Analytical study of Awareness of Metacognitive Reading Strategies and Reading Comprehension among College Students

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Abstract

The current study investigates first-year college students' awareness of metacognition reading strategies and their capacity to comprehend written content. The research focuses on first-year college students in the district of Shaheed Benazirabad, with data collected from 350 participants using a non-random sampling method, constituting approximately 23.33% of the targeted population. A cross-sectional survey was conducted using two instruments – MARSQ and a reading comprehension passage with literal, inferential, and evaluative multiple-choice questions. Data was processed using SPSS Version 22 in line with the research questions. The results indicate that both genders excel in answering literal questions but face challenges at the inferential level. However, their performance in evaluative questions is unsatisfactory, with both genders scoring significantly low. The analysis of metacognitive strategies reveals a notable emphasis on problem-solving strategies among students, surpassing other strategies. These findings provide valuable insights into the awareness of reading strategies and the overall reading comprehension levels among college students in the studied district.

***Key words**: Cognition, Comprehension, Metacognition, Reading.*

Introduction

The English language is now extensively recognized as an international language. Hence, it has become mandatory to learn it. In Shamim's perspective (2012), fluency in English is deemed crucial as it is a gateway to success and facilitates upward social mobility. Iwai, Filce and Ramp (2011) argue that reading is necessary for academic success. For that, students must read a lot and develop reading proficiency in word recognition, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. It is the only language in Pakistan regarded as worth learning, and it has marginalized almost all other local languages. Success, development, and prosperity are often linked with the learning of the English language.

English encompasses four primary skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This study focuses on one skill of the language, which is reading. There is a common complaint in Pakistan, which is often proved by research, that students struggle with reading from class one up to university. Reading constitutes one of the language's essential skills, which is considered a gateway to all other knowledge. However, there needs to be more understanding about the reading. It is often associated with pronunciation. Bilal, Tariq, Masood, and Nasim (2013) articulate that the essence of reading lies in extracting meaning from a text, emphasizing that reading devoid of comprehension amounts to mere noise.

In Pakistan, despite English being categorized as a second language, it is systematically taught across educational levels, starting from primary education and extending through graduate studies. However, our students need help with it (Zaki & Fareed, 2012). Students encounter challenges in the English language from elementary school through university. Out of the four language skills, reading occupies a significant position. Nawab (2012) says that all new learning comes through reading. Khan (2014) defines reading as an active and interactive process. Unfortunately, the students are taught and trained to repeat the teacher's exact words. A slight variation from the teacher's version is unacceptable and is considered wrong. The purpose of reading is comprehension. If the reader needs to grasp the meaning of their reading, it becomes a complete waste of time and an unproductive activity. Bilal, Tariq, Masood, and Nasim (2013) define reading comprehension as a process in which a reader uses his/ her senses to understand the message in printed material (Ahmad, Bibi, & Imran, 2023).

The aim of the reading is nothing else but understanding. With comprehension, reading is a good use of time. According to Khan (2014), teachers do not employ any instructional strategies for

reading to foster learners' independence in reading. Understanding metacognitive strategies empowers students to evolve into self-directed learners, as Iftikhar (2014) asserts. The earlier studies elucidate the concept of reading comprehension and provide insights into methods for enhancing reading comprehension among students. Regrettably, minimal effort is being made to cultivate students' capacity to comprehend various texts independently.

Review of Related Literature

According to Khan (2014), reading is a participatory and dynamic process. Students should also understand how to start their thought processes and how to read. Engaging in a dialogue with the writer via the text is a cognitive process that occurs during reading (Zare, 2013). Previous studies show that communicating with the English language presents challenges for students in general and college students in particular. According to Dhanapala (2010), reading is an intentional, active process incorporating several word-level abilities, including vocabulary, fluency, and decoding (Villanueva, 2022).

Similarly, it includes higher-order language skills, including self-reflection, assessing comprehension, drawing conclusions from prior information, inference, and prediction. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2012), reading is complex and needs a teacher's support. It has been noted that teachers get satisfied when they witness kids reading simply and accurately. Through this practice, they cannot advance to the point where they can interpret the text and decipher what is written inside and outside the lines.

Fielding and Pearson (1994) defined reading comprehension as a multifaceted process involving thought, experience, and knowledge. Interferential and evaluative thinking are involved. It goes beyond simply copying the author's exact words. In a similar vein, McNamara (2007) asserts that comprehension requires going beyond the text's actual words and appreciating the ideas and relationships between them that are conveyed. However, the reader's motivation level and cultural background can impact comprehension. When it comes to teaching comprehension, teachers may make a big difference (Öztürk, & Aydogmus, 2021). The teacher's duties include imparting decoding skills, improving fluency, enhancing and activating prior knowledge, teaching vocabulary terms, inspiring pupils, and encouraging individual reactions to texts (Prado, 2004). Zare (2013) has shown that reading methods and comprehension are significantly correlated. McNamara (2007) argued that teaching pupils reading methods can boost comprehension. A proficient reader must understand when and how to apply comprehension-

enhancing techniques. Reading comprehension is significantly increased when struggling readers are taught reading strategies. Thus, reading strategy instruction should be a core component of formal education. According to Khan (2014), teachers do not employ reading teaching tactics to help students become autonomous readers, nor do they provide the skills to apply cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies.

Similarly, "metacognitive awareness is a process of understanding the necessary strategies to process a text, being able to comprehend it and apply appropriate strategies as necessary," according to Anjomshoaa, Golestan, and Anjomshoaa (2012). Numerous studies have been published that demonstrate how students' reading comprehension can be improved by applying metacognitive reading awareness. "Awareness and monitoring of one's comprehension processes are critically important aspects of skilled reading," as Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) note. The awareness and application of metacognitive reading strategies distinguish proficient and incompetent readers (Suhag, Wassan, Oad, & Soomro, 2018).

A skilled reader makes the best use of metacognitive reading techniques, unlike a less experienced reader who does not. Zare (2013) emphasizes that reading comprehension achievement and the application of reading methods are significantly correlated.

Knowing is the process of cognition. In contrast, "meta" comes from the Greek word "beyond." Therefore, metacognition refers to how we know or learn, deliberately manage our learning process, and take responsibility for our education. Metacognition is the understanding and management of cognitive functions. It involves awareness, command, organizing, observing, fixing, editing, condensing, and assessing. Students' reading comprehension skills and metacognitive knowledge of reading methods are strongly correlated (Wu & Van, 2012; Dabarera et al., 2014). Metacognition knowledge is essential for fully comprehending the material (Iwai et al., 2011; Fathima & Saravanakumar, 2012).

Research Questions

1. Which metacognitive reading strategies (Global, Problem-solving, and Support) do college students employ when engaging with academic texts?
2. How proficient are college students in terms of reading comprehension, specifically in the areas of Literal, Inferential, and Evaluative understanding?
3. Which gender (boys or girls) makes maximum use of metacognitive reading strategies?

Research Design

In 2012, Bhattacharjee defined research design as a comprehensive plan for data collection. Its goal is to answer the research question/ hypothesis. Cross-sectional research is the most used research method in social science that examines a single point in time snapshot (Neuman, 2007; Cohen et al., 2000; Ahmad, Thomas, & Hamid, 2020). The total population of this study was 1500 students studying at Government (boys) Degree College Nawabshah and s Government (girls) Degree College Nawabshah district Shaheed Benazirabad. They were homogeneous in age groups, mother tongue, exposure and educational and cultural background. Convenience sampling techniques were used in the study (Ali, Ahmad, & Sewani, 2022). Data analysis is carried out by descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation, and cross-tabulation.

Research Instruments

Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire

MARSQ (Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategies Questionnaire) was used to assess students' awareness of metacognitive knowledge. Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) say that "(MARSQ) is planned to assess 6th to 12th-grade students` awareness and perceived use of the reading strategies while reading academic or school-related material" (p. 251). The internal consistency reliability coefficient (as determined by Cronbach's alpha) was 0.92 for the Global Reading Strategies, 0.79 for the Problem-Solving Strategies, and 0.87 for the Problem-Solving Strategies. Moreover, to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire translated into Urdu, inter-coder reliability was checked by the professors of the two universities. An online KAPA calculator was used to measure the reliability of the translation. The result of the online kappa calculator is 0.94, which shows the instruments' perfect inter-coder reliability.

Reading Comprehension Test

In this research, a reading comprehension test is created to assess students' understanding across literal, inferential, and evaluative levels. An expository type of text consisting of multiple-choice questions was selected for the study. Flesch Reading Ease is 61.8 (easy) and Flesch Kincaid Grade Level is 9.5. The test items were carefully prepared by the researcher with extensive discussion with the research supervisor to avoid any ambiguity. Moreover, test items were given to two professors for expert opinion who specialized in that area.

Descriptive Statistics of the Sample of the Study

Table: 1
Profile of the Students

Respondents` Demographic		*F*	%
Age	Under 20years	336	96
	20 to23years	11	3.1
	24 to 27years	03	.9
Gender	Male	175	50
	Female	175	50
Residence	Urban	243	69.4
	Rural	107	30.6
Education	Govt.	157	44.9
	Private	193	55.1
Ethnicity	Pathan	4	1.1
	Baloch	33	9.4
	Urdu Speaker	98	28
	Sindhi	158	45.1
	Seraiki	27	7.7
	Punjabi	30	8.6
Grade	A1-80% & above	54	15.4
	A- 70% & above	159	45.4
	B- 60% & above	107	30.6
	C- 50% & above	30	8.6
n= 350			

Table: 2
Global strategies

		Male		*Female*		*T. Mean*
No	Items of Global Strategies	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*
1	GS1	3.77	1.138	4.21	1.146	3.99
2	GS2	3.77	1.143	3.92	1.069	3.84
3	GS3	3.50	1.188	4.06	1.138	3.78
4	GS4	3.56	1.225	3.83	1.229	3.69
5	GS5	3.11	1.254	3.51	1.339	3.31
6	GS6	3.91	1.259	4.03	1.174	3.97
7	GS7	3.67	1.279	4.10	1.070	3.89
8	GS8	3.66	1.153	3.85	1.137	3.75
9	GS9	2.86	1.403	3.10	1.417	3.98
10	GS10	3.29	1.180	3.66	1.128	3.47
11	GS11	3.89	1.075	4.18	1.016	4.03
12	GS12	3.86	.973	4.13	.969	3.99
13	GS13	3.55	1.202	4.03	1.047	3.79
n= 350	Total mean	3.56		3.89		

Findings of Global Strategies

The mean of the male students is 3.569, and the mean of female students is 3.89. According to the key, 3.5 or above average is considered high. The scores of both genders show that both genders are highly aware of this strategy. However, the mean of female students is comparatively higher than that of boys, confirming that girls are more knowledgeable about global strategies. The meaning of the global strategies shows that all students check their understanding when coming across conflicting information. The findings show that all students use this strategy (4.03) more than others. It is also noticed that the second topmost strategies are having a purpose in mind and guessing about the text are the second most used strategies.

Table: 3
Problem solving strategies.

No	Items of Problem-Solving Strategies	Male		Female		T. Mean
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*
1	PSS1	4.22	1.01	4.59	.824	4.41
2	PSS2	4.18	.989	4.55	.800	4.37
3	PSS3	3.65	1.155	4.01	1.127	3.83
4	PSS4	3.20	1.326	3.67	1.395	4.29
5	PSS5	4,14	1.010	4.38	1.049	3.75
6	PSS6	3.75	1.185	4.02	.985	3.44
7	PSS7	3.57	1.206	3.93	1.194	4.26
8	PSS8	4.13	.992	4.45	.901	3.89
n=	350 Total mean	3.82		4.20		

Findings of Problem-Solving Strategies

The mean score of the boys is 3.82, whereas the mean score of the girls is 4.20. In this strategy, the score of girls is higher than that of boys. Therefore, girls are more aware of problem-solving strategies than boys. The overall means of all students shows that the problem-solving strategies are the most used strategies among all the strategies.

Table: 4
Support strategies

No	Items of *Support Strategies*	Male		Female		T. Mean
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*
1	SS1	3.99	1.168	3,49	.837	4.09
2	SS2	3.35	1.458	3.49	1.527	3.42
3	SS3	3.77	1.142	3.99	1.179	3.88
4	SS4	3.59	1.151	3.57	1.371	3.58
5	SS5	3.18	1.301	4.09	1.110	3.95
6	SS6	3.59	1.301	3.82	1.218	3.70
7	SS7	4.13	.977	4.35	1.118	4.24
8	SS8	3.53	1.178	4.05	1.118	3.79

9	SS9	3.55	1.163	3.83	1.162	3.69
	n= 350	3.64		3.85		

Findings of Support Strategies

In the support strategy, the boys' mean is 3.64, and the girls' mean is 3.85. The knowledge of both genders is relatively high, but even in this strategy, the mean of girls is comparatively higher than boys. This indicates that girls exhibit a higher awareness of supportive strategies than boys. Overall, the mean shows that all students use the paraphrasing strategies (4.24) more than any other strategy. The second most used strategy is taking notes during reading. The mean of this uses this strategy (4.9), which shows that this is the second most used strategy. Third, the most used strategy is underlining or circling the information during reading. The mean of this strategy is (3.95), which proves that it is the third most used strategy in all support strategies.

Summary and Discussion

Overall and Gender wise use of the Strategies

The outcomes related to metacognitive strategies unveil an enlightening aspect concerning implementing metacognitive reading strategies. The results demonstrate that all respondents possess awareness of each strategy. However, they use problem-solving strategies more than the rest of the strategies. The overall mean of all strategies is vividly explained in (Table 5).

Table: 5
Overall, Mean of the Strategies

Strategy	Mean (Male)	Mean (Female)
Global	3.56	3.89
Problem solving	3.82	4.20
Support	3.64	3.85

n= 350

Research Question Two

Research Question two focused on evaluating the reading comprehension proficiency of college students. To address this inquiry, participants were provided with a reading passage containing questions that covered literal, inferential, and evaluative dimensions. The aim of this tool was to measure the respondents` reading comprehension level at literal, inferential and evaluative level and determine which gender is good at reading comprehension.

Table: 6
Respondents` Performance in Literal, Inferential and Evaluative Reading Comprehension Questions

Literal Comprehension		Inferential Comprehension		Evaluative Comprehension	
f (%)	Scores in %	*f* (%)	Scores in %	*f* (%)	Scores in %
6 (1.70)	20%	13 (3.70)	0%	22(6.30)	0%
37 (10.60)	40%	27 (7.70)	20%	102 (29.10)	20%
92 (26.30)	60%	71 (20.30)	40%	133 (38)	40%
140(40)	80%	111 (31.70)	60%	70(20)	60%
75 (21.40)	100%	90 (25.70)	80%	21 (6)	80%
		38 (10.90)	100%	02 (0.6)	100%
n 350					

Respondents` Performance in Literal, Inferential and Evaluative Reading Comprehension Questions

Table 6 indicates that out of entire sample of the study only 6(1.70%) gave (20%) right answers, 37(10.60%) have given (40%) accurate answers, 92(26.30%) students have given (60%) right answers. However, 140(40%) has given (80%) right answers. Out of 350 respondents only 75(21.40%) have given (100%) accurate answers in literal comprehension questions. The performance of the respondents in inferential reading comprehension questions shows that 13(3.70%) respondents has taken zero marks, 27(7.70%) has taken (20%) marks, 71(20.30%) has taken (40%) marks, 111(31.70) has taken (60%0 marks, 90(25.70%) has taken (80%) marks and only 38(10.90%) has taken (100%) marks. The performance of the respondents in inferential questions shows that 22(6.30%) has taken (0%) marks, 120(29.10%) has taken (20%) marks, 133(38%) has taken (40%) marks, 70(20%) has taken (60%) marks, 21(6%) has taken (80%) marks and only 02(0.6%) has taken 100% marks.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The findings of the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies indicate that both types of respondents possess knowledge of the metacognitive reading strategies to some extent. The result of the female respondents in all three types of strategies, i.e., global, problem-solving, and support strategies, is far better than that of the male respondents. That shows that female respondents use all the strategies more than male respondents. This finding contrasts with the

findings of Rahman, Jumani, Chaudry, Chisti and Abbasi (210), who indicated no significant difference in the metacognitive awareness of male and female students. The results reveal that female respondents use all types of strategies more effectively than male respondents while interacting with the text. This finding is consistent with the findings of Zare (2013), who concludes that female learners use more strategies than male students. While filling out the questionnaire, girls made more inquiries than boys did. Both male and female respondents use problem-solving strategies more than global and support strategies.

The result of the reading comprehension test also indicates that most respondents can quickly answer the literal question. The findings of inferential questions reveal that both male and female respondents are less comfortable than they are with the literal questions. The overall performance of the students in inferential questions has remained moderate. The findings of the evaluative questions are rather alarming. Only 02 respondents out of 350 have acquired (100%) marks; most of the respondents have secured 40% marks. That shows that both genders cannot alarmingly answer evaluative questions. The result of the urban respondents is far better than the result of the rural respondents in the reading comprehension test. The findings show that the performance of those respondents who are educated at private schools up to matric is better than those who are educated at government schools up to their matric. The overall performance of the female respondents in the reading comprehension test remained better than that of male respondents.

The reading comprehension test contains three types of questions (literal, inferential, and evaluative), so female respondents have taken the lead in all questions. Thus, female respondents could not perform better in evaluative questions, but still, their overall performance could have been better than the boys.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study analyzed male and female respondents' metacognitive reading strategies knowledge in reading comprehension tests with different question types. We found that both genders know metacognitive reading methods but use them differently. In global, problem-solving, and metacognitive reading strategies, women outperform men. This study shows that women read better using these methods. Literal reading comprehension exam takers do well regardless of gender. Inferential questions make men and women uncomfortable and perform moderately. Evaluative questions with few total scores imply a collective struggle to provide

feedback. The study also demonstrates demographic-related performance variations. Private students outperform government students in reading comprehension, and urban readers outperform rural readers. Women outperform men in reading comprehension, but evaluation questions may be better. Metacognitive reading processes and gender differences are highlighted in the study. Inferential and evaluative questions' challenges might increase students' critical thinking. To bridge reading comprehension gaps, varied students need specialist educational help. Demographics also affect reading comprehension.

Recommendations

1. An experimental study may be carried out to measure the relationship between metacognitive awareness and reading comprehension.
2. Such researchers who are interested in reading strategies may investigate how the use of the reading strategies changes in foreign languages and in mother tongues.
3. The impact of the metacognitive reading strategies takes lot of time and energy. Therefore, a longitudinal study is needed.
4. Finally, the researcher strongly suggests that metacognitive reading strategies ought to be gradually implemented at primary, middle, secondary, college and university level.

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