

**Metacognitive Reading Strategies Of
Good Malaysian Chinese Learners**

**Abdul Rashid Mohamed
Junie Chew
Muhammad Kamarul Kabilan**

Universiti Sains Malaysia

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the awareness and use of metacognitive reading strategies of good readers. Current practices in Malaysian English language classrooms do not emphasize the importance of employing metacognitive reading strategies to facilitate critical understanding of the reading text and meaningful engagement between the learner and the text. A glance at literature reviews in the Malaysian context also indicates the shallow nature of understanding of metacognitive strategies of good learners. The benefits of examining good readers' metacognitive strategies are far-reaching. Teachers armed with such useful knowledge can learn more about how to ignite and improve weaker learners' general reading capabilities thus leading to successful comprehension of reading materials. Such a powerful tool in the hands of teachers can lead to positive changes and outcomes in the classroom situation, as far as the teaching and learning of reading comprehension is concerned.

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, reading in the educational sphere is of great importance, especially in relation to the “incorporation of a tested literature component” in the secondary school English language syllabus in the year 2000 (Ganakumaran, 2003, p. 47). In many ways, teachers and learners are now required to read more, and practice and develop insights as to their understandings of the literary texts read. In addition, considerable attention is also given to the literary appreciation aspect of reading literary materials. All these accentuate the recognition of the importance of reading especially to learners, particularly when they proceed to tertiary education. Naturally, at this higher level, learners will have difficulties understanding serious academic reading materials if they do not possess, practice and self assess their own reading strategies. To facilitate meaningful understanding of reading materials, skills such as prediction, confirmation, rejection and self-correction need to be employed.

To encourage meaningful understanding, apart from the above, a learner needs to understand and remember texts by inferring, elaborating ideas, and discarding unimportant details (Garner, 1988), as such tasks engage cognitive processes that require learners to follow and respond to a message from a writer who is distant in space and time (Davis, 1995). Logically, active and thoughtful reading procedures should lead learners to critically analyze and think of the text, resulting in the reconstruction of knowledge. Many researchers advocate this concept of reading as a source for critical thinking engagement with texts because of its potential to facilitate, re-enact and reconstruct knowledge that produces meaning and understanding i.e. comprehension (see Rubin, 1991; Fielding & Pearson, 1994).

In order to regulate comprehension, learners need to monitor what they understand and also allot appropriate ‘strategic actions’, which Flavell (1985) defines as metacognition. One of the key concepts of Flavell’s conceptualization of metacognition is metacognitive knowledge, which basically comprises knowledge of person, task and strategy. In the context of reading, a reader’s knowledge is referred to as knowledge concerning himself, such as how effective the he is as a reader, and his awareness about his ability to achieve certain reading goals. Task knowledge, according to Flavell, is knowing how to deal with the nature of information or reading tasks encountered. For example, the learners know why they are engaged in a particular task and how it will improve their reading skills. Finally, strategy knowledge means using learned strategies to succeed in achieving comprehension. It includes why and how strategies are useful and also the precise circumstances that necessitate their use.

These metacognitive strategies permit learners to control their own cognition. In other words, learners make use of functions such as centering, arranging, planning and evaluating to coordinate learning (Oxford, 1990). These are, as indicated by Singhal (2001), strategies that improve comprehension, which “indicate how learners conceive of a task, how they make sense of what they read, and what they do when they don’t

understand...(This) is to enhance reading comprehension and overcome comprehension failures” (p. 1-2).

THE PROBLEM

It is not a normal practice in Malaysian classrooms to teach reading strategies to learners. Classroom practice does not always prepare learners to utilize skills and strategies to predict, infer, analyze, agree, criticize, and evaluate by interacting with the reading comprehension passage given (Norizul & Abdul Rashid, 2001). In relation to such claims, Durkin (1981) observes that teachers rarely provide explicit instruction to children on how to use comprehension strategies while reading. Instead, most of the time teachers employ question-and-answer sessions in eliciting answers, which obviously do not augment any meaningful and critical engagement between the text and the learners, the learners and the teacher and, the text and the teacher.

A study of this nature may heighten teachers’ awareness of the importance of the triangular relationship that exists between the text, the learners and the teacher, thus prompting them to pay more attention to metacognitive reading strategies to support learners’ comprehension of reading texts. According to Anderson (2002), metacognition “combines various attended thinking and reflective processes” (p.1). The metacognition strategies can be classified into five primary components: (1) preparing and planning for learning, (2) selecting and using learning strategies, (3) monitoring strategy use, (4) orchestrating various strategies, and (5) evaluating strategy use and learning (Anderson, 2002).

The above kind of endeavor is viable for reading because metacognitive strategies involve awareness, reasoning and conscious thought processes about the text read and the understanding gained from it (Davis, 1995). As metacognitive strategies can be applied at a conscious level, it can be taught and learned for better reading comprehension. Furthermore, with the inclusion of metacognitive strategies as an integral process of reading comprehension and ultimately understanding texts critically, the connection and link between the three elements is made stronger. The elements would now influence each other positively; ensuring learners make, or at least attempt to make thoughtful knowledge construction, reification of fresh ideas and critical understanding of texts.

From the literature point of view, Singhal (2001) highlights the paucity of empirical investigations into reading strategies used by successful and unsuccessful second language learners. Only a few studies have examined learners’ metacognitive awareness of reading strategies, strategy use, and reading proficiency. What are in abundance, however, are studies on teaching second language learners to use a variety of language strategies in order to read better (Singhal, 2001). In the context of Malaysian English language teaching, many studies also revolve around the use of learning strategies and its contribution to the success of language learning (see Teoh, 2004; Mohamed Amin, 2000;

Azian & Salbiah, 1995; Mahmud, 1995; Mohamed Amin, 1994). There are also a considerable number of Malaysian works relating to learners' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies, strategy use, and reading proficiency (see Fauziah, 2003; Norsiah, 2003; Philips, 1992). But these studies do not examine the strategies used by good learners, just students in general.

Venturing into the identifying and understanding of good learners' metacognitive reading strategies is both sensible and worthwhile, as the findings can churn out potential approaches for dealing with an assortment of problems related to the teaching of reading and reading comprehension. The more focused and streamlined aims of such approaches may assist us in encouraging learners' confident use of knowledge to improve their reading efficiency in real reading situations (Jun, 2001) that: 1) allow the construction and reconstruction of meaning, 2) facilitate the adaptation of reading behavior to specific tasks, 3) develop learners' ability to accurately predict his or her performance on the task and, 4) self-regulate his or her reading process in order to read for comprehension (Collins, 1994). Therefore, this study is initiated to investigate whether good learners use specific and effective reading strategies to facilitate their reading comprehension. The specific objectives of this study are:

- a. to determine whether good learners are aware of metacognitive reading strategies and,
- b. to determine if good learners employ metacognitive reading strategies in particular situations

RESEARCH DESIGN

Sample

This is a study of the reading comprehension ability of Form 5 male Chinese native speakers from a Chinese medium school. More significantly it is about their competence in using relevant reading strategies to comprehend English texts. The study uses purposive sampling, where 100 learners from a premier Chinese medium secondary school who scored A for the English language paper in the 2003 Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) examination (a national examination designated for lower secondary students) were selected. They were required to sit for a reading comprehension test in order to identify the best 20 learners in terms of achievement. The reading comprehension test consisted of four passages adapted from MUET¹, English 121 Examination workbooks and also from The Pennsylvania Reading Assessment

¹ (Malaysian University English Test): basically an English Language entrance examination for Malaysian universities.

Handbook. A simple frequency count of the learners' performance in the test was conducted.

The 20 learners who scored the highest in the reading comprehension test were selected as subjects of the study. Then, the Survey of Reading Strategies Questionnaire (SORS), developed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), was administered to these 20 subjects to determine their metacognitive awareness, their use of reading strategies as well as the most frequently used metacognitive reading strategy subscale. Finally, the top five achievers of the reading comprehension test were interviewed to obtain a picture of their awareness of and their use of metacognitive reading strategies. Also determined were the situations when metacognitive reading strategies were utilized (Figure 1).

Data Analysis

As different types of data were gathered, a number of relevant procedures were used for analysis. First, a frequency count was made of the scores achieved by the 100 subjects who sat for the reading comprehension test. The purpose of this was to identify and select the top 20 subjects to participate in the SORS. Each correct answer was awarded one mark. As there were 30 questions in the reading comprehension test, the highest score a subject could achieve was 30. To categorize the subjects into good, moderate and weak learners, the Grading System used by the Malaysian Examination Board was adopted (Table 1).

Table 1: Learner Grading System

Category	Raw score (out of 30)	Total score (%)
Good learner	25	85
Moderate learner	15	51
Weak learner	Less than 15	Less than 51

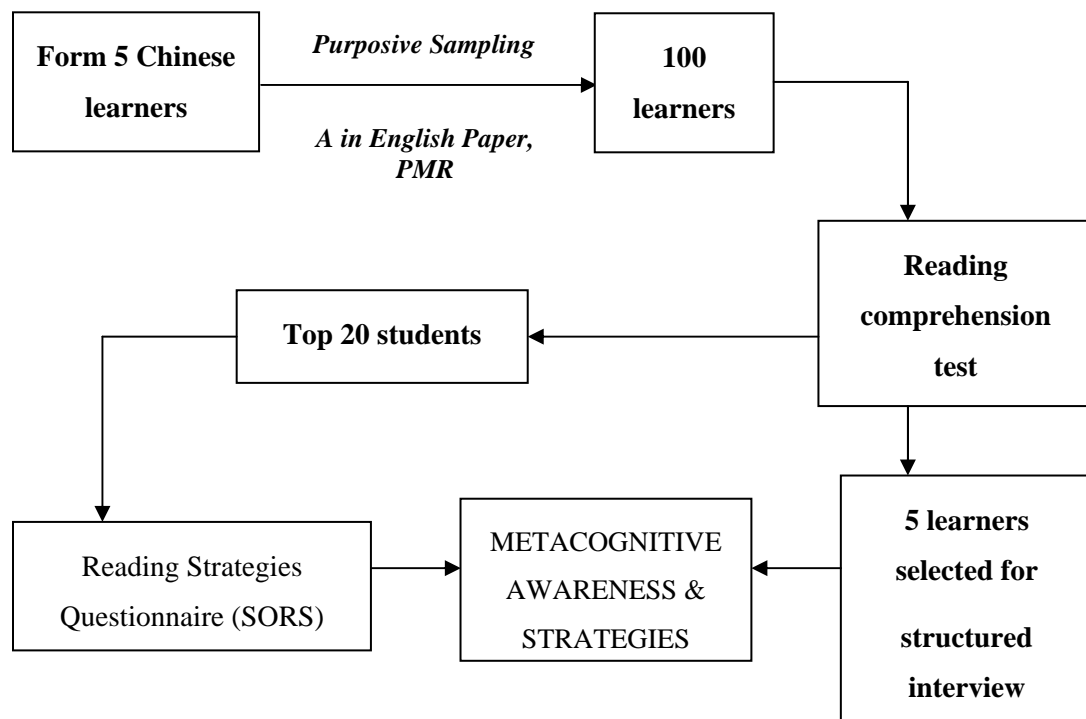


Figure 1: The Research Process

There are 30 items in the SORS, and each item uses a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (“I never do this”) to 5 (“I always do this”). The 20 subjects were asked to circle the number that applied to them, indicating the frequency with which they used the reading strategy described in the statement. As all the statements in the SORS are positive, the higher the number, the more frequent the use of the strategy concerned. For every subject, the score obtained for each strategy was transferred onto the scoring sheet. The total scores were then added up and divided by 30 (the total number of items) to obtain the average response or score for the entire inventory. The overall average score indicates how often learners use the strategies listed in the instrument when reading academic materials.

In order to obtain the average response or score for each strategy subscale (i.e., Global, Problem-Solving and Support Strategies), the scores for the respective subscales were added up and divided by the number of items under each subscale. The average for each subscale in the questionnaire represented the mean frequency with which learners used a given subscale of strategies when reading academic materials. According to Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), there are three levels of reading strategy usage that can be identified: high (average score of 3.5 or higher), moderate (average score of 2.5 to 3.49) and low (average score of 2.49 or lower). This scale will be used to interpret the data obtained and hence, identify the learners’ reading strategy usage level.

The qualitative data gathered were from structured interviews of five subjects who achieved the highest scores in the reading comprehension test. Both interpretative analysis and content analysis were used to analyze the data collected from the transcriptions of the structured interviews to get in-depth feedback on whether the subjects were aware of and employed metacognitive strategies to facilitate reading comprehension. Apart from that, the situations when the subjects applied metacognitive reading strategies, were also looked into.

FINDINGS

The results of the reading comprehension test showed that 60 out of 100 subjects were moderate learners. The mean score for this group was 20.1 and the median was 22.0. This means that the majority of the subjects were moderate learners. There were 20 good learners and 20 weak learners. The top 20 good learners were then selected to answer the SORS questionnaire. These 20 students will be the focus of this study i.e. to determine their metacognitive awareness, their use of reading strategies as well as the metacognitive strategy on the subscale most frequently used. Table 2 and Table 3 indicate the performance of the 20 best learners among the 100 subjects who sat for the test.

Table 2: Performance On Reading Comprehension Test

Mean	Median	Number of Good Learners	Number of Moderate Learners	Number of Weak Learners
20.1	22.0	20 (20%)	60 (60%)	20 (20%)

Table 3: Best Learners Reading Comprehension Test Scores

Category	Raw Score	No. of Scorers
Good Learners	25	6
	26	9
	27	3
	28	1
	29	1
	30	0
TOTAL	-	20

Then structured interviews were conducted on the 5 best learners, referred as Subjects A, B, C, D and E, based on the highest to the lowest scores achieved by them respectively in the reading comprehension test (Table 4).

Table 4: Top 5 Subjects' Scores

Subject	Raw Score
A	29
B	28
C	27
D	27
E	27

Awareness And Use Of Metacognitive Reading Strategies: Findings From SORS

The findings of the SORS are presented below. Firstly, the subjects' awareness of metacognitive reading strategies and the use of these strategies are presented. This is followed by the most frequently used subscale of the metacognitive reading strategies by the subjects.

Performance Of The Good Learners In The SORS

The performance of the 20 top learners who answered the Survey of Reading Strategies questionnaire is shown in Table 5 and Table 6. The average score for the entire list of strategies as well as for each strategy subscale (i.e., Global, Problem-Solving, and Support strategies) obtained by the subjects is analyzed. Each subject's average score for the entire inventory is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: The Overall Score Average For The SORS

Subjects	Average
A	3.57
B	3.93
C	2.83
D	3.23
E	3.27
F	3.13
G	3.17
H	3.37
I	3.57
J	2.80
K	3.03
L	3.47
M	3.40
N	3.07
O	3.63
P	3.40
Q	2.77
R	2.93
S	2.73
T	2.77

The overall average score for the Survey of Reading Strategies Questionnaire indicates how often subjects use all the strategies in the instrument while reading texts (Table 6). Three levels of usage are identified: high (average score of 3.5 or higher), moderate (average score of 2.50 to 3.49) and low (average score of 2.49 or lower).

Table 6: Performance On Survey Of Reading Strategies Questionnaire

Number of High strategy-users	Number of Moderate strategy-users	Number of Low strategy-users
4 (20 %)	16 (80%)	Nil

The results reveal that the average score for the metacognitive awareness strategy use fall in the range of 3.57 to 3.93 (20%) of subjects. This means that only 20% of the subjects display high awareness of metacognitive reading strategies and they are the high strategy-users. Most of the subjects (80%) are moderately aware of metacognitive reading strategies and they can be categorized as moderate strategy-users. However, none of the subjects depict low awareness of metacognitive strategies.

Good Learners' Most Frequently Used Subscale Of Reading Strategies

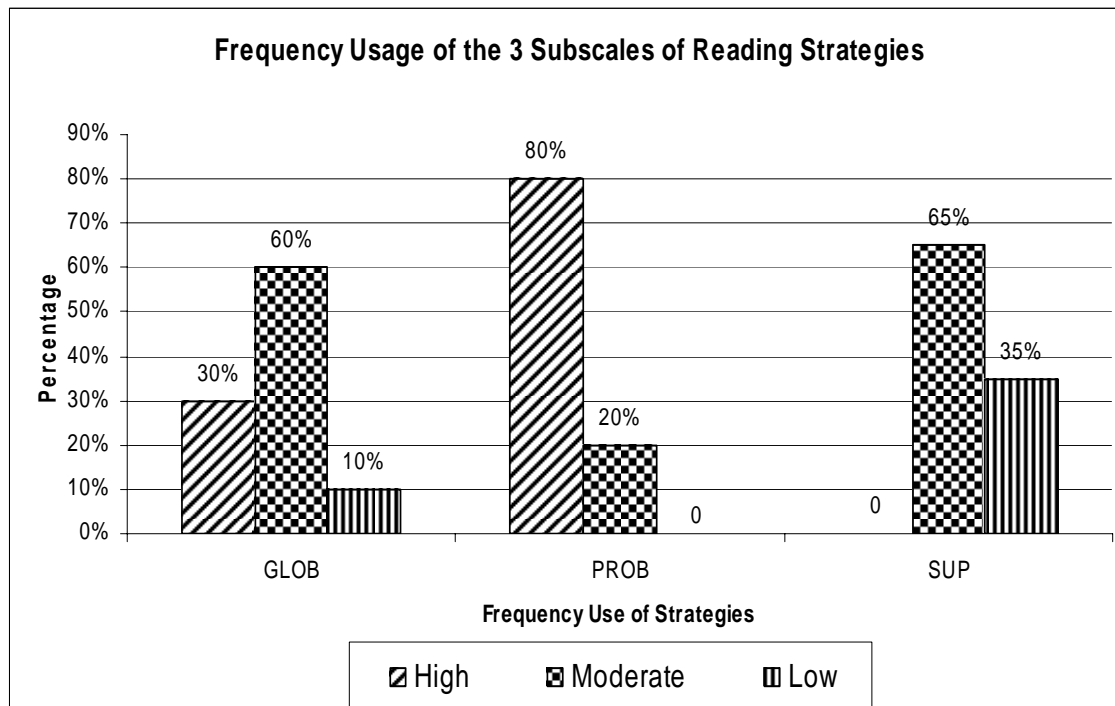
The averages for each subscale in the SORS questionnaire illustrate the group of strategies (i.e., Global, Problem-Solving, and Support Strategies) that subjects use the most (or least) during reading. Table 7 indicates the findings of the frequency usage of the three different subscales by the 20 subjects. The results of the Survey of Reading Strategies demonstrate that 60% of the subjects moderately use Global Strategies as compared to 30% who use the strategies frequently (Table 7 & Figure 2). However, only 10% of the subjects report low usage of the Global Strategies.

Table 7: The Use Of The Different Reading Strategies

Subject	GLOB	PROB	SUP
A	3.85	4.00	2.78
B	4.23	4.38	3.11
C	3.38	3.50	2.44
D	3.08	3.38	3.33
E	3.00	3.50	3.44
F	2.54	4.00	2.22
G	3.23	4.00	2.33
H	3.77	3.38	2.78
I	4.00	4.00	2.56
J	2.46	3.25	2.89
K	3.46	4.00	1.56
L	3.38	4.38	2.78
M	3.62	3.88	2.67
N	2.69	3.88	2.89
O	3.85	4.00	3.00
P	3.38	3.63	3.22
Q	3.00	3.88	1.44
R	3.15	3.50	2.11
S	2.38	3.38	2.67
T	3.08	3.63	1.56

Note: GLOB = Global Strategies; PROB = Problem solving Strategies; SUP = Support Strategies

Figure 2: Frequency Usage Of The 3 Subscales Of Reading Strategies



In comparison to the subscale for Global Strategies, a very high percentage (80%) of the subjects use Problem-Solving Strategies frequently and 20% use it moderately. As for the subscale of Support Strategies, none of the subjects point towards a high usage of these strategies. The majority of the subjects (65%) use Support Strategies moderately with 35% using it sparingly. Figure 2 charts out the usage of the three subscales. The findings show that these good learners exercise Problem-Solving Strategies the most, followed by Global Strategies, but none are found to be high users of Support Strategies.

Awareness And Use Of Metacognitive Reading Strategies: Findings From The Interviews

As a preamble to the discussion of findings from the structured interview, analysis of the results obtained from the SORS questionnaire are presented for the top five achievers of the reading comprehension test (Table 8 and Table 9). This is to give us an overview of the learners' awareness and use of metacognitive reading strategies

TABLE 8: Performance Of Top 5 Subjects In The Survey Of Reading Strategies Questionnaire

Subjects/ score (per 30)	Score
A (29/30)	3.57
B (28/30)	3.93
C (27/30)	2.83
D (27/30)	3.23
E (27/30)	3.27

TABLE 9: Breakdown Of The 3 Subscales Of Reading Strategies For The Top Five Learners

Subject	GLOB Strategies	PROB Strategies	SUP Strategies	Average
A	3.85	4.00	2.78	3.57
B	4.23	4.38	3.11	3.93
C	3.38	3.50	2.44	2.83
D	3.08	3.38	3.33	3.23
E	3.00	3.50	3.44	3.27

Subject A

Subject A is highly aware of metacognitive reading strategies and findings indicate that he is a high metacognitive strategy user with an overall average score of 3.57. In terms of average score, he is the second highest frequent strategy user. He frequently employs Global Strategies and Problem-Solving Strategies but only moderately uses Support Strategies.

Subject B

Similarly, Subject B shows that he is highly aware of metacognitive reading strategies. He has the highest average score of 3.93. He is also a frequent user of Global as well as Problem-Solving Strategies but only a moderate user of Support Strategies.

Subject C

On the other hand, Subject C is only moderately aware of metacognitive reading strategies and uses them moderately. This is evident from his overall average score of 2.83, which is the lowest score. This explains that he does not employ metacognitive reading strategies as frequently as the rest of the subjects. Subject C, nonetheless, frequently applies Problem-Solving Strategies. He is only a moderate user of Global Strategies and a low user of Support Strategies.

Subject D

Subject D is aware of and uses of metacognitive reading strategies moderately. With the overall score average of 3.23, he utilizes all the subscales of the metacognitive strategies moderately.

Subject E

Like Subjects C and D, Subject E is moderately aware of metacognitive reading strategies with an overall average score of 3.27. He exercises Problem-Solving Strategies frequently and only moderately performs Global Strategies and Support Strategies.

The findings show that of the three subscales of strategies, Problem-Solving Strategies is the most frequently used, followed by Global Strategies. This finding concurs with Mokhtari and Sheorey's (2002) claim that Problem-Solving and Global Strategies are highly used by good learners.

Situations Where Metacognitive Reading Strategies Are Used

An inductive content analysis was carried out on all transcripts of the structured interviews. The main objective in conducting the interviews was to identify the situations where the subjects use metacognitive reading strategies. The findings are presented below.

Subject A

Subject A clearly states that he is aware of metacognitive reading strategies and he draws on this particular strategy to help him comprehend what he is reading. He seems to have a purpose in reading;

“I read because I love reading and read for exam purposes, academic purposes. I have to read to gain information”

Subject A believes that background knowledge is important as it assists him to understand better what he is reading. It is not necessary to read every part of the text, he reasons;

“Because there are only certain parts which I feel is very important so I read that part”

What is interesting is that he adjusts his reading speed according to the difficulty of the text. When facing texts with new information, he usually pictures what he is reading to facilitate comprehension. He also makes full use of contextual clues and predicts the meanings of the words or phrases that he does not understand.

Simultaneous utilization of multiple reading strategies is a key feature of Subject A's metacognitive reading strategy. He monitors his reading as he checks whether he grasps what he is reading by 'intelligently guessing' the content of the text. If his guesses are wrong, he would reread to see where he went wrong. "I sometimes read the text or paragraph again and again," according to him. He also exercises problem-solving strategies such as rereading briefly and going back to the parts again when understanding becomes a problem, or when concentration is lost. When these happen, he "... sometimes read(s) a few times..."

Visualization of ideas and concepts does help Subject A. He finds supporting materials very useful and perceives tables, graphs and charts that accompany the text as important as they help him comprehend the text. This is achieved by frequent note taking and going through it briefly in his mind to help him understand better. He says, "... Sometimes I write down what I read... in exercise books... or text books..."

Subject B

Subject B displays a deep purpose for reading. He too, similar to Subject A, believes that background knowledge is important as it helps him understand what he is reading. What makes him different from Subject A is that he plans systematically before he starts reading as the excerpt shows:

“First, I would look at the title and just see what the text is about.”

Obviously, he is aware of metacognitive reading strategies and uses them to aid comprehension. Unlike Subject A, he reads every part of the text and focuses more on the points he thinks is integral to the understanding of the overall text. He checks his understanding of the text and employs problem-solving strategies such as rereading and using contextual clues if the situation demands it. "... Some parts are difficult... so I read a few times... sometimes I read slowly..." Therefore, he makes it a point to concentrate

more on new texts or information, which is unfamiliar to him in order to enhance comprehension. In terms of his reading speed, he adjusts it according to his understanding of the text. To further increase comprehension, he would also make short notes.

Subject C

According to Subject C he reads for tests, for fun and to know more things. Like the previous two subjects, he iterates the importance of background knowledge for comprehending what is being read. Before reading, he ‘glances over’ the text so that he gets an idea on what he would be reading. This is more of a skimming and scanning process, surveying for crucial points and parts of the text that may provide clues as to what he can expect at the end of it all. He clearly exhibits his awareness of metacognitive reading strategies and employs them to facilitate and augment comprehension.

“I think about what I am reading and I ask questions about the text. I also look for important details”.

Subject C examines and scrutinizes his reading by asking himself questions about the text, and ensures that what he reads make sense to him. When he stumbles upon new information, he focuses and spends more time on it, making sense out of it. He makes guesses while reading and takes instant remedial action such as back tracking and rereading when he does not understand. His reading speed is based on the substance and difficulty of the material he is reading. He also uses contextual clues to guess the meanings of unfamiliar words or phrases. He basically summarizes and reflects on what he has read;

“I think about the text and my understanding of it”.

Subject C also performs support strategies to assist him in his comprehension. Besides that, he feels that visuals such as tables, charts and graphs in the text are quite useful as they aid him in comprehending what he reads.

Subject D

Subject D’s main reasons for reading are for tests and to get information. He concurs strongly with earlier subjects that prior knowledge helps him understand the text more easily. Before reading, he looks for the headings and sub-headings to get the general idea of the text.

“I get to know the text and look at the title.”

Unlike Subject B, Subject D does not focus on every part of the text but instead concentrates on the main points. He is aware of metacognitive reading strategies and applies appropriate strategies in comprehending the texts that he reads. For example, he self-observes his reading by inspecting his understanding of what he reads.

Subject D makes guesses as he reads. If his guesses are proven wrong, he rereads the text and reexamines what he has read earlier. Besides that, he attempts to solve the problem by going back to the part of the text where he had faced difficulty. His reading speed depends on how easy or difficult the text is. He also visualizes what he reads, especially when he encounters difficulties. If he is reading an unfamiliar text, he pays closer attention to it and jots down some of the points to help him remember. He also prefers materials with tables and graphs as they improve his understanding of the text. He usually visualizes mentally of what he has read in order to facilitate comprehension.

Subject E

Like the rest of the subjects, Subject E also has a purpose whenever he reads. He also believes that background knowledge helps him understand what he is reading. Before reading a text, he reads up the summary (if there is one) and verifies what the text is about. He too concentrates on the key parts and skips unimportant details. He seems to be aware of metacognitive strategies and applies the reading strategies appropriately;

“I guess what is coming next. I analyze. I also think about what I’m reading. And I also try to understand what I read”.

He monitors his guesses and executes problem-solving strategies such as rereading and going backwards if the need arises. His reading speed is regulated according to the familiarity of the text. When he reads an unfamiliar text, he pays extra attention to the part where he has difficulty understanding and he constantly monitors his understanding of the text. He guesses the meaning of words or phrases that are new to him but at times he looks them up in the dictionary. He summarizes the texts in the form of charts and notes. Subject E also finds tables, charts and graphs in the text crucial, as they are aids to his reading comprehension.

From the interviews, all the five subjects show that they are aware of metacognitive reading strategies and they employ metacognitive reading strategies to facilitate comprehension. Furthermore, the subjects apply metacognitive reading strategies especially when problems or difficulties during reading are encountered, and also when they are reading new or unfamiliar text.

DISCUSSION

The subjects selected for the study represent the best learners from three Form Five science classes of an all boys' urban premier Chinese medium secondary school in Penang, Malaysia. The reading comprehension test shows that the majority of the high achievers who scored A in the PMR English Language Paper were only moderate learners. However, 20% of the 'A' scorers can be categorized as good learners.

The Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) questionnaire discloses several important findings about good Malaysian Chinese learners. First, the majority of them are only moderate metacognitive strategy users. Second, only 4% of these good learners can be classified as high strategy users. For instance, Subjects A and B demonstrate high awareness and usage of metacognitive reading strategies in the SORS questionnaire.

However, there are some discrepancies when findings from the SORS questionnaire and the structured interview are cross-checked. For example, in the SORS questionnaire Subject C obtained the overall average score of 2.83, which suggests he is a moderate strategy user. On the other hand, the structured interview reveals Subject C as having a high level of metacognitive awareness and being a high user of metacognitive reading strategies. It is the same for Subjects D and E. Such a discrepancy can perhaps be partially explained by learners' laidback approach to responding to items in the SORS. But most probably, the answer lies within the structure of SORS – it assigns numerals to represent certain patterns of learners' habitual actions to the items. These patterns are easily identifiable and hence, the learners are surer of their practices in relation to the suggested patterns in the SORS. On the contrary, the structured interview does not elicit or extract data that narrate the learners' intensity of metacognitive awareness and usage, but just represents a "valuable awareness-raising exercise" (Adamson, 2004, p. 64).

One positive implication of this inconsistency is that we can now be very certain of learners' own confidence in their understanding of metacognitive awareness and uses. It is apparent that the learners responded accordingly to the requirements of SORS and structured interview. So the question of 'inconsistency' does not arise when the learners react appropriately, but rather illuminates the learners' intelligent use of metacognitive strategies in taking into account the situation and context of the engagement, as both the SORS and the structured interview entail different objectives. This is further evidence that authenticates Jun's (2001) views (mentioned earlier) that metacognitive strategies should, among others, facilitate learners' adaptation of reading behavior to specific tasks, and develop learners' ability to accurately predict his or her performance on the task.

It is quite clear that metacognitive strategies are utilized by the good Chinese learners. But the bigger question would be, "Can we model or transform the traits and strategies of these good learners to the weaker ones or even to learners of other races in Malaysia?" And if it is possible, then how should we, as teachers, go about doing it? Conceivably,

any similar efforts ought to begin with the education of teachers, where they are trained to model metacognitive approaches to reading so that learners receive explicit verbal explanations about strategies to be learned (Jacobs & Paris, 1987). For this reason, teacher education programmes in Malaysia should include elements of training that encourage student teachers to integrate explicit explanations into their routine basal-reading skill instruction. With initiatives of that character, teachers may develop, in the long run, abilities to teach learners – good and weak – how to facilitate comprehension by including information about cognitive self-appraisal and self-management in their reading lessons.

Many researchers, as a result of their studies, strongly suggest that learners be taught to think aloud (Dauer & Smith, 1984), think about thinking or even conduct “strategy training” (Jiongying, 2005, 149). While we totally agree with the above, we are also convinced with the idea that teachers must also, as a supplementary approach, plan and create “appropriate situations and activities in language classes so that learners use these rather neglected strategies” (Abdolmehdi & Mohammad, 2005, 123). The latter is much more important because the classroom is the breeding ground, if you like, that fertilizes ideas and learners’ learning notions. It is where the learners are presented with an invaluable learning experience to experiment and test their metacognitive strategies. As Nik Suriana (2001) summarizes, “...teachers need to know what metacognitive strategies are. Then they have to be able to explain and model the use of metacognitive strategies before the students can learn how to use the strategies effectively” (p. 33). In years to come, the development of a learner’s metacognitive reading strategies can be traced back to this very single point of time and place, where the replication process transpired.

Another pertinent and essential issue to this is the materials and texts used for such purposes. Critically, the texts and materials must challenge the learners to utilize their strategies uninhibitedly, and also perhaps compel them to learn and adopt new strategies. Therefore, the salient roles of teachers cannot be underestimated. In particular, their ability to think creatively and critically in order to bring upon significant changes to the ways they approach the teaching of reading and reading comprehension is almost compulsory. The approaches that ought to be seriously reflected by the teachers are the types of questions that are put forward to learners, ways of questioning learners, ways activities are conducted and the ways each learner is considered in terms of his/her reading capabilities. For example, reflective questions (such as “think back of the time when...”) in a retrospective manner should prevail with the aid of concrete and meaningful activities that are proportionate to the learners reading abilities and necessitate the creative and critical thinking skills of learners.

CONCLUSION

By being exposed to metacognitive reading strategies early, it is much easier for learners to interact more actively with the texts and thus become critical, thoughtful and

independent readers. The learners of this study are not only aware of the metacognitive reading strategies, but frequently use them to comprehend texts. Basing on findings from the interview, we can furnish unequivocal measures, activities and strategies that enhance and enrich our learners' capabilities of reading and critically understanding texts. The experiences and practices of good learners can and ought to be introduced to weaker learners. Some of the strategies that we propose are:

1. Being extremely clear when elucidating and explicating the main purpose(s) of reading a particular text;
2. Being creative and critical in selecting reading texts or materials that may capture the learners' interests and imaginations;
3. Being alert to texts and reading materials that are without visuals, pictures etc. Good learners assert that visuals are essential to their understanding of the texts.
4. Teaching certain techniques of speed-reading, including contextual clues, guessing and predicting meaning, note-taking, etc.
5. Discussing with learners issues or matters related to the text before the learners actually attempt reading it. As the interviews carried out shows, having prior/background knowledge and information of the content of text does facilitate easier comprehension.
6. Encouraging and providing room and space for discussion between learners to strengthen understanding. Weaker learners may not be able to quickly recognize the clues that may lead to successful comprehension of the text; but if opportunities are provided for them to share and discuss the text with others, as each learner is reflecting on his own understanding of the text and sharing it, perhaps they can forge a better understanding much faster than reading and reflecting individually.

This study confirms that metacognitive strategies are utilized by good learners. But one question that may need critical answers would be, "Did weak learners utilize or attempt to utilize the same set of metacognitive strategies as the good learners did?" and if they did, to what extent was it effective?" Future research ought to answer these questions.

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