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READING STRATEGIES OF SECOND LANGUAGE READERS AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

The most important problem faced by ESL students in colleges is that they cannot understand what they need. One major characteristic of successful readers is that they are aware of and use variety of strategies to decode the texts. This line of research has been useful in instructing the struggling L2 readers to improve their comprehension. This paper attempts to present a research study that deals with the metacognitive awareness and use of reading strategies among postgraduate English major students in encountering academic texts. Integrating metacognitive awareness and reading strategies can transform students into constructively responsive readers.

**Key words :** Metacognition, strategy, constructively responsive reading.

The Hallmark of a Literate Person Is the ability to read fluently and efficiently. It is important for students at all levels of education to read with appropriate speed and comprehension. Krashen (1993) suggested that for non-native speakers, reading in the target language "is a powerful means of developing literacy, of developing reading comprehension ability, writing style, vocabulary, grammar and spelling" (p.22). For accessing new information, the ability to read in English, especially informational texts has become a pre requisite for students.

Unfortunately, the important problem faced by our students in colleges is that while they can read, they often have difficulty in comprehending what they read. The students find it difficult to understand the main idea of the text, make simple influences or evaluate the information. They can read but they cannot understand what they read. Hence, many students need remediation in reading. It is also necessary to understand the underlying causes for various difficulties faced by students while reading and to develop instructional strategies for improving our students' reading ability.

A number of research studies have dealt with what successful readers do when they engage in extracting meaning from a written text. One major characteristic of successful readers is that they are aware of and use a variety of strategies to decode the texts. Pressley and afflerbach (1995) have reported that proficient readers are strategic and constructively responsive and take conscious steps to comprehend what they are reading. This line of research has been useful in instructing the struggling L2 readers to increase their awareness and use of reading strategies to improve comprehension.

The purpose of this paper is to present a research study that deals with the reading strategies of postgraduate English major students when they read academic texts, and to suggest implication for reading instruction in English which is considered as a second language. The participants involved in this study are the

postgraduate English major students of arts and science college in Virudhunagar , one of the southern districts of Tamilnadu State, India. In this paper, we try to contribute to the research on one crucial aspect of reading, namely, metacognitive awareness and use of reading strategies.

In order for a reader to accomplish the task of comprehending the text successfully, the reader must be aware of and conscious of using various strategies. Strategic awareness and monitoring of comprehension process are critically important aspects of skilled readers. Such awareness and monitoring is often referred to as “metacognition” ,which can be thought of as readers’ knowledge about themselves as readers.

Metacognition is, according to Grade and Stoller (2002), “our knowledge of what we know .... (which) permits us to reflect on our planning, goal setting, processing of tasks, monitoring of progress and repair of problems”. Metacognition, according to Auerbach and Paxton (1997), “Entails knowledge of strategies for processing texts, the ability to adjust monitor comprehension, and the ability to adjust strategies as needed” (pp.240-241).

The importance of Metacognitive awareness in reading comprehension is influenced by an array of research. (eg., Baker & Brown, 1984; Block, 1992; Carrell, 1998; Garner, 1987; Paris & Jacobs, 1984; Sheorey,2006; Sheorey & Mokhtari,2001). Reza Aghaie and Lawrence Jun Zhang explored the effect of explicit teaching of reading strategies on English as a foreign language (EFL) students’ reading performance in Iran. Their results showed that reading strategy instruction contributed to the autonomous reading behaviors. Per Urlaub investigated the effect of reading comprehension strategy of generating questions on literary reading development in 1.2. The result suggested improvement in learners’ ability to critically read literary texts in the second language. The research literature indicates the need to understand , Metacognitive knowledge and reading strategies in order to develop our students into active, constructively responsive readers.

Strategies, according to Paris, Wasik and Turner (1991) “are actions selected deliberately to achieve particular goals” (P.611). In case of reading, deliberate or conscious procedures are used by readers to enhance text comprehension. In other words, strategies are mental activities that readers undertake to comprehend written texts. Some examples of reading strategies as identified by Grabe (1991) are : “adjusting the reading speed, skimming ahead, considering Titles, Headings, Pictures and text information, anticipating information to come and so on” (P.379). Knowledge and understanding of these strategies provides a plan of attack and use of these strategies provides a sense of control over the reading process.

Researchers have developed ways to measure students’ Metacognitive awareness and use of reading strategies. The research tool used in this study is survey of reading strategies (Mokhtari & Sheorey,2002). It is particularly designed to identify the reading strategies of English as second language (ESL) students. The SORS helps to measure the type and frequency of reading strategies perceived to be used by ESL students while encountering academic materials in English (such as text books, journal articles, class notes, etc.). The SORS consists of 30 items each of which uses a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (“I never or almost never do this”) to 5 (“I always or almost always do this”). Students were asked to read each statement and circle the number that applies to them, indicating the frequency with which they used the particular strategy mentioned in the statements.

The SORS measure of three broad categories of reading strategies, namely, global strategies, problem – solving strategies and support strategies.

- Global strategies are techniques by which learners manage their reading acts. eg. Having a purpose in mind, previewing the text, using typographical aids and tables and pictures.
- Problem – solving strategies are techniques which learners use when problems develop in understanding the text. eg. Adjusting reading speed when the material becomes difficult or easy, guessing the meaning of unknown words, and rereading for better comprehension.
- Support strategies are aids used by readers to comprehend the text eg. Using a dictionary, taking notes and underlining or highlighting.

#### Data collection and analysis

The SORS was administered in the classroom. 54 postgraduate English major students (Male -26, female -28) is the sample size for this study. The Students were informed of the purpose of the survey and the

fact that there was no right or wrong answers. They were asked to record their honest opinion for each of the SORS statement.

Responses given by the students were examined in terms of the three strategy categories mentioned earlier, namely, global strategies, problem solving strategies and support strategies. The overall mean of the sample is 3.5, indicating a high over all perceived use of reading strategies among the students. The overall mean values for all the strategies taken together is higher for females (male M=3.3 vs. female M=3.7).

#### **Limitation and implications**

The findings reported in this study relate to the metacognitive awareness and use of reading strategies among the postgraduate English major Students of arts & Science College in Virudhunagar, one of the southern districts of Tamilnadu State, India. In the age of information, it is imperative to integrate metacognitive reading strategies instruction to enable students to become proficient readers. Such instruction Which can help promote an increased awareness and reading strategies to the struggling L2 students, can be a powerful way to promote skillful reading.

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