METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS IN THE READING COMPREHENSION OF LITERARY TEXTS: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY BASED ON METACOGNITIVE READING STRATEGY

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Abstract:

This article establishes a connection between students' metacognitive awareness and success in reading comprehension. Reading is a cognitive process that directs students to interact, predict, form hypotheses about the literary text. Reading also involves synthesizing information and critically analyzing a text in a literary context. Metacognition implies "cognition about cognition". The use of metacognitive strategies for reading purposes is interlinked with the attainment of advanced levels of literacy. Metacognition is a complex aspect of thought that involves both linguistic and cognitive activities. Recently the identification of strategies used by readers on tests of reading comprehension is of foremost interest. Using strategic knowledge or metacognition while monitoring the comprehension process is an important aspect of skilled reading. A focus on reading strategies assists researchers regulates the extent to which readers understand the purpose of reading. Readers' proficiency level is highly influenced by the strategy applied. This study has an experimental design involving a conventional group and an experimental group with whom a metacognitive reading strategy is implemented. This article documents a small-scale investigation of how effective implementation of metacognitive reading strategy directs students to a higher level of proficiency in reading comprehension. From the result of the study, we sum up that the participants exposed to metacognitive reading strategy exhibit better understanding and proficiency level than those who are not exposed to metacognitive reading strategy. The participants' performance reveals an important implication about the development of reading comprehension through short stories.

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1. Introduction

The concept of metacognition includes thinking about the thinking process, self-awareness, understanding and memory techniques, and learning characteristics as noted (Flavell, 1979). When we study the researches on literacy, currently there is a mounting emphasis on the importance of metacognition. Griffith & Ruan (2005) investigated and recognized that the application of metacognitive strategies for reading purposes and the achievement of highly developed levels of literacy share a comprehensible connection. Israel et al. (2005) documented the outcome after researching that learners can be motivated to develop their own metacognition and how this development can be attained, strategies have also been suggested. The studies designate that the expansion of metacognition can be supported by unequivocal instruction in comprehension strategies and the appliance of questions as a tool. (Raphael, 1982; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Baumann & Seifert Kessel, 1993; Baker, 2002; Guthrie et al. 2004; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2002 Oczkus, 2003; Hinders 2007; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Wilson & Smatana, 2011). No detailed researches have been done up till now really on how learners can become conscious of metacognition by taking participation in textual deliberations based on works of fiction.

Both linguistic and cognitive activities are prerequisites for metacognition as it is a multifaceted aspect of reflection and learning processes. From the time of the expression's coinage, it has been pondered and evaluated what aspects can be included to define the term and whether this term can be defined and applied in different disciplines of education. Schreiber (2005) mentions that in the early 20th century, research on metacognition has taken place in the arenas of psychological and pedagogical investigations that are associated with mental activities along with learning.

In the field of metacognition, new paths have been opened by Vygotsky's (1978) theory and he provided views on the development of higher psychological functions. He claimed the relationship between self-consciousness and self-regulation connected with the function of language with regard to learning and a capacity developed by learners to survey and master cognitive processes to achieve metacognition. Flavell coined the term to use it to describe "*one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them, for example, the learning relevant properties of information and data*" (Flavell, 1976, p. 232). The focal point of the metacognitive operations was separated by Flavell into three categories and they are- consciousness, task, and strategy (Flavell, 1987). Later on, with these additions, the concept was used to focus on the ability to observe one's own learning process, connected thought operations, and adjusted to a specific task and learning situation, one's personal learning process actively affected by making a cognizant choice of learning processes.

Reinforcing the significance of being able to exchange impressions verbally, Brown (1987) has further developed Flavell's definition of metacognition. Baker & Brown (1984), Palincsar & Brown (1984; 1987), Brown (1985; 1987), and Baker (2002) have carried out researches on metacognition and the term "metacognition" has attained its contemporary import though previously it had been more or less integrated directly into the realms of reading research and learning to read activities. The development of metacognition should be understood in conjunction with the reading process and as it is the quality to scrutinize, problematize, communicate, one's own learning and thought processes can be influenced through a dynamic selection of reading comprehension strategies (Baker & Brown, 1984; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; 1987; Brown, 1985; 1987; Baker, 2002).

The use of strategies is a connected issue concerning metacognitive competencies and within the arena of researches on literacy, these competencies are discussed often without overtly naming the subject itself. This occurrence has been observed, for instance, in the definition of comprehension strategies and their application during the act of reading provided by Anmarkrud and Braten (2012): "[*We*] *define comprehension strategies as forms of procedural knowledge that the readers voluntarily use to acquire, organize, and transform information, as well as to reflect on and guide their own text comprehension*" (Anmarkrud & Braten, 2012, p. 591).

2. Metacognitive Awareness and Reading Comprehension

Reading is the skill of developing the cognitive process and through readers' cognitive interaction and motivational involvement, they can build up interaction with the text. By making use of their background knowledge, they can form hypotheses, predict and construct the meaning. There are several activities involved in the process of developing reading skills, for instance, understanding and recollecting ideas, identifying and selectively attending significant information, monitoring comprehension, and learning, synthesizing information as well as critically evaluating a text in the academic framework. The text, the reader, the interaction between the reader and the text, the mental state of the reader after the text interaction- these are four fundamental elements encompassed in reading itself. Reading comprehension is the process that connects the reader's cognition with the text to reach that purpose of achieving quantitative and qualitative outcomes of proficiency in the target language and that is why, the better the reading comprehension skills, the higher are the chances of attainment of satisfactory success in the competitive exams.

Regarding developing second language (L2) reading skills, L2 proficiency is a related issue, Anderson (1984) suggests. He also points out that reading ability can be improved by high overall competence in L2. Carrell et al., however, claim that by increasing awareness of reading strategies and learning how to use these strategies, meticulous readers can harmonize for their incompetent language proficiency. To attain the ability to comprehend successfully is not an automatic procedure, rather successful

comprehension depends on a directed cognitive endeavor which is referred to as metacognitive processing (Mehrdad et al., 2012). Metacognitive awareness is considered as a critical constituent of proficient strategic reading by Carrell et al. In this perspective, metacognitive awareness is considered as readers' attentiveness, monitoring, and adapting to reading strategies.

2.1 Research Questions
1) What is the effect of metacognitive reading strategy on students?
2) How performance derived from the metacognitive reading strategy is different from that of conventional reading strategy?

3. Method

3.1 Group Profile (Experimentation)
This study took place at BGC Truss University Bangladesh with the first-year students of BA (Hons) in English. The total number of students who participated in the study was 20 and we taught them the course Reading I. The participants were the 1st year students with an intermediate level of English Language acquisition. Prior to my experiment, we took a surprise test of the reading comprehension of the students. This surprise test would help us to assume their basic reading comprehension proficiency. Our experimental teaching lasted one month which is considered to be the students' basic foundation period. I gave lessons 3 hours a week. The reading passages were selected from their curricula. We followed the reciprocal teaching methods prescribed by Brown. The structure of the exercise book was well organized and lucid. The book Reciprocal Teaching guided us in a proper way to teach students. The participants were of tertiary level and educated enough to understand our speech and communicate with each other. The atmosphere of our classroom was congenial enough to help students acquire a good command of reading comprehension.

The experiment we have conducted has three steps. These are:
A. Pre-exploration assessment;
B. Application tasks;
C. Post-exploration assessment.

A. Pre-exploration assessment
It was the surprise test taken at the very early stage of the course. This assessment helped to predict the basic - reading proficiency of the participants. According to the correct answer asked from the reading a passage we formulated three levels of performance of the participants. I categorized their performance into three degrees of successful exploration. These are excellent, acceptable or efficient, and average performance. As we mentioned above, the participants were 20 students, we divided them into two groups, for the convenience of the experiment. I have to divide the groups very tactfully so that

each group contains an equal ratio of excellent, efficient, and average performance of the participants.

Our methodology to collect data was well planned. At the very beginning of the experimentation, students were asked to sit for a surprise reading test. We chose reading comprehension for the test. We also intended to get a glimpse of their basic reading proficiency, whether they are able to construct a correct sentence to express their perceptions and attitudes. However, their language proficiency was satisfactory. The test contained four parts- of questions that were designed as MCQs. The exam was conducted for before applying a metacognitive reading strategy in order to divide students into two groups so each group had to contain an equal ratio of performance level. The two groups are named as Conventional group and Experimental group respectively. So, both the groups consist of an equal number of students with excellent, efficient, and average performance levels. Pre- exploration assessment helps researchers to assume the accurate comprehension level of the students. Then the researcher can implement appropriate methods and approaches to teaching.

Table 1: Results obtained from surprise test

Comprehension levels	Percentage of Student
Excellent	55%
Efficient	35%
Average	30%

B. Application Tasks

Next, we move to application tasks. Now both the groups are identical while they are varied in teaching approaches. The conventional group is taught with traditional approaches of teaching reading stories and questioning from the text. The experimental group is trained with reciprocal teaching approaches as a form of metacognitive Reading strategy. Reciprocal Teaching (Palincsar and Brown, 1984) is a tool for measuring and analysing reading, comprehension (Edling, 2006). Reciprocal teaching implies an instructional activity in which students become the teacher in a small group of reading sessions. The teacher's model of reciprocal teaching refers to guiding a group discussion using four strategies: Summarizing, question answering, clarifying, and predicting. Once students have mastered the strategies, they assume the role of the teacher while reading stories. For an. advanced comprehension of teaching students several strategies like concept maps, jigsaw, story maps, story sequence, etc. We have taught three stories to both groups. These stories are "A Hunger Artist" "The Tell Tale Heart" and "The Lottery". The conventional group is taught with traditional approaches to reading. Traditional approaches include three steps of reading, first reading or letting the story shows itself, second reading or reflecting on the story, third reading for focusing on writing.

The Experimental group is taught to attain several reading purposes like:
- to read between the lines;
- to read beyond the lines;

- to summarize, to analyze and to question;
- to predict about the fiction and interpretation;
- to assume the semantic construction of the text;
- to reflect upon the aesthetic excellence of the story;
- finally, to develop a meta language to describe the text and to develop metacognition. To be more specific about the teaching approaches, we divide the teaching into five stages.

3.1. Concentrating on Students Viewpoint and Approaches

One important aspect of metacognitive thinking is the ability to identify and visualize the premises of one's own personal queries (Flavell, 1976; 1987. Brown, 1987). We guided the students by asking them to identify and explain their own queries, approaches, and viewpoints. Our main focus was on why students pose that specific question and what the justification of that query is.

3.2. Concentrating on Student Responses

We would like to analyze texts by enhancing students' responsive and interpretive abilities. We would like to predict their responses towards the cognitive and emotive effects of the texts. The students are aided to discover who is the main character of the story, what is the perspective of the narrator. The responses of the students determine their understanding levels. We assisted students to recall certain features of the story that they have acquainted with at the initial stage. These students are encouraged to involve their emotional self with the comprehension process and response to the text.

3.3 Concentrating on Interpretation or Contest Clues Reading Strategy

This procedure is intended to strengthen the pupils' ability to observe, assess, and verbalize their own thoughts during the interpretation process (Flavell, 1976 1987; Palincsar and Brown, 1984; Brown, 1987). We adopted a single set of questions to respond to students' interpretations. We used questions like: What are your thoughts about?; What makes you think like that?; How do you interpret?

We did enhance their interpretive abilities. by focusing on text internal and text external factors that make interpretation possible. Discussion on textually oriented issues helped students to point out exactly what they feel about the text. Thus, they can draw a conclusion on their own. In short, they can develop their meta-perspective through explaining and reflecting on their own interpretation.

3.4 Concentrate on Meta-language

The effective way of enhancing students' metacognition is to make them aware of their own reading comprehension strategies. This means that they should be aware of the strategies they are using, have used on will be using and analyze the benefits of the choices made (Flavell, 1976; 1987; Palincsar and Brown, 1984; Brown, 1987). Researches show that there are three steps of helping students recognize their own reading

comprehension strategies. The steps are asking for the strategy used, instructing students to use more other strategies, and pointing out the strategies used.

Meta language can be developed by introducing terminologies taken from literary studies and literary didactics. These terminologies will subsequently be used by a teacher and students together. Subject-related vocabulary is generated from these terminologies. This vocabulary would exhibit the exact degree of reading comprehension. With an aim to develop students' meta language we encouraged students to discuss the goods and evils of the main characters from the short stories we have chosen the characters. Students came up with lots of new traits of the characters. In addition, they start challenging each other's opinions in the same context. A shift of perspectives occurred in the classroom. We both recognize and discard their opinion. We helped them enhance meta-language by revealing their own reading comprehension strategy. Now they are aware of the cognitive and linguistic activities involved in reading. We finished this step by summarizing and repeating the strategies students have already used.

### 3.5 Concentrate on Students Thought Process

Students thought processes can be analyzed by focusing on how they produce their own meaning regarding the text. Interaction between text and the reader clearly demonstrates this thought process. We initially helped the students to recognize the text as an aesthetic construction. It demands a focus on the author's perspective of the literary piece. Students are guided to observe and later explain the author's perspective and choices regarding the interpretation of the text. Students' thought and feeling towards the author's perspective is very important. It involves an advanced thought operation on the part of the students. The interactional relationship between text and the reader is of great importance. It means embracing both how the text can produce meaning and how different readers create meaning based on certain parameters (Snow, 2002). We focused on the micro details of each paragraph of the story. Students' attention was directed towards the imagery and abstractions authors deploy in conveying contain meaning. It required a third reading of the text. All the students moved their attention from the plot to a more intricate feature like foreshadowing. Students stepped into a fictional world. Ryan (2001) used the term "*immersive form of reading to describe an act of reading where the reader stepped into the fictional world and was engrossed by it*". Then students were aware of the fact that their interpretation was a consequence of their responses towards the text as an aesthetic construction.

C. Post Exploration Assessment

Firstly, we deal with post exploration assessment of the conventional group. After finishing the short stories, we instructed students to think critically about the topic as they had read. We encouraged the students to write in their reader-response journals expressing ideas and emotions. They have been doing well while we were instructing them with activities like cloze test, true/false tasks, fill in the gaps tasks, etc. However, their performance was not excellent when we asked them questions generated from

context clues. More or less, they failed to recognize a literary piece as an aesthetic construction. We did not approach a module of metacognitive strategies that helped students to understand the text deeper and improve their thinking skills. We designed a question for their assessment. According to their answers, I came up with the following results of the Conventional group.

Figure 1: Metacognitive Comprehension of Conventional Group
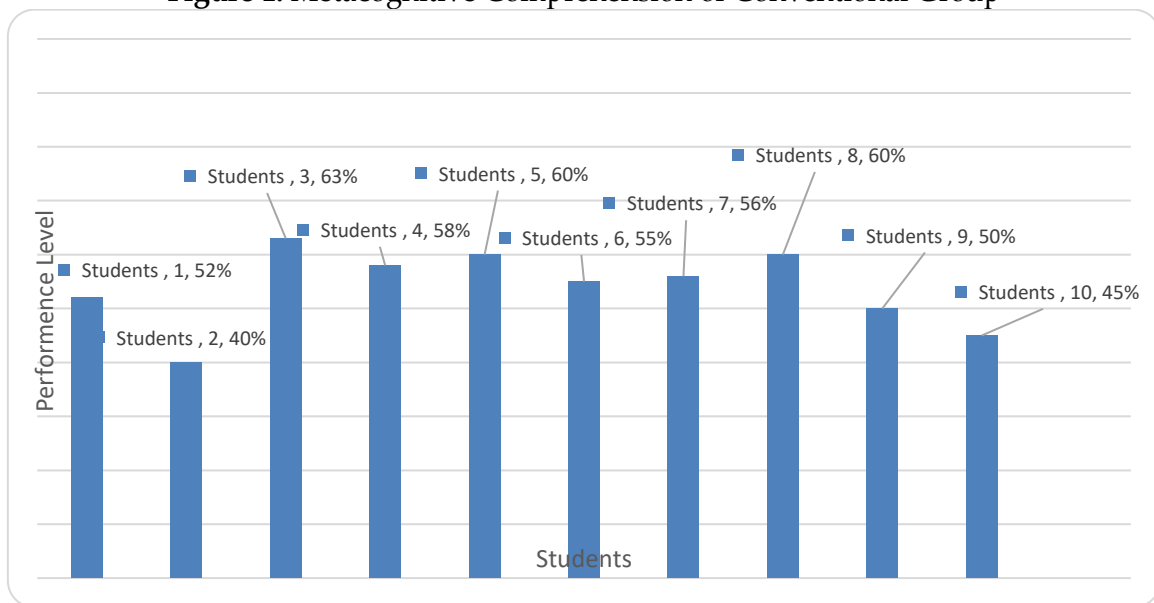
As we had applied metacognitive reading strategy in teaching reading comprehension to the Experimental Group their comprehension level was better than that of the Conventional Group. The following figure exposed their results.

Figure 2: Metacognitive Comprehension of Experimental Group
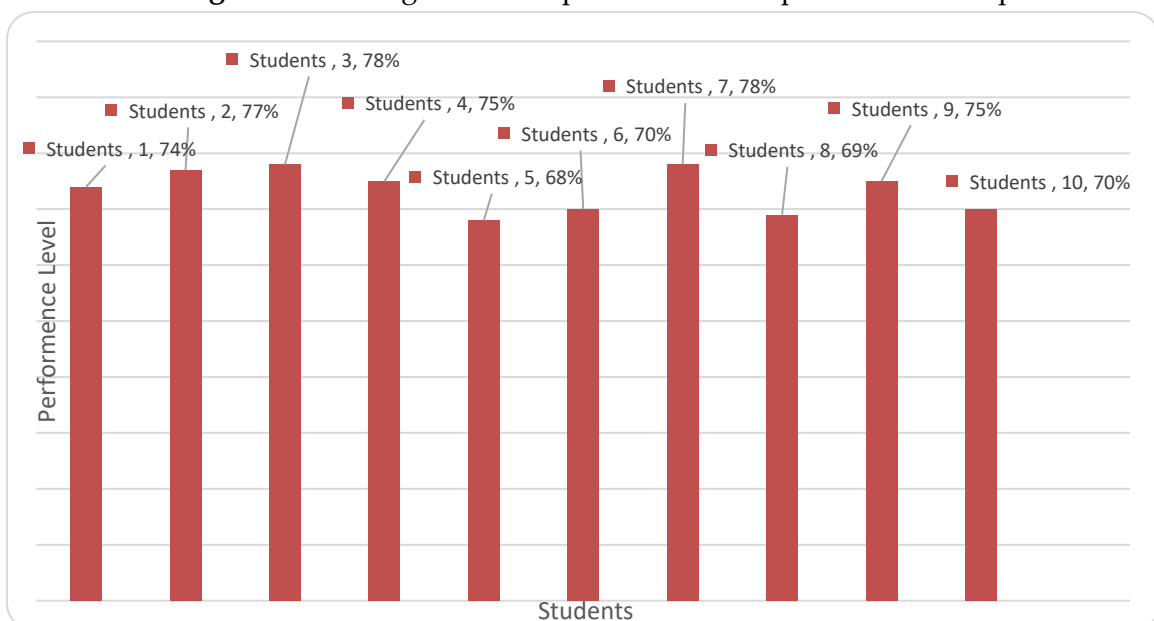
4. Results and Discussion

According to the analysis of the results in Table 1 and Table 2, we can conclude that the metacognitive reading strategy is very effective for enhancing students' thinking skills. Without being exposed to metacognitive reading strategy students can only develop superficial reading comprehension skills to relate words, phrases, and sentences written in the text. A profound understanding of the text requires the assistance of the teacher who can apply to teach metacognitive strategies in reading comprehension. Data obtained from this study hints at the fact that the application of the metacognitive reading strategy is beneficial for students. Students exposed to this strategy demonstrate a higher level of proficiency in reading comprehension.

At the end of the practical implementation, we tried to analyze the results of both groups in comparison to identify their differences in experimental teaching. Prior to our experiment, both the groups were at an equal level of excellence. But after experimentation, we see that the conventional group improves to the level of 63%. The highest improvement of this group is 63%. But the experimental group increases its reading comprehension skills up to 78%. Figure 2 demonstrates clear evidence of reasonable improvement in reading comprehension.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this small-scale experimentation is to exhibit how learners responded differently to different learning strategies. It also focuses on learners' improvement of reading comprehension through short stories. This quantitative research is designed to demonstrate that metacognitive strategies have a firm position in language teaching. As far as it is concerned with the hypothesis of this study, we strongly believe that metacognitive reading strategy is a beneficial and valuable mechanism for improving students' reading skills.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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