing and contrasting the known and the new, problem solving, and shifting strategies as the reader attempts to reconcile text with expectations.

To EFL reader, reading comprehension of English text is more complex comparing to reading text printed in their mother tongue (L1) due to the different system of language features. Reading comprehension is a multicomponent, highly complex process that involves many interactions between readers and what they bring to the text (previous knowledge, strategy use) as well as variables related to the text itself (interest in text, understanding of text types) (Klingner, Vaughn & Boardman, 2007, p.8).

Students need to be taught a set of procedures, or strategies that they can use on their own when they read text, especially when they encounter difficulties (Dole, 2003, p.2). Metacognitive strategies are accurate and efficient for problem-solving activities and task performance (Álvarez, 2010, p.80). Wang (2014, p.83.) claims that metacognitive strategies are able to assist students plan, monitor and evaluate their reading process; and for English majors, it is even more necessary to be familiar with efficient reading strategies.

Strategies were conceived as representing routines that successful readers engaged in as they read in order to keep their comprehension on track (McKeown & Beck, 2009, p.11). Therefore, in teaching reading comprehension, the teacher instruction model of how to use the strategies to comprehend the text is greatly needed. By modeling effective metacognitive strategies teachers allow their students to develop a deeper understanding of which strategies work best for their individual learning styles (Shannon, 2008, p.9).

Anderson (2002, p.3) reinforces that students must receive explicit instruction in how to use these strategies, and they need to know that no single strategy will work in every instance. In line with Anderson, McKeown & Beck (2009, p.9) also suggest to implement the components of metacognitive ability and directly teaching students what those were and how to engage them in interactions with text, that is, strategies instruction.

The illustration of the application of metacognitive strategies in teaching reading comprehension can be seen as follow (adapted from Othman, Mahamud & Jaidi, 2014, p.104):

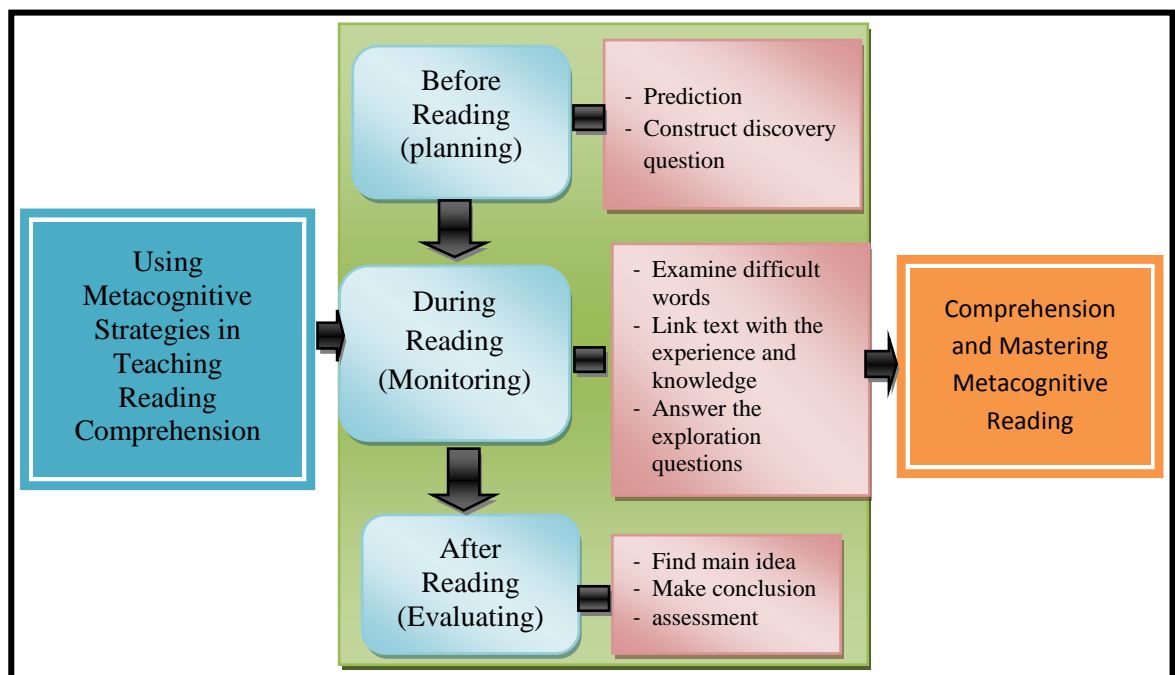


Figure 1. The Application of Metacognitive Strategies in Reading Comprehension.

Comprehension metacognition practice can be prompted by directing, modeling, scaffolding, and practicing to help students identify what they do not understand and select the best individual strategies to resolve their comprehension difficulties (Willis, 2008, p.155). Metacognition has typically been conceptualized as involving one or more of the following aspects of a cognitive process: knowledge about that process, the monitoring of that process, and the control of that process (Sera & Metcalfe, 2009, p.278). Paris & Jacobs (1987, p.256) mention three skill techniques of metacognitive strategies: Planning, monitoring and evaluating (repair own comprehension).

Planning Strategy stimulates students' interest, arouses their expectations, and fosters their motivation to discover what will occur in the text (Sequero, cited in El-Koumy, 2004, P.17). Anderson (2002, p.3) emphasizes that preparation and planning are important metacognitive skills that can improve student learning.

Metacognitive monitoring interacts with the readers' background knowledge. Afflerbach & Cho (2010 p.212) describe that successful readers monitor to determine the difficulty of the text, the relationship of the readers' background knowledge to text content, and if the text content is relevant to the reading goal. Cromley (2006, p.194) argues that the main goal of metacognitive monitoring is to detect a lack of understanding so that it can be corrected.

Evaluating is the way the readers check their comprehension after reading. Afflerbach & Cho (2010, p.202) explain the range of evaluating strategies includes establishing a critical stance, judging the accuracy of information contained in text, examining text for the presence or absence of evidence to support claims made, and the suitability of text and its contents to help the reader complete a task.

## METHOD

Selecting the best method is a crucial aspect in ensuring the acquisition of relevant and valid information (Tomal, 2010, p.35). Based on the problems of this study which have been conveyed from the aforementioned, the researcher decided to conduct a classroom action research. Procedures to implement a classroom action research in this study were based on Bachman's model. It consists of 3 phases: planning, acting and monitoring, and evaluating.

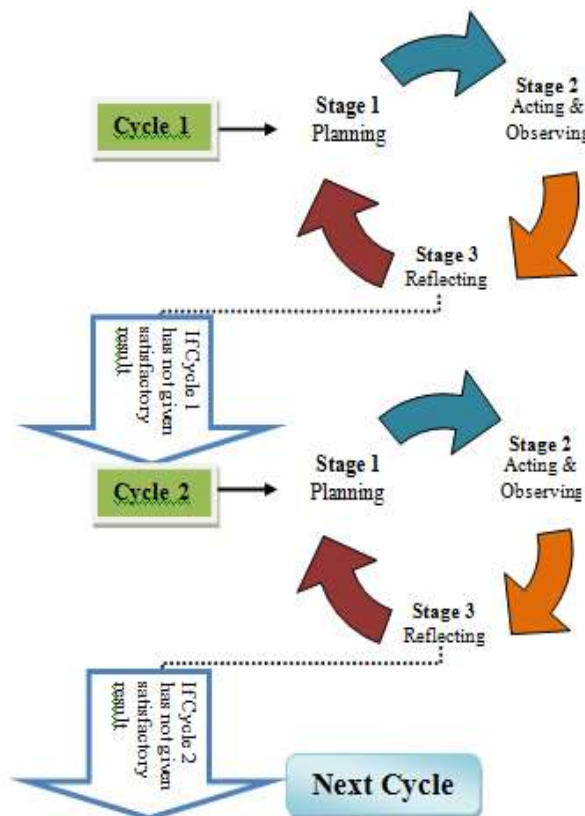


Figure 2. The Cyclical Process of a Classroom Action Research (adapted from Bachman, in Mertler, 2009)

The cyclical process of action research was started from planning, acting and observing, and then reflecting phase. The description of stages in one cycle planning, acting and observing, and reflecting are described as follow:

1. Planning
  - a. The teacher arranged the process of taking data in Cycle 1 and scenario of teaching and learning activities in classroom in the form of lesson plan to make the activities more manageable.
  - b. The teacher prepared the material for teaching such as kinds of text which fit with the syllabus and appropriate with students.

- c. The teacher also prepared some instruments that will be used to gather data such as observation checklist, test and field note.
  - d. The teacher as researcher chose and trained collaborators to work with. The collaborators help the teacher to gather the data and give suggestion to improve the way of teaching process.
  - e. The teacher prepared the criteria of action success.
    - a) The treatments were stopped if the number of students who reach Criteria of Minimum Passing reach 80% from the total number of students (80% from 29 students is 23 students).
    - b) The students were actively involved in the teaching and learning process, indicated by most of students (22-28 students) from the total number of students participated in the process.
    - c) The students' performance and behavior while using Metacognitive Reading Strategies showed the improvement and enjoyment in reading which is noted in filed note.
2. Acting and observing Stage
- Acting and observing were done at the same time during the process of teaching while conducting classroom action research. In acting and observing phase, the teacher get data about which part of the teaching process which need to be developed. In collecting data the teacher was helped by collaborator. Collaborator observed while the teacher was doing acting in the classroom.
3. Reflecting Stage
- After all data instruments taken by the teacher and collaborator have been collected, data were analyzed and interpreted in order to get the information how was the teaching reading by using Metacognitive Reading Strategies to the Year-10 students of AKA 3.

This research was conducted in three cycles to have better improvement on the students reading comprehension. The implementation of Metacognitive Reading strategies included three steps of reading activities proposed by Othman et al (2014, p.104). First, before reading (planning) involved predicting and constructing discovery questions. Second, whilst reading (monitoring) involved examining difficult words, linking text with the experience and knowledge, and answering the exploration questions. Post reading (evaluating) involved finding main idea, making conclusion and having assessment. The procedures of teaching reading were taught explicitly by prompting, explaining, modelling, drilling the strategies and engage the students to practice the strategies.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Research Findings**

This study applied quantitative and qualitative data collection. The instruments of qualitative data are observation checklists, field note, and interview transcription. The instruments of quantitative data are test and questionnaire.

Based on the observation sheets to observe the students from Cycle 1 until Cycle 3, data showed positive improvement on the students' behaviour. In Cycle 3, more than 80% students involved and showed their positive responses during the implementation of the strategies.

From the field note of Cycle 1, the collaborator noted that the students looked attentive and curious during the explanation of Metacognitive Reading Strategies. But, when the students worked in groups, the situation was not conducive. Some students looked busy talking out of the topic of reading material and sat improperly. The teacher took more time to manage the students to work well in group. In cycle 2, in the main activity, the students work in pairs. The atmosphere of the class was more conducive than in Cycle 1. In cycle 3, the students' performance showed better improvement than the previous cycles. They started practicing Metacognitive Reading Strategies by their own pace. They looked active while reading the text by doing some activities of metacognitive strategies which could help them to comprehend the text such as underlining on certain part of the text, taking note of unfamiliar words and finding the meaning of those words.

The questionnaire used in this study was MARSII questionnaire from Mokhtari and Richard (2002). This questionnaire functioned to raise the students' awareness before the implementation of Metacognitive Reading Strategies began. Moreover, this questionnaire was used as a tool for helping students increase metacognitive awareness and strategy use while reading.

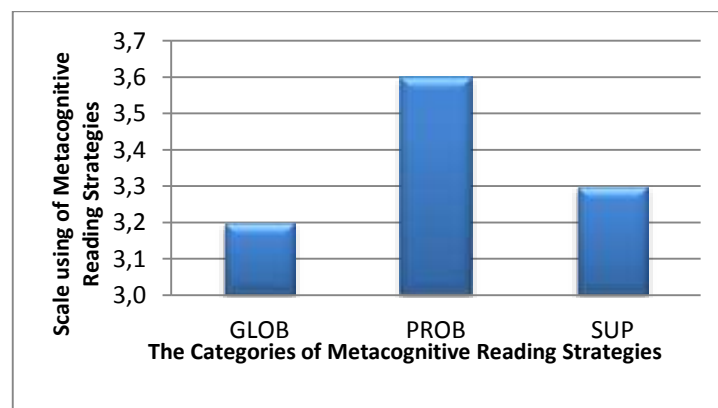


Figure 3. Chart of students' Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies

Based on the result of three metacognitive subscales, the average score of Global Reading Strategies (GLOB) was 3,2 which was categorized as medium; Problem Solving Strategies (PROB) was 3,6 which was categorized as high and Support Reading Strategies was 3,3 which was categorized as medium.

The test based data of the three cycles showed the students' improvement in comprehending English text. After three meeting treatments in Cycle 1, the number of students who passed the test was 18 (64%) students and the students who did not reach the standard of minimum score was 10 (36%). The students' scores of Cycle 1 can be seen from the following chart:

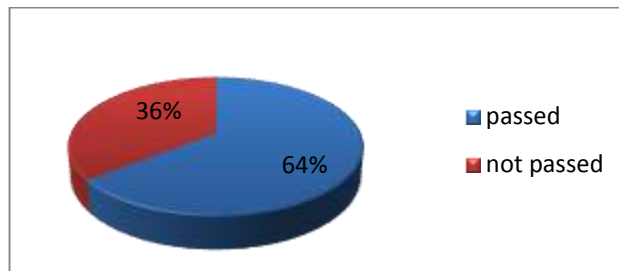


Figure 6. Chart of Students' Score in Cycle 1

The following chart is the result of the students' scores in Cycle 2. The students who passed the test were 21 (75%) students. This number increased from cycle 1 about 11%. While, the number of students who still haven't passed the test was 7 (25%) students.

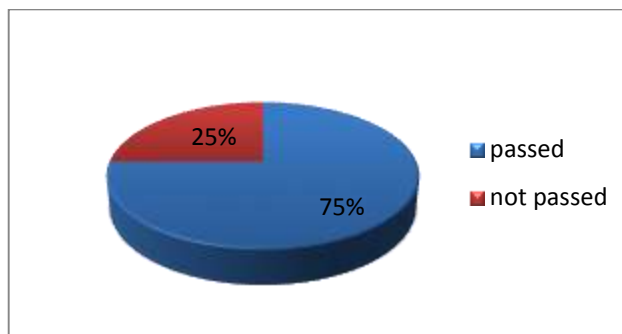


Figure 7. Chart of Students' Score in Cycle 2

In Cycle 3, the students' score was much better than the previous cycles. The number of students who passed the test was 25 (89%) students, while the students who did not pass the test remained 3 (11%) students.

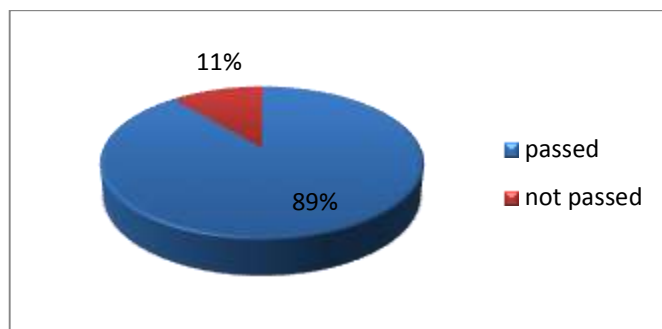


Figure 8. Chart of Students' Score in Cycle 3

The number of students who passed the test in Cycle 1 was 18 (64%) students. In Cycle 2, the number of students who passed the test was 21 (75%) students. In the last cycle (Cycle 3), the improvement showed by the increasing number of students who passed the test became 25 students or 89%.



In order to find out the students' perception, the focus group interview was held at the last meeting of the last cycle. The category of perception in this study was bottom-up perception. It needs the complete students' knowledge and experience about Metacognitive Reading Strategies that have been taught to them.

The first question asked about the students' preference when reading English texts, whether using their conventional reading strategies or Metacognitive Reading Strategies. Based on the students' answers, from the total number of students at the Year-10 students of AKA 3, there were 27 students preferred to use Metacognitive Reading Strategies and 2 students chose their conventional reading strategy. The students who chose Metacognitive Reading Strategies as their useful strategies mention these strategies were useful for them.

- a. "I prefer reading using Metacognitive Reading Strategies because I feel helpful when reading". (S2G1)
- b. "I prefer using Metacognitive Reading Strategies because it is easy to understand. (*some students answered together*)

While, the students who preferred their conventional strategies mentioned that they would use metacognitive strategies if they understood how to use Metacognitive Reading Strategies in reading. Both of these students did not achieve Metacognitive Reading Strategies well because they did not attend two meetings during the treatment of Metacognitive Reading Strategies. Therefore, they got less practice than their friends.

- a. "I prefer using conventional strategy because it is easy to understand. (S1G2)
- b. "I prefer using the reading strategies that I used to do because it is easier for me to understand. If I have understood how to use Metacognitive Reading Strategies I will practice them when reading". (S2G2).

The second interview question asked about the students' feeling about Metacognitive Reading Strategies when it was implemented in their class. The students mentioned that they got confused when Metacognitive Reading Strategies were implemented in their class for the first time. They explained that these strategies were new for them and they needed some times to understand how these strategies worked.

"Firstly, I felt confused because it was the first time we learned this reading strategies in our class. But then I like it because it helped us to comprehend the English text. Now, I don't feel confused anymore" (S3G1).

The third question asked the students confirmation whether they could read the text comprehensively by using Metacognitive Reading Strategies or whether they feel being helpful in comprehending English reading text by using Metacognitive Reading Strategies. Some students mentioned that they felt confused at first but then they felt easier to comprehend the text by using Metacognitive Reading Strategies.

- a. "I feel easier to comprehend the text by using Metacognitive Reading Strategies because it raised my curiosity ..." (S6G1)
- b. "I feel confused at first because I didn't understand " (S7G2)

The next question was about the benefits and drawbacks of Metacognitive Reading Strategies. Most of the students claimed that they have experienced the benefits of Metacognitive Reading Strategies.

- a. “according to me, Metacognitive Reading Strategies are easy to practice, ... there is clear steps when we comprehend English reading text”. (S7G1)
- b. “get more knowledge”. (S8G1)
- c. “make reading in English easier”. (S4G2)
- d. “It easy to understand”. (S5G2)

The students mentioned that the difficulties they found when comprehending English reading text was difficult to get the meaning of the text although they used Metacognitive Reading Strategies, but still lack of vocabulary was the factor in getting the meaning of the text.

“According to me, the drawback of Metacognitive Reading Strategies is we still feel difficult to get the meaning of the complicated words (new words), moreover, if the meanings of those words are more than one meaning”. (S7G2)

The fifth question to students asked whether the students have any suggestions and/or comments on (the implementation of) Metacognitive Reading Strategies. One student gave comment that the implementation of these strategies in their class was good. One student suggested that the teacher could help them in translating the difficult words while reading.

- a. “The implementation of these strategies is good”. (S6G1)
- b. “I suggest the teacher can help us to translate the difficult words while reading” (S8G2)

The last question asked whether the students would keep using Metacognitive Reading Strategies to comprehend English text. The students mentioned that they would keep practicing Metacognitive Reading Strategies to master these strategies.

- a. “Yes. After knowing how to read by using Metacognitive Reading Strategies, the reading activity becomes interesting” (S4G1)
- b. “Yes. I will practice more to master these strategies” (S12G2)

## **Discussion**

The findings showed that Metacognitive Reading Strategies have improved the students reading comprehension. During the treatments, Metacognitive Reading Strategies were delivered explicitly integrated with the instruction by explaining, modeling, reviewing and prompting. As the result, in cycle three the students started reading using Metacognitive Reading strategies by their own pace. Iwai (2011) mentioned that providing learners with explicit instruction as well as a variety of Metacognitive Reading Strategies help the students to become independent learners.

The findings from the various data showed that integrating Metacognitive Reading Strategies instruction has contributed on the students’ good achievement in reading. The result of this research is in line with Takallou (2011) who claims

the metacognitive strategy instruction seems to have contributed to the improvement of students' reading comprehension performance.

Giving the variation in teaching techniques and class setting are necessary to avoid from monotonous classroom atmosphere. Reading comprehension is commonly practiced by the readers silently. But, the activities can be varied by doing reading aloud as well. Changing the class setting by grouping and pairing the students instead of individual also showed as the effective ways to avoid from boredom, to raise the students' enjoyment while practicing Metacognitive Reading Strategies and to create the atmosphere of the class more alive. Therefore, it can be noted importantly that the variation of teaching techniques and class setting are necessary to avoid from monotonous of classroom atmosphere.

From the field note data, the main problem that seems encounter the process of reading comprehension to EFL students was caused by the lack of vocabulary mastery. The EFL students got difficulties in getting the meaning of the word if the meanings of certain words have more than one meaning in their native language. Hence, the students become confused because they do not only have to understand the meaning of the word but also understand the context of the text. Therefore, to keep integrating the teaching reading comprehension and developing the students' vocabulary mastery as well is greatly necessary.

The students' awareness in using Metacognitive Reading Strategies also indicated as one of the reasons of the students' improvement in reading comprehension. Those who are successful in language learning are those who are aware of the learning process and use learning strategies (including metacognitive ones) flexibly and efficiently (Huang, cited in Henter, 2014 p.50).

By applying and facilitate the students with MARS from Mokhtari and Reichard (2002), the students awareness is raised to use Metacognitive Reading Strategies with various set of strategies from GLOB (Global Reading Strategies), PROB (Problem Reading Strategies) and SUP (Support Reading strategies). These set of strategies have provided various strategies which help the students to be independent readers by leading them to do self-directed strategies while reading based on their needs. Raising the students metacognitive reading strategies awareness also note importantly by Ahmadi, et al (2013) who mention that metacognitive reading strategy awareness give great significance on the students' reading comprehension and can be advantageous to improve EFL learners' metacognitive reading comprehension skill.

The students' perception on Metacognitive Reading Strategies was taken by conducting focus group interview. 27 from 29 of the students conveyed their positive perceptions on Metacognitive Reading Strategies. They mentioned that Metacognitive Reading Strategies have given them the ease to comprehend the text, made reading in English more comfortable and facilitated them to get more knowledge. Moreover, the students mentioned that they would keep using Metacognitive Reading Strategies to comprehend English text because it has successfully improved their reading achievement.

Giving motivation is necessary either explicitly or implicitly when learning process is held. Realizing that English is the foreign language to students of

Accounting Program class 3, during the implementation of Metacognitive Reading Strategies the students were motivated the importance of English for their future, especially for them as vocational students. As vocational students, they are prepared to be graduates who are ready to enter the workforce. Dornyei (2001, p.2) argues that without sufficient motivation, however, even the brightest learners are unlikely to persist long enough to attain any really useful language. Therefore, as a teacher, giving motivation to students is important to be integrated in the learning process.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

### **Conclusion**

The study at Year-10 students of Accounting Program class 3 in SMK Negeri 1 Putussibau presented how Metacognitive Reading Strategies was applied to help the students improve their reading comprehension. This study also found out the students' perceptions toward Metacognitive Reading Strategies. To maximize the students' improvement on reading comprehension, this study was conducted in three cycles of classroom action research. The findings revealed that integrating Metacognitive Reading Strategies instruction and raising the EFL students' metacognitive reading strategies awareness have improved the students' reading comprehension. The data findings showed the significant improvement on the students' scores from Cycle 1 to Cycle 3. Moreover, 27 from 29 students conveyed their positive perceptions on the implementation of Metacognitive Reading Strategies in their class. The students mentioned that Metacognitive Reading Strategies gave them the ease to comprehend the text, made reading in English more comfortable and facilitated them to get more knowledge. Based on the research findings, it is concluded that Metacognitive Reading strategies have successfully improved the EFL students' reading comprehension at Accounting Program class 3 of SMK Negeri 1 Putussibau. Thus, this study implies that Metacognitive Reading Strategies are needed to be integrated in the teaching and learning reading English in the EFL classroom.

### **Suggestion**

The writer underlined some important points to the students, teachers, headmaster and the other researcher. (1) It is suggested to students to keep using Metacognitive Reading Strategies to comprehend English text, to practice more to master these metacognitive strategies and to enrich the vocabulary mastery for better comprehension. (2) It is suggested to English teachers in Vocational High School and Senior High School to teach the students about these strategies to comprehend English reading text. (3) It is suggested to the headmaster to continue supporting the teacher to do classroom action research collaboratively with other teachers. (4) It is suggested to other researchers to conduct the research about Metacognitive Strategies from different perspectives of English language skills such as vocabulary, speaking, and listening.

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