Investigating EFL Learners' Employment of Metacognitive Reading Strategies
The Case of First Year Undergraduate Students at the English Department, Larbi Ben M'Hidi University, Oum El-Bouaghi
Enquête sur l'Utilisation des Stratégies de Lecture Métacognitives par les Apprenants d'Anglais Langue Etrangère
Le Cas des Etudiants de Première Année de Licence au Département d'Anglais de l'Université Larbi Ben M'Hidi, Oum El-Bouaghi

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Abstract

This study aims at exploring first-year undergraduate English students' employment of metacognitive reading strategies at Larbi Ben M'Hidi University, Oum El Bouaghi. It particularly attempts to find out which category of reading strategies—global, problem-solving, support—students use most frequently. It, likewise, seeks to identify the most frequently employed reading strategies within each of the aforementioned categories. To fulfill these aims, the Survey of Reading

Strategies (SORS), developed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), was distributed to 158 students. The survey addresses the three previously mentioned categories and includes 30 items. The findings of the survey demonstrated that the participants reported a frequent use of problem-solving reading strategies category. Furthermore, out of the 30 strategies outlined in the SORS, participants were found to frequently use 17 strategies from the three categories, with mean scores=3.5 or higher. Based on these results, this study recommends teaching the less frequently utilized strategies, attempting to equip students with a variety of reading strategies that could be used to effectively read various text types across different contexts.

Keywords:

Metacognition ; EFL learners ; reading comprehension ; reading strategies ; metacognitive reading strategies.

Resumé

Cette étude a pour objectif d'explorer l'emploi des stratégies de lecture métacognitives chez les étudiants de première année de Licence en anglais à l'université Larbi Ben M'Hidi, Oum El Bouaghi. Elle vise surtout à identifier quelle catégorie de stratégies de lecture — globale, résolution de problèmes ou soutien — les étudiants adoptent le plus souvent. De plus, elle vise à identifier les stratégies de lecture les plus couramment employées au sein de chacune des catégories mentionnées ci-dessus. Pour atteindre ces objectifs, le Questionnaire des Stratégies de Lecture (SORS), développé par Mokhtari et Sheorey (2002), a été distribué à 158 étudiants. Le questionnaire aborde les trois catégories précédemment mentionnées et comprend 30 éléments. Les résultats de l'enquête ont révélé que les participants ont indiqué recourir souvent aux stratégies de lecture de la catégorie de résolution de problèmes. De plus, parmi les 30 stratégies énoncées dans le SORS, il a été constaté que les participants utilisaient fréquemment 17 stratégies provenant des trois catégories, avec des scores moyens

de 3.5 ou plus. Sur la base de ces résultats, cette étude recommande d'enseigner les stratégies moins fréquemment utilisées, en s'efforçant de doter les étudiants d'une variété de stratégies de lecture qui pourraient être utilisées pour lire efficacement différents types de textes dans divers contextes.

Mots clés

Métacognition; apprenants d'anglais langue étrangère; compréhension de la lecture; stratégies de lecture; stratégies de lecture métacognitives.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a skill that foreign language learners have to master in order to achieve success in both, educational setting and life. To begin with, during the reading process, a reader is required to develop an understanding of what the writer is trying to communicate. Thus, comprehension is necessary for reading to take place. Reading comprehension is a task in which two factors interact : the reader and the text (McNamara & Magliano, 2009) and is perceived as a meaning-construction process (Pang et al., 2003). Moreover, it is believed to be an active and complex process that requires the reader to draw on their existing knowledge and past experiences, in conjunction with the information provided in the text to enhance their comprehension of the reading material (Duke & Pearson, 2009). Furthermore, effective reading comprehension requires the application of various reading strategies that serve different functions. Researchers pointed out that such strategies—cognitive and metacognitive—play a vital role in enhancing reading comprehension. Specifically, while cognitive reading strategies are thinking processes used in comprehending and restoring meaning in the text (Ellis, 1989), metacognitive reading strategies are cognitive processes involving planning,

monitoring, and evaluating one's reading comprehension (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). While many studies focused on identifying the cognitive strategies that students at different levels utilize in reading in various contexts, little research has been conducted on the use of metacognitive strategies. Understanding how students employ metacognitive strategies in reading is highly important as an attempt to foster their comprehension. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the employment of these strategies among students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Metacognition

The term *metacognition* is attributed to John Flavell (1976). Metacognition has evolved from meaning one's awareness regarding his/her own cognitive processes (Flavell, 1979) to"the ability to reflect on what one knows and does and what one does not know and does not do"(Anderson, 2004, p. 17). In simpler terms, metacognition is thinking about thinking. It refers to an individual's awareness of their existing knowledge and the strategies employed when approaching a learning task. Moreover, it involves recognizing knowledge gaps and unemployed strategies. This reflective practice would, eventually, enhance the learners' learning experiences .

In addition to these basic definitions, key characteristics of metacognition include the self-regulatory strategies utilized by an active and engaged learner while tackling problem-solving tasks. These metacognitive skills involve checking outcomes of any attempts towards the solution of a given problem, planning one's next step, and monitoring the effectiveness of the implemented actions or strategies (Baker & Brown, 1984).

Flavell (1979) further proposed a model of cognitive monitoring. In this model, a variety of phenomena interact to help learners monitor their cognitive processes. These are categorized into four classes. The first class, metacognitive knowledge, is defined as knowledge or beliefs that individuals have about cognitive abilities and the tasks they engage in, while the second class, metacognitive experiences, encompasses the cognitive or affective experiences that accompany cognitive endeavors. The third class, goals, refers to what the cognitive activities are intended to accomplish. Finally, the fourth class, actions, involves the behaviors or strategies employed to achieve cognitive goals.

2.2 Reading Strategies

In examining the notion of reading strategies, Duffy (1993) offered a definition that describes them as"plans for solving problems encountered in constructing meaning" (p. 232). Similarly, Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008) characterized reading strategies as the deliberate and purposeful actions taken by readers to adapt and refine their methods for understanding text, grasping vocabulary, and creating meaning from written content. Together, these definitions highlight the vital importance of reading strategies in facilitating comprehension and meaning-making for readers.

Throughout the process of meaning-making, different comprehension difficulties can occur. In order to help students overcome such challenges, McNamara (2009) admitted that strategies are among the most effective methods. Their importance is highly emphasized by claiming that they are crucial for both achieving successful understanding and addressing reading difficulties, thereby enhancing one's abilities as a reader and comprehender.

Different scholars have categorized reading strategies differently. For instance, Block (1986) classified reading strategies into two main categories. The first category, termed *General* Strategies, consists of predicting, recognizing text structure, synthesizing information, asking questions, interpreting the text, utilizing general knowledge and associations, commenting on processes or behaviors, monitoring understanding, linking behaviors, and responding to the text. The second category, referred to as *Local* Strategies, includes paraphrasing, rereading, questioning the meaning of phrases or sentences, and examining the meaning of individual words. Furthermore, Anderson presented his 1991 taxonomy of reading strategies, which detailed five comprehensive processing strategies: overseeing strategies, support strategies, paraphrasing strategies, strategies for achieving coherence in text, and test-taking strategies, each with a specified number of strategies within them.

Effective reading strategies have been shown to improve students'reading comprehension. For example, Al-Jawhari and Al-Humaidi (2015) explored the role that prior knowledge plays in improving EFL students'reading comprehension in Oman. The researchers employed three data collection instruments in their study, which included a

questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire revealed that there was a strong consensus among teachers with respect to the critical role of prior knowledge in enhancing text comprehension. Teachers reported that students'reading comprehension can significantly be improved by activating their existing knowledge. In a similar study, Deshpande (2016) found that activating prior knowledge as a strategy facilitated 1st year students'reading comprehension skills at the university of Mumbai.

In another study, Hagaman, Casey, and Reid (2012) conducted an investigation on the impact of a specific paraphrasing strategy, known as RAP (Read, Ask, Put) on students'reading comprehension. Results disclosed that students' reading comprehension has greatly improved due to the implementation of the RAP paraphrasing strategy. This is evidenced by increased percentages of recall of text and improved performance on short-answer questions related to the reading material, thus showing the positive role, which the RAP plays in the context of reading.

Furthermore, Sua (2021) explored the implementation of five cognitive reading strategies--predicting, asking questions, visualizing, summarizing, and answering comprehension questions--to improve reading comprehension among ninth-grade students in a Columbian public school. The study found that these strategies enhanced text understanding, activated prior knowledge, and increased vocabulary, alongside boosting students'reading motivation.

The body of research demonstrating the effectiveness of reading strategies in enhancing students'reading comprehension and other skills is extensive, and the studies mentioned are just a small sample of a much larger body of work.

2.2Metacognitive Reading Strategies

The concept of metacognition has been examined in relation to reading (Brown, 1980). The term entails the different processes readers employ "to plan, monitor, and repair their own comprehension" (Jacobs & Paris, 1987, p. 256). Moreover, the integration of reading strategies with metacognition involves five main components: (a) preparing and planning for efficient reading; (b) determining the appropriate time to employ specific reading strategies; (c) understanding how to monitor the application of reading strategies; (d) learning how to coordinate the use of different reading strategies; and (e) assessing the effectiveness of reading strategy implementation (Anderson, 2004).

Building on these insights and for effective comprehension of the text, the reader should use metacognitive knowledge and deliberate strategies (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). Similarly, it has been argued that metacognition is an important factor in reading comprehension (Brown, 1980). Good readers also use, along with cognitive strategies, certain metacognitive strategies to monitor their understanding and adjust their reading approaches accordingly. Brown (1980) emphasized several critical metacognitive skills that significantly contribute to enhancing reading comprehension, including setting clear reading objectives for reading, recognizing the key components of the material being read, maintaining focus on the primary content while minimizing distractions, and monitoring comprehension. Engaging in self-questioning helps readers assess their progress, and when comprehension difficulties arise, it is imperative for readers to implement corrective measures to overcome these obstacles. These metacognitive strategies are essential for ensuring that readers not only grasp the text but also engage with it on a deeper level.

Several studies support the effectiveness of metacognitive reading strategies. For example, Tregaskes and Daines (1989) examined the extent to which metacognitive strategies affect the reading comprehension of sixth-grade social studies students. The experimental group participants were taught metacognitive strategies explicitly for a period of 12 weeks. During the instructional period, the participants were exposed to the following strategies: visual imagery, summary sentences, webbing, self-interrogation, and "click cards. Following the treatment, both the control and experimental groups underwent a post-test. The findings indicated that students in the experimental group outperformed their peers in the control group regarding reading comprehension.

Recently, Nash-Ditzel (2010) studied the effects of metacognitive reading strategies on the self-regulation abilities of 5 college freshmen over two semesters. The participants learned various techniques including background knowledge, fix-up strategies to address the meanings of unfamiliar words, questioning, inferencing, summarizing, and assessing the significance of a text by using annotations. Through interviews, think aloud protocols, informal observations, and document analyses, the researcher investigated how these strategies influenced the students' reading practices

and self-regulation their reading processes. The results revealed significant improvements in reading comprehension and highlighted that metacognitive instruction helped students better monitor their comprehension and adjust their reading processes.

3 Methodology

3.1 Aims of the Study

The current study aims at investigating the metacognitive reading strategies that first year undergaduate students use in academic reading. More specifically, it aims at identifying which type of metacognitive reading strategies (Global, Problem-solving, Support) is frequently used by EFL learners. It also aims at exploring which individual reading strategies students frequently use, as indicated by a mean score of 3.5 or higher. These goals stem from the assertion made by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) regarding the conceptual foundation of the SORS. The developers of the SORS contended that this assessment tool is designed to identify the reading strategies employed by adolescent and adult ESL learners when engaging with academic texts in English. By doing so, it aims to not only measure the diverse strategies that these students utilize but also to determine how frequently they report using these strategies during their reading interactions (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002).

3.2 Research Questions

The study's research questions are as follows :

1. What category of reading strategies—global, problem solving, or support—do first year EFL students use most frequently?
2. Which metacognitive reading strategies in each category are frequently used by first year EFL students?

3.3 Population and Sampling

The population targeted by this study consists of First-year undergraduate students from the Department of English, Oum El Bouaghi University. A total of 158 participants were randomly selected to form the sample of the research.

3.4 Instrument

To collect data, the researcher employed the SORS which has been developed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) to assess students' metacognitive awareness and perceived

application of reading strategies. The survey is made up of 30 items organized into three categories of reading strategies: Global Strategies (13 items), Problem-Solving Strategies (8 items) and Support Strategies (9 items).

The core assumption behind self-reported reading strategies that readers use to process academic texts is that teachers will be able to determine which strategies are not frequently used, and thus those strategies can be taught to enhance students' reading achievement (Oxford & Crookall, 1989).

3.5 Data Collection and Statistical Tool

The survey was administered to participants who were instructed to evaluate how often they employed the strategies on a five-point Likert scale (Never, Occasionally, Sometimes, Usually, Always). They were invited to imagine they are reading material for university and consider the typical things they do to enhance their understanding of the text as they rated each strategy.

Data were collected, imported, and then analyzed using SPSS, version 24. To interpret the students' scores, the researcher employed the framework established by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), which categorizes reading strategy use into three different levels: a high level (mean=3.5 or higher), a moderate level (mean=2.5 to 3.4), and a low level (mean=2.4 or less).

4 Analysis and Discussion of the Results

4.1 Analysis of the Results

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Three Types of Reading Strategies

	Mean	SD
Prob strategies	3.75	1.19
Glob strategies	3.56	1.05
Sup strategies	3.3	1.19

The table displays the frequency with which respondents used three different types of reading strategies: global, problem-solving, and support reading strategies. The findings indicate that the category of problem-solving reading strategies scored a mean of 3.75. Moreover, the respondents scored a 3.56 for global reading strategies. In contrast, the support reading strategies received the lowest mean score (3.3).

As it is shown in table 1, problem-solving reading strategies received the highest mean score in comparison to global and support reading strategies. In other words, they were reported to be more commonly used by the participants in this study. It appears that the respondents are more self-aware of the solutions they could employ to overcome challenges with reading comprehension when they engage with academic texts.

Table 2 : Mean and Standard Deviation of the Global Reading Strategy

Item	M	SD
GLOB17. Using context clues	3,9241	1,204
GLOB24. Predicting the text's content	3,7848	1,304
GLOB15. Using tables, figures, and pictures	3,7595	1,381
GLOB27. Verifying predictions	3,6962	1,270
GLOB6. Aligning text content with reading goals	3,5127	1,525
GLOB1. Having a purpose in mind	3,1139	8,012
GLOB12. Selective reading	2,4494	1,357
GLOB20. Using typographical features	2,4304	1,304
GLOB8. Noting text's characteristics like length and organization	2,0823	1,019
GLOB23. Assessing comprehension	2,0633	1,270
GLOB3. Activating prior knowledge	2,0190	1,076
GLOB21. Analyzing information in the text	2,0063	1,382
GLOB4. Previewing the text	2,0000	1,146

The table shows that the respondents employed a number of global reading strategies to increase their comprehension. Strategies demonstrating a high level of usage include using context clues (Glob17, M=3.92), predicting (Glob24, M=3.78) and using different types of illustrations to increase understanding (Glob15, M=3.75). Verifying

predictions (Glob27, M=3.69) and aligning text content with reading goals (Glob6, M=3.51) were also reported to be used frequently although they were slightly lower than the above strategies. The table also indicates that having a purpose in mind, a single strategy employed by respondents, was used at a medium level, with a mean score of 3.11. Finally, strategies such as selective reading (Glob 12, M=2.44), using typographical features (Glob 20, M=2.43), noting text's length and organization (Glob8, M=2.08), and monitoring comprehension (Glob 23, M=2.06) fall within the low level. Other less frequently used strategies involved activating background knowledge (Glob3, M=2.01), analyzing information in the text (Glob21), and previewing the text (Glob4), with an equivalent mean score of 2.00.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Problem-Solving Strategy

Item	M	SD
PROB25. Re-reading	3,8861	1,172
PROB14. Paying closer attention to the content while reading	3,8861	1,184
PROB7. Reading slowly but carefully	3,8291	1,225
PROB11. Adjusting the reading speed	3,7848	1,418
PROB28. Decoding unfamiliar vocabulary	3,6899	1,464
PROB16. Pausing to reflect on the reading material	2,0316	1,050
PROB19. Visualizing	1,9684	1,330
PROB9. Getting back on track when distracted	1,9557	1,176

According to the findings, the respondents used a number of problem-solving strategies to better comprehend and engage with written material. Five strategies were employed at a high level. These strategies involved re-reading (Prob25) and paying closer attention to the content while reading (Prob14), having the same mean score of

3.88. Moreover, reading slowly and carefully (Prob7), adjusting the reading speed (Prob11), and decoding unfamiliar vocabulary (Prob28) were also frequently employed, with mean scores of 3.82, 3.78 and 3.68 respectively. Notably, the table shows that the respondents reported not using any of the strategies at a moderate level. However, the low level utilized strategies included pausing to reflect on the reading material (Prob16) which scored a mean of 2.03. The strategies of visualizing (Prob19) and getting back on track when losing concentration (Prob9) were even identified as being used at a low level, as indicated by their closely related mean scores of 1.96 and 1.95 respectively.

Table 4 : Mean and Standard Deviation of the Support Reading Strategy

Item	M	SD
SUP13. Using reference materials (e.g. (a dictionary	4,0506	1,004
SUP10. Underlining or circling information	4,0190	936,
SUP22. Exploring relationships among ideas	3,9494	10,762
SUP18. Paraphrasing	3,9241	1,204
SUP30. Thinking about information in . both English and mother tongue	3,8165	1,437
SUP29. Translating from English into native language	3,6456	1,682
SUP2. Taking notes	3,5443	1,434
SUP5. Reading aloud	2,4367	1,611
SUP26. Self-questioning	2,0949	1,195

The table shows that the participants frequently employed a variety of support reading strategies to enhance their comprehension of the text, demonstrating a high-level usage. The most commonly reported strategies were using reference materials (Sup13, mean=4.05), marking information in the text for memory enhancement (Sup10, mean=4.01), and reviewing the text to identify relationships among ideas (Sup22,

mean=3.94). Paraphrasing to aid understanding (Sup18) was also commonly used, although slightly less frequently than the top three strategies, with a mean score of 3.92. Furthermore, considering information in both languages during reading (Sup30) and translating (Sup29) were also reported frequently, scoring means of 3.81 and 3.64 respectively. Finally, while note-taking as a strategy for comprehension (Sup2) was less frequently used compared to the above strategies, with a mean score of 3.54, it was still highly practiced. In contrast, medium-level utilized strategies were not reported according to the table. However, the respondents reported using re-reading (Sup5) and self-questioning (Sup26) at a low level, with mean scores of 2.43 and 2.09 respectively.

4.2 Discussion of the Results

The respondents had characteristics of strategic readers. They have been found to employ different types of strategies: Global, Problem-solving, and Support strategies. However, the respondents reported using Problem-solving strategies more frequently in comparison with the other two types of reading strategies. It is this kind of reading strategies that are used in academic contexts where texts might be more challenging, involving actions like re-reading, visualizing, adjusting reading speed, and using context clues to infer meanings.

Participants' responses indicated their awareness of the reading strategies outlined in the SORS; however, these are employed at varying levels of strategy usage. Specifically, the respondents reported using seventeen (17) reading strategies at a high level. They highlighted the importance of 5 Global reading strategies, which aid in preparation, monitoring, and evaluating comprehension. Notably, the participants recognized the significance of contextual information (Glob17) and predicting (Glob24) in understanding complex texts, emphasizing the role of graphics (Glob15) in clarifying information and actively verifying predictions (Glob27). They also emphasized the importance of ensuring that the text content aligns with reading goals (Glob6) to improve their understanding and engagement with the material.

The participants were found to invest their metacognitive awareness of reading strategies when they encountered reading comprehension difficulties. This awareness is demonstrated through 5 problem-solving practices including re-reading (Prob25), paying

closer attention to the content read (Prob14), and reading slowly (Prob7). This also included adjusting reading speed (Prob11) and deciphering unfamiliar vocabulary (Prob28).

In addition to problem-solving strategies, participants frequently used support strategies which are simple mechanisms that assist comprehension, such as consulting reference materials (Sup13), underlining key information in the text (Sup10), and exploring relationships among ideas (Sup22). Furthermore, the respondents mentioned that they often used paraphrasing (Sup18), reflecting on information in English and mother tongue strategy (Sup30), and translation from English to native language (Sup29). Note-taking (Sup2) is also highly used to identify essential ideas.

While the response to having a purpose in mind (Glob1) was moderate, the Low usage of 12 reading strategies (7 Global strategies, 3 Problem-solving strategies, and 2 Support strategies) might reflect certain problems. Firstly, it could suggest that they did not receive adequate training in these strategies. Secondly, the respondents might find it difficult to apply these strategies due to a lack of practice or understanding of when and how to use them. Lastly, these strategies might be of less importance among the respondents, the reason why they employ them less frequently than others.

5. Conclusion

The primary aim of this study was to explore the metacognitive reading strategies that students use while reading academic material. The SORS inventory was administered to first-year undergraduate students at the Department of English language, at Larbi Ben M'Hidi University, Oum El Bouaghi, providing valuable insights into their reading strategies. In addressing the research questions, the researcher discovered that the most frequently utilized category among the participants was problem-solving reading strategies. Out of the 30 strategies outlined in the SORS, 17 strategies from the three categories were frequently used by the participants. However, to enhance the reading comprehension skills of first-year students, it is recommended to provide explicit instruction on the strategies that received low scores (M=2.4 or lower) in this study, as suggested by Oxford and Crookall (1989). These strategies, which can assist in cultivating a more effective method for reading academic materials, include determining what to read closely and what to overlook (Glob12), using text formatting elements (Glob20), noting characteristics like length and organization (Glob8), monitoring comprehension

(Glob23), activating background knowledge (Glob 3), evaluating the information providing in the text (Glob21), previewing the text (Glob4) pausing to reflect on content (Prob16), visualizing (Prob19), getting back on track when distracted (Prob9), reading aloud (Sup5), and self-questioning (Sup26). By incorporating these less used strategies into their reading practices, first-year students can expand their repertoire of reading skills and become more confident and successful in their academic pursuits.

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