# SHEIKHBAHAEE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

## THE ROLE OF USING METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' READING SKILL

A THESISSUBMITED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING ENGLISHAS A FOREIG LANGUAGE

by

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE CONTENT FORMAT AND THE QUALITY OF PRESENTATION OF THE THESIS SUBMITTED BY

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# THE ROLE OF USING METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' READING SKILL

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# DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

## Dedicated To:

# My Family & My Friends

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## LIST OF ABREVIATIONS

CALLA…… cognitive academic language learning approach

ETR…… experiment-text-relationship

MARSI……. metacognitive awareness of reading strategies instruction

SM…… semantic mapping

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of ten specified metacognitive reading strategies on Iranian EFL freshmen's English reading skill and

reading comprehension. In this study 63 (24 male and 39 female) EFL freshmen students of Sheikhbahaee University received instruction in metacognitive strategies for reading comprehension. Metacognitive strategies are those strategies which require students to think about their own thinking as they plan, arrange and evaluate it. Participants were taught metacognitive strategies of reading comprehension in ten sessions. The experimental group received explicit instruction on metacognitive strategies beginning from the first session. Chamot & O'Malley's (1994) Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) was chosen and applied in the strategy training phase. The collected data was analyzed using ANCOVA. The results showed that effective metacognitive reading comprehension strategies can influence Iranian EFL university students' learning experience and improve their English reading achievement. This study has its potential in contributing to our deeper understanding of metacognitive reading strategy of EFL readers and also provides further evidence for the benefits of metacognitive strategy training.

**Keywords:** reading strategies, metacognition, metacognitive reading strategies, CALLA

# Chapter One

# Introduction

## Introduction

### 1.1. Preliminaries

Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process (Adams, 1990). In order to comprehend texts, the students need to be able to read the texts and understand the meaning of words. Carlisle and Rice (2002) found that the lack of phonological sensitivity would prevent the students from reading to a certain extent, but other factors also came into play as students progressed through different levels of reading comprehension because those students who receive phonological awareness training do not necessarily become fluent readers. Scarborough (2001) believed that in addition to decoding skills, students need vocabulary knowledge and metacognitive skills, so that they can monitor their comprehension and reflect on what has been read. Skilled readers often learn these parts simultaneously and fluently. In addition, if one of these parts is missed, comprehension could be slowed down.

Followed by metacognitive studies in the L1 context, second language researchers have also drawn increasing attention to metacognitive strategies in second language learning, especially in the reading skill. Many second language reading researchers have pointed out the positive correlation of proficient second language readers with more awareness of using appropriate reading strategies in English reading tasks (Barnett, 1988; Devine, 1984; Kern, 1989; Pardon and Waxman, 1988). Moreover, several researchers (Carrell, 1998; Cordero-Ponce, 2000; Sheorey and Mokhtari, 2001) assert that in order to make reading strategies effective in the reading process, metacognitive awareness or metacognition must be employed.

Metacognitive knowledge or awareness is the knowledge about learners' themselves, it is thinking about thinking. To gain this knowledge, teacher's part is to work to guide students to become more strategic thinkers by helping them understand the

way they process information (Fountas and Pinnell, 2000). Applying metacognition in the language learning field, it refers to the action that one uses for planning, organizing, evaluating, and monitoring of his or her language learning (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

## 1.2. **Statement of the Problem**

Nowadays, most English teachers in Iran are under great pressure to prepare their EFL students for the examinations and covering the materials in the specified time. Some may argue that they don't have enough time to spend on teaching their students how to self-direct, learn and read. In order to meet the student's expectations, most of them are hard-working teachers, trying to teach whatever they know and to cover whatever their EFL students need to know in order to perform well in the exams. Fan (2009) asserted that EFL teachers may feel it would be more useful to teach their EFL students test-taking strategies, which are different from reading comprehension strategies for effective understanding of the texts. However, while these test-taking strategies could have helped them get good grades, their ability for deep understanding of the reading materials might not have improved. So this question may arises, why after teaching all the materials and giving the students so much English knowledge without wasting class time in other things, the EFL students don't read well or tolerate well comprehending of the texts. As Wang (2009) argued one good reason behind this problem is that EFL students are not taught how to be independent learners; dependence on English teachers' instruction can hardly allow them to reach a satisfactory level. However, to master or acquire a second language, EFL students would be able to take control over their learning process and also,

read more and comprehend well to expand their exposure to language input and to improve their English proficiency level.

So, lack of awareness of metacognitive strategies is one of the main problems facing students of foreign languages. As students learn, understand, and make effective use of metacognitive strategies they would be able to comprehend better.

Several studies have revealed that students who had previously struggled with reading deficiencies attributable to poor attitudes about reading, low motivation, and poor self-image increased their confidence and improved their comprehension once they learned and applied metacognitive strategies to their reading (Caposey & Heider, 2003; Serran, 2002). All these researchers who studied in this field saw a direct relationship between student's growth in reading comprehension and the application of metacognitive strategies. If students want to be more successful in reading comprehension, they must understand different strategies and know how to apply them to reading tasks they encounter in EFL contexts. So, it is a good idea to teach how to use a variety of strategies in EFL reading classes.

## 1.3. Purpose and Scope of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how metacognitive reading strategy training affects Iranian students' reading comprehension in English. It also intends to determine the relationship between use of metaconitive strategies and students' reading comprehension among Iranian EFL students. Another favorable goal of metacognitive reading strategy instruction is hoping that it can make Iranian EFL students to manage

their using of reading strategies and use them selectively and flexibly according to different reading tasks they face.

### 1.3.1. Research Question

The research question posed for this study is as follows:

1. To what extent would metacognitive strategies use lead to an improvement in the reading comprehension of Iranian EFL students?

### 1.3.2. Research hypothesis

1) There are meaningful differences in the reading comprehension scores between the group that receives metacognitive strategy training and the group that receives no metacognitive strategy training.

## 1.4. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential for contributing to our deeper understanding of metacognitive reading strategies in EFL readers. This study also provided further evidence for the benefits of metacognitive strategy training.

This study has implications for learners, teachers, and teacher educators in the realm of language learning and helps teachers in accomplishing their challenging task of teaching English. Teachers would be better able to help learners use different metacognitive strategies to facilitate their reading comprehension.

## 1.5. Definitions of Key Terms

**Reading Strategies:** Oxford and Crookall (1989) define strategies as learning techniques, behaviors, and problem-solving or study skills which make learning more effective and efficient. Applied to second language reading context, reading strategies are processes used by the learners to enhance reading comprehension and overcome comprehension failures.

**Metacognition:** It is a term for thinking about one's own thinking processes (Institute for Habits of Mind, n.d.). It is the process of thinking about one's own actions emotionally and intellectually. It involves cognitive skills as well as motivation. Metacognition consists of two basic processes occurring simultaneously: monitoring one's progress as learning occurs, and making changes and adapting strategies if one perceives he/she is not doing well (Hobson, 2008).

**Metacognitive Reading Strategy**: Metacognitive reading strategies are behaviors carried out by the learners to plan, arrange, and evaluate their own reading. Such strategies include direct attention and self-evaluation, organization, setting goals and objectives, seeking practice opportunities, and so forth. In the context of reading, self-monitoring and correction of errors are further example of metacognitive reading strategies ( Singhal, 2001 ).

**The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach:** The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) is an instructional model for second and foreign language learners based on cognitive theory and research. CALLA integrates instruction in priority topics from the content curriculum, development of the language skills needed for learning in school, and explicit instruction in using learning strategies

for academic tasks. The goals of CALLA are for students to learn essential academic content and language and to become independent and self-regulated learners through their increasing command over a variety of strategies for learning in school. CALLA can be used in ESL, EFL, bilingual, foreign language, and general education classrooms (Chamot & Robins, 2007).

# Chapter Two

# Review of Literature

## 2.1. Overview

The purpose of this study is to test the effects of metacognitive reading strategies on Iranian EFL freshmen's English reading skill and reading comprehension. In order to understand the context of this study, a review of related literature is presented in the following sections: (1) reading comprehension in second language learning; (2) reading strategies and second language; (3) metacognition; (4) metacognitive strategies in reading comprehension; (5) studies on reading strategies; (6) relevant research on metacognitive strategies in reading comprehension including descriptive and experimental studies along with their findings and brief criticisms of any shortcomings, and the related metacognitive strategy studies on Iranian learners were presented.

## 2.2. Reading Comprehension in Second Language Learning

It is very difficult to define the term comprehension. Reduced to its simplest elements, it might be said that comprehension is part of the communication process of getting the thoughts that were in author's mind into the reader's mind. This is a difficult process because it involves the transmission of ideas through several imperfect media. For example, the author must have a clear idea in his mind, and then reduce this idea to the written language. This will then be printed and finally the reader looks at the printed words and forms an idea.

Reading can be thought of as being on two levels. First, the reader should get objective information i.e. facts. According to Adams (1990) these facts require little interpretation or judgment. Then, on a higher level, the reader should be able to get subjective information, i.e. the tone and the mood of the story, unstated ideas or the