

In the Name of the Most High

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The Effect of Metacognitive Strategy Instruction on EFL Learners' Reading
Comprehension Performance and Metacognitive Awareness

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Abstract

As learners have an important role in new teaching methodologies, raising their awareness of learning strategies and helping them utilize these strategies is a crucial aim of teachers. One type of these learning strategies is metacognitive strategies including planning, self-monitoring and self-evaluation. The present study aimed at examining the effect of metacognitive (planning & self-monitoring) strategy instruction on EFL learners' reading comprehension performance (on authentic and inauthentic texts) and their metacognitive awareness. To this end, two tests (TOEFL and a reading comprehension test) and Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) were administered to 93 male and female EFL learners in four phases of this study. At the first phase, TOEFL was administered to all the students both to homogenize students regarding language proficiency and to validate the reading comprehension test. At the second phase, SILL was administered to two experimental and one control groups before strategy instruction. SILL assesses the frequency with which the subjects use a variety of techniques for foreign language learning. At the third phase, two experimental groups received five sessions of instruction on metacognitive strategies, one on planning and the other on self-monitoring strategy based on the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA). Both experimental and control groups worked on authentic and inauthentic texts (some articles from *Readers' Digest* and *Reading Skillfully III*). At the fourth phase, after completion of instruction, the reading comprehension test and SILL questionnaire was administered to all groups. Data analysis revealed that two experimental groups which received instruction on 'planning' and 'self-monitoring' outperformed the control group on the reading comprehension test. Moreover, text type played an important role in the subjects' reading comprehension. The subjects performed better on authentic texts. In addition, the results showed that experimental groups' awareness to metacognitive strategies significantly increased after instruction. The findings of the present study have implications for learners, teachers, and textbook writers in the realm of TEFL in particular and education in general.

Key words: EFL, Metacognitive strategy instruction, Planning, Self-monitoring, Reading comprehension, Authentic and Inauthentic texts.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Increasing emphasis on learners and learning in the field of language learning and teaching has led to numerous studies investigating individual language learning strategies and their relationship to achievement in learning second/foreign languages. Studies have indicated support for appropriate language learning strategies on second/foreign language achievement (Oxford, 1990).

Oxford (1998, p. 8) defines second language learning strategies as "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques...used by students to enhance their own learning." Language learning strategies are specific behaviors or techniques that students use to improve their language learning (Rubin, 1981; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 1993). All language learners, whether they are skilled learners or not, tend to use some kind of language learning strategy in order to enhance language skills. At the early stages in learner-strategy research, strategies used by 'good learners' were identified in order to enhance the learner capabilities of 'poor learners' (Stern, 1975; Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin, 1981; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Chamot & Kupper, 1989, cited in Gamage, 2003).

Recent research tends to concentrate on the complex relationship between language performance and strategy usage (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Hall, 1996; Nam & Oxford, 1998). Much of this line of research agrees that strategies help learners to become autonomous in the target language. There seems to be enough evidence to be confident that strategy instruction can, indeed, be effective at helping students learn more successfully (for example, see Politzer, 1983; O'Malley et al., 1985; Stewner-Manzanares et al., 1985; O'Malley, 1987; Rubin, 1987; Oxford, 1990; Oxford et al., 1990; Mu?iz-Swicegood, 1994; Oxford & Leaver, 1996;

Chamot et al., 1996; Cohen, Weaver, & Li, 1998). Strategy instruction is also effective in promoting learner autonomy, or helping learners take control of their own learning (Oxford et al., 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Stewner-Manzanares et al., 1985). Strategy instruction is also effective in promoting learner autonomy, or helping learners take control of their own learning (Oxford et al., 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Stewner-Manzanares et al., 1985). In addition, strategy training can help teachers become more aware of their students' needs and improve the relationship of their instruction to students' styles and strategies (Oxford et al., 1990; Nyikos, 1996).

Strategy training is defined as the explicit teaching of how, when, and why students should employ learning strategies to enhance their efforts at reaching language program goals (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Cohen, 1998). Since the 1970s, researchers have addressed the need for strategy training in response to the lack of students' awareness of the cognitive tools and strategies available to them.

Much empirical research has been done on the effect of metacognitive strategy instruction on language learning. People like O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Pressley et al. (1990), Nunan (1991), Schraw and Dennison (1994), Green and Oxford (1995), Cohen et al. (1995), Cohen (1996), Nunan (1997), White and Frederiksen (1998), Bransford, Brown and Cocking (1999), Lin and Lehman (1999), Carlisle and Rice (2002), Mokhtari and Reichard (2002), Trenchs Parera (2006), Philip and Kim Hua (2006), just to name a few, worked on the positive effect of metacognitive strategy instruction on language learning.

Moreover, reading has generally been perceived as the most needed skill in students' higher academic pursuit (Jordan, 1997; Flowerdew &

Peacock, 2001). For most EFL students, reading is difficult because, in their past experiences, they used to read intensively and focus mainly on the details of language.

To be a successful reader, student needs efficient reading strategies. According to Barnett (1989, p. 66), reading strategies refer to the "mental operations involved when readers purposefully approach a text to make sense of what they read." In a way, reading strategies reveal the readers' resources for comprehension and indicate how readers conceive a task, what textual cues they attend to, how they make sense of what they read, and what they do when they do not understand (Block, 1986). They range from bottom-up vocabulary strategies such as simply rereading difficult segments and guessing the meaning of an unknown word from context or looking up the word in the dictionary, to more comprehensive strategies such as summarizing and relating what is being read to the reader's background knowledge (Janzen, 1996). Put simply, reading strategies are "plans for solving problems encountered in constructing meaning" (Duffy, 1993, p. 232).

Reading strategies are of interest for what they reveal about the way readers manage their interaction with the written text and how these strategies are related to text comprehension (Carrell, 1989).

During reading comprehension process, reader and text are interacting with each other. According to Halliday (1978), texts represent the specific linguistic choices writers are making to achieve their aims against the backdrop of all the other ways they might have expressed themselves, i.e. the "meaning potential" (p. 148). Halliday (1989, p. 10) clarified the text as follows:

Text looks as though it is made of words and sentences; it is really made of

meanings. Of course the meanings have to be expressed, or coded, in words and linguistic structures... in order to be communicated; but as a thing in itself, a text is essentially a semantic unit. It is not something that can be defined as being just another kind of sentence, only bigger.

By considering discourse, Kress (1988) provided another definition for text as "a structure of messages or message traces which has a socially ascribed unity" whilst discourse "refers to the social process in which texts are embedded... text is the material object produced in discourse" (p. 6).

As Harden (1995) equates the act of reading with a communicative event, reading involves the interaction among the reader, the text, and the author. Referring to the nature of this interaction, readers' interactions with the text are also affected by the manner they approach learning tasks.

"Psychological and psycholinguistic research strongly indicate that the quality of reading as psychological processing of the target language input depends on whether the reader finds the text personally significant" (Nilsson, 2003, p. 4), that is, if the text relates to the reader's background knowledge and experiences, interests and information need. According to Little et al. (1989, p. 6) "this can be accomplished by using carefully chosen authentic texts".

There has been a widespread increase in the use of authentic materials for foreign language teaching over the recent years. The reason for this attempt is that a close association has been established between the use of authentic materials and the development of communication (Widdowson, 1990).

Using authentic materials as a teaching tool is a way of making efficient use of the learner's time, by directly addressing the target language

and providing a means for the learner to get more acquainted with the foreign language. Tasks which present authentic materials are contextually rich and provide insights into the learner's community. On the other hand, it is said that authentic materials might be too culturally biased or they might be difficult for lower level learners to decode (Nunan, 1999). Much empirical research has been done on the effect of authenticity on language learning. People like Shrum and Glisan (1994), Mindt (1996), Kennedy (1998), Young (1999), Hauptman (2000), Pritchard and Nasr (2004), Wallace (2006), and Bndaka (2007), just to name a few, worked on the effect of authenticity on language learning. To determine correlations among learning strategies, reading comprehension, and authenticity, some empirical studies have been conducted in EAP contexts such as Ems-Wilson (2000), Smith (2003), and Cain (2004).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

As Grabe (1991) mentions reading is probably the most important skill for second language learners in academic context but according to Van Wyk (2001), many students enter higher education underprepared for reading demands which this is often due to their low level of reading strategy knowledge and lack of metacognitive control. Research on learning strategies focus on diverse issues of the reading comprehension process (Li & Munby, 1996; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Schoonen et al., 1998; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001).

Several studies show that strategy instruction is effective in promoting learner autonomy, or helping learners take control of their own learning (Stewner-Manzanares et al., 1985; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Oxford et al., 1990).

Furthermore, interactive reading processes involve the presence of both reader and text (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). Lazaraton and Skuder (1997) found that even the most recent texts fell short on authenticity criteria used. For this reason, teachers need to become critical consumers of published materials. "Bring authentic data into the classroom can assist learners ... to make communicative meanings ... nonauthentic language, in some respects, actually makes the task for the language learner more difficult" (Nunan, 1999, pp.80-81).

Some Studies are conducted on the relation between language learning strategies specifically metacognitive strategies, reading comprehension and text authenticity for example Li and Munby (1996), Schoonen and co-researchers (1998), Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001), and Smith (2003).

Although similar studies related to this research have been conducted in EAP context, the effect of metacognitive strategies instruction on learner's reading comprehension performance regarding authentic and inauthentic texts has not been previously reported in EFL context. The present study focuses on the effect of planning and self-monitoring strategies instruction on the EFL learners' reading comprehension performance. Moreover, it intends to explore the effect of text (authentic or inauthentic) on their reading comprehension performance. It also examines the effect of metacognitive strategy instruction on EFL learners' metacognitive awareness.

1.3. Significance and Justification of the Study

This study intends to investigate the effect of metacognitive (planning and self-monitoring) strategy instruction on EFL learners' reading

comprehension performance on authentic versus inauthentic texts. Moreover, it intends to explore the effect of metacognitive strategy instruction on EFL learners' metacognitive awareness.

As Williams (1986, p. 43) argues, "The pendulum has swung towards an emphasis on teaching appropriate skills and strategies". Most of the research in the field of learning strategy instruction has focused on reading strategies as one of the important language skills (Carrell, 1998). There seems to be enough evidence to be confident that strategy instruction can, indeed, be effective at helping students learn more successfully (Mu?iz-Swicegood, 1994; Chamot et al., 1996; Oxford & Leaver, 1996; Cohen, Weaver, & Li, 1998).

Furthermore, Grabe (1997) cited that strategy instruction can improve reading abilities, and that strategic efficiency in reading distinguishes good readers from poor readers (Lysynchuk, Pressley, & Vye, 1990; Pressley et al., 1995; Slavin, 1995; Brown et al., 1996).

Davies (1995) argues that good reading task makes use of authentic and challenging texts. The advantage of using authentic data is that "learners encounter target language items in the kinds of contexts where they naturally occur, rather than in contexts that have been concocted by a textbook writer" (Nunan, 1999, p. 27). Authentic texts "help even the learners at the lower levels to make sense of these real texts, and to develop effective learning strategies for reading" and other skills (Nunan, 1999, p. 80).

Celce-Murcia (2001) maintains that "the use of authentic engaging materials should be the basis for in-class activity" (p.110). "Good learners become actively involved as participants in authentic language use" (Stern, 1991, p. 411). Sigal (2001) suggests that good readers have an enhanced metacognitive awareness of their own use of strategies but the same

researcher holds that more research is necessary to reinforce this conclusion.

Some studies on the relation between language learning strategies and reading comprehension studies in ESL/EFL context have been outlined here.

Schoonen and co-researchers (1998) explored the relationship between metacognition, vocabulary knowledge, and reading comprehension in both native language and English as a foreign language.

Carlisle and Rice (2002) showed that when teachers provide instruction on specific strategies to monitor and repair comprehension, it improves children's reading achievement.

According to Scruggs (cited in Yang, 2002) research results suggested that direct teaching in metacognitive strategies may be useful and that independent use develops gradually.

Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) investigated whether significant differences exist between first and second language readers in their metacognitive awareness and perceived use of specific strategies when reading for academic purposes in English. They reported remarkably similar patterns of strategy awareness and reported usage when reading academic materials in English.

Trenchs Parera (2006) in a small-scale study of three educated readers studied the process of reading literary texts in a foreign language. The study explored the repertoire of strategies used by educated, non-native readers of literature and their progress in the use and awareness of those strategies after receiving academic instruction. Results evidenced the use of a great variety of cognitive, support and metacognitive strategies although, over time, some of them became less frequent or even disappeared. The study showed that repertoires of strategies change in time but also that each reader changes differently.

Philip and Kim Hua (2006) studied the implication of metacognitive strategy instruction (MSI) in context of academic reading at an ESL tertiary environment in Malaysia. The MSI incorporates the correlation of cognition that teacher provides the learners not only with constructing scaffolding on such strategies like planning, monitoring, problem solving, and evaluating, but also conceptual scaffolding on meaning construction process from the text. The analysis revealed that both the high proficient and low proficient learners demonstrate a strong sense of metacognitive awareness in terms of strategy use. The results suggested that MSI helps not only in sensitizing the learners to the utility of strategies, but also in transforming the learners into effective strategy users.

Moreover, in EAP context, some research was conducted on the relation of strategies, reading comprehension and authentic/ inauthentic texts which some of them are explained here.

Ems-Wilson (2000) used a test requiring students to apply chemistry principles and evaluate molecules. In the research, a more authentic test format was implemented, namely an application test that required students to draw Lewis structures. Students were given a formula and space on the test to draw the structure. Based on the preponderance of literature reporting the superiority of elaborative interrogation compared with rereading, it was presumed that students assigned to elaborative interrogation would perform better on the tests.

Smith (2003) also used authentic text from a college biology course-required textbook. Students were given separate paper with statements that paraphrased text paragraphs and were directed to explain why the paraphrased statements were true. Students read the materials using either the elaborative interrogation strategy or repetitive reading. Those using

elaborative interrogation benefited with greater recall on a posttest than those who used repetitive reading.

Cain (2004) studied the effectiveness of comprehension strategies with authentic text in a chemistry college environment. Results indicated that the more effective strategy was undetermined when reading authentic text in this setting. However, prior knowledge level was identified as a statistically significant factor for learning from authentic text. That is, students with high prior knowledge learned more, regardless of assigned strategy.

In consequence of these studies, much insight has been provided into the nature of reading comprehension, language learning strategies, and the role of authentic/inauthentic texts. The present study intends to investigate the gap in EFL setting, whether strategy instruction has the same effect on reading performance regarding authentic and inauthentic texts. Is authentic text superior to inauthentic? Moreover, this study intends to explore the effect of metacognitive strategy instruction on EFL learners' metacognitive awareness. Finally, the findings might provide much insight for material developers who incorporate learning strategies and authentic/inauthentic texts in their teaching materials. It is also beneficial for language learners who want to improve their language learning strategies and advance in language learning.

1.5. Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

1. Does planning strategy instruction have any significant effect on EFL learners' reading comprehension performance on authentic vs. inauthentic texts?
2. Does self-monitoring strategy instruction have any significant