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# Poor EFL Learners' Metacognitive Reading Strategies: A Case Study

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**Abstract**

This study was designed to investigate the reading difficulty of some foreign language (FL) learners who were unsuccessful at English reading comprehension. It was hoped that a case study would yield a more comprehensive picture of the group of learners' nature of problem. Through a purposive sampling, twenty five English as Foreign language (EFL) poor readers whose progress in reading comprehension courses was a matter of concern were selected. In the light of Li and Munby's (1996) study, the learners' awareness of metacognitive strategies and the type of metacognitive strategies employed by the participants were investigated. Interview and questionnaire were the principal sources of data gathering in the study. The analysis of data showed that the majority of the participants lacked or were not aware of the metacognitive awareness necessary for efficient reading. Only a few had a shallow awareness of these types of strategies. The data also provided evidence that since the participants were *too much concerned with the language itself*, they ignored or were not aware of metacognitive knowledge and strategies. It was also assumed that the social environment where the participants grow up may have had a great influence on their being detail-oriented.

**Keyword:** Metacognition, Metacognitive reading strategies, EFL learners, Poor EFL readers

## 1. Introduction

In Iran where English is used as a FL, reading is an important skill to master. Reading skill plays a vital role for Iranian students in their academic context. Students from the first years of guidance school up to high school may rarely find chances to communicate with native speakers orally, but they have to pass different EFL courses in which reading comprehension is given too much emphasis (Rajabi, 2009). Even University students who have some courses of General English or ESP are exposed to different texts in different subjects with varying degrees of detail and difficulty.

A lot of researchers and teachers have tried hard to find out possible ways to help students read successfully in English, but there are many factors affecting the reading proficiency of a foreign language learner including text types, school and social environments, students' intelligence, learning motivation, teaching method, and so on (Hsu, 2009) .However, one of the most important factors in reading comprehension is the type of learning strategy one employs while reading (Block, 1986). The review of literature demonstrates that reading performance heavily depends on the use of reading strategies. Moreover, reading strategies used by efficient and inefficient learners are different (Block, 1986; Singhal, 2001).

Since the reading problems of FL university students, in Iran, seems be in some danger of neglect, and is need of serious attention the present article has made an attempt to delve into the problems university students may have in their reading comprehension. Accordingly, the researcher chose some of the students who demonstrated a very poor performance in reading comprehension during two subsequent terms. It was believed that the focus on metacognitive strategies of such students in a case study may shed more light on the nature of their poor performance since each group of students' reading comprehension problems may be unique to that specific number of learners (Allison & Sau,1991).

### *1.1 Language Learning strategies*

Language learning strategies have been defined by different researchers; however, one of the first comprehensive definitions was presented by O'Malley and Chamot (1990). As they defined strategies, they are any set of actions, plans, tactics, thoughts or behaviors that the learners employ to facilitate the comprehension, storage, retrieval, and use of information. Oxford (1990) later provided a more detailed taxonomy of language learning strategies, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The main distinction in this inventory which draws attention to itself is that it distinguishes between direct strategies (related to the language itself) and indirect strategies (related to general management of learning). In this inventory, there are three subclasses in the Direct strategies: memory strategies (specific to store and retrieve aspects of the target language), cognitive strategies (for using the language and for understanding how it works), and compensation strategies (strategies for compensating lack of knowledge). SILL divides indirect strategies into metacognitive strategies (strategies for planning, organizing and evaluating learning),

affective strategies (which are used for approaching the task positively), and social strategies (for working with others to get input and practice).

*1.2 Reading Strategies of Effective and Ineffective Learners*

One of the outstanding characteristic of effective readers is that they know how to effectively use strategies in order to facilitate the functioning of different cognitive processes (Lau & Chan, 2003). As Lau and Chan further maintained, this might be a highly probable explanation for their successful ability to construct meaningful and understand the text. On the other hand, poor readers simply resort to reading the text word by word without using, or without effective use of strategies. In some early language studies, the use of various strategies has been found to be effective in improving students' reading comprehension (Palinscar & Brown, 1984). The recent studies also underline the importance of strategies in effective reading. Mingxu (2004), for example, found out that for the poor readers, the most cited causes are: limited vocabulary (95%), poor grammar (85%), lack of interest (75%), insufficient reading strategy use (60%).

Different studies in the area of reading strategies have supported the assumption that younger and less proficient students make use of fewer strategies and use them less effectively in their reading comprehension than proficient readers (Magno, 2010). In a study on Iranian high university students and based on the analysis of their findings, Fotovatian and Shokrpour (2007) noted that efficient readers made use of a various reading comprehension strategies, while poor readers rarely used strategies during reading the text. Hsu (2009) reports that there is no significant difference between male and female students in terms of overall strategy use ,however, in line with Fotovatian and Shokrpour (2007) and based on the study conducted in a different Asian context, Hsu (2009) reported that more effective readers use more strategies than less effective ones. In Dhanapala's (2010) study, the proficient readers, kept the meaning of the text in mind while reading, read in broad phrases not words, dropped less important words, and had a positive self-concept as a reader. Anderson (1991, cited in Singhal, 2001) sought the differences in reading strategy employed by adult second language learners. Based on the findings it was revealed that the same kind of strategies were used by both high and low scoring readers while answering the comprehension questions; however, high scoring students seemed to be applying strategies more effectively and appropriately. Contrary to Anderson's (ibid.) findings, Vandergrift's (1999) concludes that the learning strategies used by successful and less successful learners are different, and that the effective readers make better use of metacognitive strategies including planning for learning, monitoring the process and self-evaluating learning after the tasks.

*1.3 Metacognitive Strategies and EFL Reading*

Metacognitive strategies and their application by effective readers have long been recognized by researchers. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) define metacognitive strategy as "higher order executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of learning activity" (p.44) . As O'Malley and Chamot noted the processes involved in metacognitive strategies are

1. Selective attention for special aspects of a learning task, as in planning to listen for key words in phrases.
2. Planning the organization of either written or spoken discourse.
3. Monitoring or reviewing attention to a task, monitoring comprehension information that should be remembered, or monitoring production while it is occurring; and
4. Evaluating or checking comprehension after completion of a receptive language activity, or evaluating language production after it has taken place (p.44).

Nisbet and Schucksmith (1986) recognized monitoring as the key process which distinguishes good from poor learners. Oxford (1990) emphasized the importance of metacognitive strategies and adds that they are "essential for successful language learning" (p.136). She further reasoned that they are important for language learning " since language learners are often overwhelmed by too much 'newness'…With all this novelty, many learners lose their focus, which can only be regained by the conscious use of metacognitive strategies such as paying attention and overviewing/linking with already familiar material".

Since one of the basic skills in foreign language teaching, especially educational context is reading skill, the role of metacognition in reading needs due importance (Hacker& Graesser, 2009). Therefore, it seems necessary to see what happens when one reads a text. When an individual is reading, the process of reading in his mind would range from lower-level to higher-level processing (Alderson, 2000; Kinstch, 1998). Lower-level processing includes automatic recognition of word meanings, syntactic structures and parts of speech and this means that automatic reading processing requires that individual read with a minimum of awareness. Thus, the reader may decode the text without really being aware of the process (Field, 2003). It seems that a learner needs the automatic processing of words and such a process is part of success in L2 reading . (Segalowitz, 2003). Even Alderson (2000) claimed that the more automatized the readers' processing is, the more effective his reading will be (Alderson, 2000). Apart from the importance of automatization in reading, as Phakiti (2006) believed, "optimal reading performance in an L2, cannot be achieved solely by automatization"(p.55). Phakiti further maintained that " a control process has been argued to be necessary". This is what a lot of scholars have underlined (e.g., Block, 1992; Kintsch, 1998). To elucidate the importance of such 'control process', Phakiti (2006) explained that

> Since in most routine reading contexts, L2 readers are likely to encounter unfamiliar words, syntactic structures or topics that require them to consciously or intentionally evaluate and examine alternative sources or use context clues. Therefore, when difficulty in reading arises, regulatory or control

> processes, as higher-level processing, such as assessing situations and monitoring current comprehension are needed because such difficulty affects the speed and effectiveness of reading. (p.55)

It should be noted that while metacognitive processing may slow down reading speed, it helps increase reading achievement (Phakiti, 2006).

According to Cromley (2005), there seems to be several reasons for assuming a strong connection between the use of metacognitive strategies and efficient reading. First, since they recognize words automatically efficient readers might have more attention available for monitoring. Second, because they already have knowledge about topic and have a large vocabulary they might notice when something does not make sense to them. Third, they know or may have been taught to focus on meaning or to employ reading comprehension strategies.

In a study on successful readers, Saricoban (2002) studied a group of EFL successful and less successful readers. He observed the participants during the stages of pre-reading, reading and post-reading. The findings revealed that successful readers use a combination of global ad local strategies and based on the findings it was suggested that students develop a global understanding of the texts. Phakiti (2003) who explored the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategy of university students reported that the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies employed by the participants differed qualitatively and quantitatively. Moreover, as he observed, there was a complex and 'multidimensional' relationship between the readers' use of strategies and their reading performance. Zhang (2000) who studied the strategy use of some Chinese EFL readers found out that poor EFL readers made use of strategies to different degrees and that they were not fully aware of the strategies they used. They handled the tasks by attention to all linguistic elements in the texts, and were not tolerant of ambiguities; therefore, made continuous use of dictionaries. On the contrary, successful readers demonstrated awareness of the strategies they had employed. Zhang (2000) speculated that the participants had transformed their metacognitive strategies from their L1. Therefore, as he concludes,

> It seems that there was a knowledge transfer from L1 to L2. The subjects' metacognitive knowledge about L2 reading and their reading behavior could also be attributed to the traditional literacy practices that they had gone through in the Chinese classroom. (p.89)

In her study of the choice and awareness of metacognitive strategies of low scorers and high scorers of reading passages, Zheng (2001) found out that not only high scorers were more aware of the strategies they used, they used them more frequently than low scorers. They were also aware of when, where, and how they used the strategies. Moreover, employing strategies, in the study, was related to the level of the proficiency of the learners in that learners with higher proficiency were more capable and at the same time aware of using metacognitive strategies. The other important finding in this study was that high scorers showed a better use of schematic knowledge. Fotovatian and Shokrpour (2007) in an study in Iranian context with university students concluded that efficient readers used metacognitive strategies more frequently while poor readers did not have sufficient familiarity with the correct use of metacognitive strategies.

*1.4 Metacognition Knowledge and Metacognition Strategy of Use*

Pereira-Laird and Deane (1997) explained that there are two features involved in metacognition in the related literature; metacognition knowledge and metacognition strategy of use. As they further maintain, metacognitive knowledge consists of statable information about one's cognitive processes; for example, knowledge about strategies, and knowledge about when and where to use strategies. The second salient feature is that metacognition involves metacognitive strategy use, that is, it involves self-regulation or control of thinking. Metacognitive strategy use, also known as executive processes, involves planning, monitoring, and correcting one's on-line performance. Brown and Palincsar (1982) commented that these two forms of metacognition are "closely related" and that "each supports the other recursively" (p. 1). They suggested that any attempt to separate the two constructs results in "oversimplification". O'Malley and Chamot (1990), also assumed that metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive strategies are integrated. As they state metacognitive strategies

> Involve both knowledge about learning (metacognitive knowledge) and control or regulation over learning (metacognitive strategies). Metacognitive knowledge refers to knowledge of one's own cognitive processes and those of others.... Regulation of learning, as distinguished from knowledge about learning, entails the use of metacognitive strategies. (p. 150)

Therefore, based on what was mentioned, in this study there is no attempt to separate these two.

The study reported in this paper was designed to investigate the following research questions:

1. Are EFL poor readers aware of metacognitive reading strategies as reported by Lee& Munby (1996)?

2. What types of metacognitive reading strategies are employed by Iranian unsuccessful EFL learners?

## 2. Methodology

### *2.1 Participants*

The participants in this study were 25 EFL poor readers who were selected based on a purposive sampling. All participants were Iranian university students majoring in TEFL in Islamic Azad University located in Kermanshah, a city in the west of Iran. The criteria for using the poor readers were the poor readers' final exam report cards, their self-assessment, and teachers' previous familiarity with EFL learners.

During two different courses of reading, Reading 1 and Reading 2 (two subsequent terms) the researcher encountered some fresh female students of 23 to 27 years old who had no or little participation in class activates. They failed to answer the questions raised during the whole course and seemed to be very reticent. It seemed that unlike other students who had reading problems, this group of learners were not disorganized or careless; therefore, they could not be characterized as passive readers, so their inefficacy in reading could have mainly stemmed from the their lack of knowledge regarding reading strategies or their inappropriate use.

Once the researcher, who was at the same time the teacher of the course, asked all students to read a short story as an extensive reading activity, which to the researcher's knowledge seemed to be manageable for the freshmen. They were asked to choose the story based on their interest and were supposed to ask any questions they wished during two weeks intervals from the teacher and at the end of two week give a short lecture demonstrating their understanding of the story. While reporting the story, the students felt free to talk in Persian if they felt they had problem retelling the story in English. The poor readers failed to provide an account of the story. They seemed to be confused, though they could refer to parts of the story and talk about some details.

During some informal conversations in the office, before the research, the researcher recognized that majority of these poor readers were eager to acquire a good proficiency in English. As they claimed, their performance in high school and university, based on their grade point average, showed that they were average students. When they were asked about their reading habits in their first language, they explained that they were not in the habit of reading a lot and that they sufficed to read some specific magazines. They told the researcher that they kept reading English texts a lot; however, it was surprising to them that despite their perseverance they had gained a little. This, as they said, had contributed to their disappointment in reading courses.

### *2.2 Data Collection*

#### 2.2.1 Unstructured Interview

Unstructured Interviews in which the interviewer used general questions as guidelines were conducted in the study. After receiving response from the participants, the interviewer asked some detailed questions. Following Lee and Munby (1996), the questions were open-ended: for example, "Can you tell me the strategies you used when you read your textbooks or any other English materials?" The following questions which followed the first question focused on information already provided by the participants: "What do you mean by translation?" "Can you give me some examples of background knowledge?" In order to have a better in depth understanding of the participant's strategies, they were allowed to use Persian during the interview. The interview was tape recorded.

#### 2.2.2 Questionnaire

In addition to the interview, a questionnaire which was Mokhtari and Sheorey's (2002) Survey of Reading Strategies was adopted. This questionnaire was developed to measure the metacognitive awareness and perceived use of reading strategies of adolescent and adult learners of English as a second language (ESL) "while reading school related materials in English" (p. 2). It has 30 items measuring three broad categories of reading strategies: global reading strategies (henceforth "GLOB"), problem-solving strategies (henceforth "PROB"), and support strategies (henceforth "SUP"). A 5-point Likert scale following each item indicated the frequency of strategy use ranging from 1 (*never do*) to 5 (*always do*).

## 3. Analysis and Discussion

### *3.1 Findings of the Interview*

This study was conducted to explore some universities' students' sever problem in reading comprehension. Analyzing the interview data, the researcher concentrated on Li and Munby's (1996) study in which the metacognitive strategies employed by efficient readers were mentioned. Attempt was made to see which one of the stated metacognitive strategies used by efficient readers in Li and Munby's study were employed or ignored by the participant in the present study. Meanwhile, the applied strategies were analyzed and those which were not used during the interview sessions were coded. The rationale for focusing on only the metacognitive strategies was the participants' performance on the questionnaire and their informal interview with the researcher provided some clues to their lack of awareness of metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive use.

#### 3.1.1 Monitoring Comprehension

Monitoring comprehension is one of the most important metacognitive strategies and indicative of metacognitive knowledge (Livingston, 1997; Oxford, 1990). Geladari, et. al. (2010) reported that based on the findings of their study, self-monitoring was employed mostly by the good readers either efficiently (60%) or partially (40%). However, 50% of the poor readers were not engaged in monitoring their reading.

When the participants were asked whether they checked their reading while and after they finish a sentence or paragraph or at the end of the reading task, 83.4% replied that they seldom did so. As one of the participants reported, "I rarely go back from one sentence to the previous one, especially when I do the reading in the classroom or for the exam. What I do is just checking the words I did not get in my first attempt". Once again in order to make sure she had reported his real use strategies, she was asked whether she evaluated her reading in order to make sure she has grasped the idea in the text. Her response matches with her answers to items 9 and 11 in the questionnaire. There, in answer to the item 'I check my understanding when I come across new information' she had chosen 'occasionally' and her answer to item 11 ' I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong' was 'never'.

3.1.2 Self Questioning

Self questioning before, during and after the performance, as Hartman (2001) holds, can guide the learners and can improve learners' "self awareness and control over thinking and thereby improve performance" (p.55). Also Hartman and Glasgow (2002), in line with Hartman (2001), declared that good comprehenders involve in self questioning which is a metacognitive strategy.

In both questionnaire, and interview 72% of the participants mentioned that they rarely pause to ask themselves questions about the important ideas. As an example, one of these students said that when she read the sentence from her textbook and does not get the idea she did not reread the previous sentences to find a clue as to the meaning of the phrase. Another student declared that although she stopped asking herself what a specific phrase or sentence meant; however, she was more concerned with the meaning of words.

3.1.3 Use of Background/Schema Knowledge

Li and Munby (1996) in a comparison of efficient and inefficient readers noted that efficient readers were capable of using personal and general knowledge to associate with the text being read. Research has shown that if readers state that they do not have such knowledge and consciously report lacking such knowledge, their comprehension might suffer (Zhang, 2001). In answer to the question which probed if they had background knowledge regarding the texts they read, 64% of the participants responded that they did not have such knowledge. Moreover, 15% reported that even if they had the schemata they did not invoke it while reading a text. To have a better grasp of the use of the participants background knowledge, the researcher, who was at the same time the instructor of the reading course of one of the participants, inquired whether while reading the lesson 'Bumps and Personalities' the participants had background knowledge about the content of the lesson. The answer was no. One of the students reported that the teacher gave only a brief explanation about the content. Again she was asked "Did you know that you had no background knowledge about the content?"

The student answered

> "I have no idea right now, and I have never thought about it. When we were doing the reading in the class, I got familiar with the passage by the instructors' explanations, but the whole idea was something new. I was confused and was not able to connect what was in the book with what I had in my mind. In these cases I know that there is a problem; however I don't know how to deal with it. Right know I guess that that should be important'.

She was asked about the cultural background and her idea about having background in 'Color Me Pink' which was one of the units she had already read in the classroom was used. The participant answered that although she had no problem with reading the lesson, but she was not aware that she had no previous background about the lesson.

3.1.4 Anticipating Text Contents and Prediction

Making guesses about what will come next, based on the information already given in the text, and being aware of such strategy is considered to be a part of a good readers metacognitive knowledge (Zhang, 2001).This kind of strategy happens before the reader goes into details. When the researcher asked the participants whether they predict the content by looking at the title or if they make guesses what is going to happen next, 89% answered that they do not think it is important to do so. This is reflects the finding of Li and Munby's (1996) study. They reported that proficient readers in their study anticipated the content and made guesses as to what comes next in the text. Zhang (2001) also reported that while 45% of successful readers were aware of such strategy, only 15% of less proficient readers were familiar with it.

3.1.5 Translation

A lot of second language teachers believe that translation is not a good reading strategy; however, as Liao (2006) noted, such a statement lacks empirical evidence. In the study conducted by Liao learners showed a medium to high level use of translation and acknowledged that translation had a positive role in their learning.

In answer the question which inquired the participant's use of translation while reading, 68% of the students reported that they usually indulged in mental translation while reading. As one of the participants explained, every detail in the text was important for him and he was not going to miss it. Accordingly, as he reported, he resorted to translation. The findings concur with that of Zhang's (2001) who reported that successful readers in his study were metacognitively aware of using translation in their reading and, as he maintains, they only used translation when they encountered very difficult sentences or phrases. In Zhang's study, successful readers do not use word by word translation in order to grasp the meaning of the text. Therefore, the participants were asked if they translated the whole text while reading. Out of

68% of the participants, 23% responded that they translated all sentences and words and the rest responded that they translated when the encountered a problem. When one of the students was asked if she translated all the text in her mind and if she was aware of employing such a strategy, she answered

> "I have no choice but to translate everything. If I do not use this technique everything would forget everything in a short time. I think translation would help me understand the text better".

There were numerous cases of translation in the above mentioned learner's reading in the classroom. As an example, in one of the courses she had with the researcher she read from the text *Five is considered a most holy and lucky number in Egypt.* The student verbalized her thought as پنج هست ...یک خیلی با ارزش و... خوش شانس عدد در مصر which is a word by word translation of the sentence.

As it is evident, if she had any background knowledge about the numbers or if she stimulated her cognitive schema to find relationship between numbers and superstition, she would have interpreted such sentences easily and in a shorter time.

3.1.6 Paying Attention to the Topic

Based on Zhang (2001), efficient readers approach a text from outside. For example they think about what the text might be about before going into details in reading a text, they prefer to predict the content of the text by looking at the title or topic sentence of the first paragraph. Allan (1991) stresses that one of the characteristics of good readers is focusing on the topic sentence.

As one of the poor readers expressed in the interview

> "I seldom try to find the topic sentence to anticipate text content, and I would like to read a text carefully from the very beginning in order to understand it. We have been told in university to locate the topic sentence, but we have not had enough practice to know how to do it." She further added "It is often very hard to recognize where to topic sentence is".

All in all, to the researcher's surprise, 78% of the participants reported that they do not pay a close attention to the title. It seemed that these students were not aware of the value of the title of the passages in their coursebooks. Ten percent also declared that the titles are so vague that they could not get help from them. One of these student said that "title are often so difficult [to understand] that do not help me with the general understanding of the text".

3.1.7 Re-reading Sentence or Paragraph

Block (1986) considers re-reading as an efficient reading strategy. Lever (2009) underlines the importance of re-reading and holds that rereading is a mechanism which allows the brain to process information, photograph the spelling of new words, and put together old and new language concepts.

In answer to the question if the participants reread the sentences or paragraphs, 72% reported that they did so. The following is the part of the interview about her response regarding the re-reading strategy.

Interviewer: Do you ever re-read the paragraph, a sentence, or part of it?"

The participant: "Yes, I do".

Interviewer: "Why do you do it?"

The participant: "I think everything in the text is important. I should not miss them".

Interviewer: "How do you do it? Do you re-read the whole paragraph, sentence, or words?"

The participant: "I often re-read the words and phrases and try to translate them".

Interviewer: "Do you re-read the previous sentences to have a better understanding of the given sentence?"

The participant: "I'm not sure".

Based on the participant's report, it seemed that while re-reading she did an attempt to decipher meaning of words. It is also likely that she does not do pre-reading with awareness. As Zhang (2001) argues, frequent re-reading may hamper understanding. From the participants' answer it appears that re-reading for her means grasping the meaning of all words and sentences. Her answer to question 4 in the questionnaire 'When reading I decide what to read closely and what to ignore' which is 'never' may confirm the researcher's guess.

It can be concluded that although some of the participants reread the text, they reread some parts of the text; however, while trying to do so they sufficed to rereading small chunks of the sentence.

3.1.8 Comparison and Contrast to L1 Knowledge Domain

One of the strategies used by the successful readers in Li and Munby's (1996) study is Comparison and Contrast to L1 Knowledge Domain. As Zhang (2001) reported, efficient readers compare the similarities and the differences of the specific reading content with the relevant knowledge domain in China so that they do not misunderstand the context. The second language disability to do so may be due to two reasons among others. First, not having background knowledge or information about the content or not having the awareness about the possibility of application of such a strategy. In case of 82% of the students both cases were possible. In the interview, they frequently referred to their

insufficient reading practice in first language. As one of the participants reported, she was from a poor area of a remote town. As she said, her family members were not educated. It seems likely that a hurdle which impeded her reading comprehension was her lack of world knowledge (Hampton & Resnick, 2008). In order to make sure if she possessed such knowledge, at least about the content of the textbook, the researcher randomly chose some lessons or ideas put forward in her reading coursebook and asked the participant whether she had already read about them. The answer in most of the cases was 'no'. To understand whether the participants consciously does the comparison between the ideas in the text with what they already knew (her background knowledge) the researcher asked them "Do you relate the ideas with what you already knew? For Example, when you read about 'North American Holiday' did you compare it to Holiday in Iran?" one of the participants responded

that in some cases as in the example he did so. Therefore, it can be concluded that even if majority of the participants were aware of such a metacognitive strategy, they may not have enough background knowledge to do the comparison.

*3.2 Findings of the Questionnaire*

Following Zhang and Seepho (2013), the frequencies of metacognitive strategy use was categorized. The criterion for determining the levels of use was as follows. The range between 1–50% was considered to be low, the range of 51–70% was considered to be moderate, and the range of above 70% was regarded as high.

All in all, the strategies consisted of:

Global reading strategies: 13 items

Problem-solving strategies 8 items

Support reading strategies 9 items

Overall: 30 items

Table 1. Frequency of metacognitive strategies of poor EFL readers

| Metacognitive strategy | Number of questions | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Global reading strategies | 13 | 45.3% |
| Problem-solving strategies | 8 | 18% |
| Support reading strategies | 9 | 14% |

As Table 1 illustrates, all indices indicate that the poor readers did not adequately make use of metacognitive reading strategies. Forty five point three percent of the participants employed these strategies; therefore, the participants fall in the range of low users. Eighty percent were problem solvers, and 14% used support reading strategies.

As the results of the questionnaire shows all indices support the findings of the interview in that the poor readers were not good metacognitive strategy users. Of course, lack of the awareness regarding the metacognitive strategies may be part of the reason poor EFL learners; however, low level of metacognitive strategies rings the bell for the researchers.

**4. Conclusion**

Among a variety of factors which result in learners' difficulty in learning a second language metacognitive strategies may be one of the most critical ones (Ehrman, 1996). Findings of research in metacognition demonstrate a significant positive relationship between metacognitive awareness and comprehension ability (Spence, 1995).

The questionnaire, the researcher's informal observation in the classroom as well the interview demonstrated that the poor EFL learners had problem with metacognitive strategies and lacked the necessary awareness of using cognitive strategies. The results obtained from the questionnaire and the interview confirmed the assumption which predicted that the participant in the study who showed having a sever difficulty in reading comprehension, did not employ the strategies used by efficient readers in other studies.

The poor EFL learners' case is typical of many other Iranian students who believe that if they understand all the parts of a passage, they can understand the whole. They try to understand each word by deciphering meanings of words, and sentences. They seldom anticipate the whole meaning first and then test their hypothesis, as good readers do in their native language (Kitao & Kitao, 1995).

Based on the findings, most of the participants were not aware that the knowledge that the reader brings to the text is very crucial. Since the construction of meaning depends on a knowledge of the subject of reading and a broad-based background or world knowledge (Day& Bamford 1988; Hampton & Resnick, 2008), among other variables, the students seemed to not possess such knowledge. Even in her first language, they demonstrated a poor performance in reading comprehension and were not in the habit of studying.

The participants' use of mental translation did not prove to be fruitful, since instead of using such a metacognitive strategy effectively when they encountered difficulties, they translated all words they encountered in the text. Even their attempt to re-read the text was to decipher the meaning of unknown words and not grasping the idea put in the context.

Contrary to Munby (1996) and Zhang's (2001) successful readers, the participants were not good at guessing. The reason for her inability to be a good guesser might be the fact that they were basically unaware of possibility of using

such a strategy. Some of the participants, as they reported, they did not skip any part of the test and thought that all things presented in the text are of the same value to them. There might be different reasons for their performing meticulously while reading the text but they may also be 'detail oriented'. As Ehrman (1996) holds, some learners with learning difficulties are so obsessed with the detail that the meaning becomes obscured for them. This can be the possible reason for the participants' obsession with details since in classroom observations showed to have average knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. Thus, bottom –up skills were not the likely reasons for her detail-orientedness.

The question which comes up here is whether teaching metacognitive strategies to the poor learners or raising their metacognitive awareness would enable them to become good readers. The bigger question is whether their orientation to pay attention to details is just limited to their reading habit or is a part of their mental construct which has been shaped the community in which they were raised in. This assumption is in line with Rajabi's (2009) experiment in which rural subjects showed great reliance on texts and the application of bottom-up processing. Based on Rajab, the participants in his study never incorporated the knowledge of the world as well as their prior knowledge to answer reading comprehension questions. This is what was observed in some of the participants' cases.

While having these questions in mind, one should not be oblivion of the fact that one's world knowledge and content knowledge may help FL readers partly cope with the problems they encountered while reading.

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