

The Effects of Metacognitive Strategy on Teaching English Reading Comprehension to Bhutanese Students*

ผลการใช้กลยุทธ์อภิปริชานในการสอนภาษาอังกฤษที่มีต่อการอ่านเพื่อความเข้าใจของนักเรียนชาวภูฏาน

Chencho Dema **
Boonjeera Chiravate***

Abstract

This research examined the effect of metacognitive strategy instructions on Bhutanese ESL learners' reading comprehension and their opinion on metacognitive strategy instructions. The research samples consisted of 81 of the 11 grade students studying in a public higher secondary school in Thimphu, Bhutan. The research samples were divided into two groups: control and experimental groups. While the control group (43 students) was taught in the traditional way, the experimental group (38 students) received metacognitive strategy instruction on reading comprehension. The language program intervention in which metacognitive

strategy was used consisted of 12 sessions. The research data were collected by pre-test, post-test and a semi-structured interview. ANCOVA was used for analyzing the pre-test and post-tests scores. The research findings revealed that the metacognitive strategy is effective in improving the students' reading comprehension as the experimental group's scores were significantly higher than the scores of control group. Additionally, based on the interview, the student had positive attitude towards the metacognitive strategy instructions. Based on these findings metacognitive strategy should therefore be used in developing Bhutanese ESL learners' reading skill.

*วิทยานิพนธ์ Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language มหาวิทยาลัยคริสเตียน

**นักศึกษา Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language มหาวิทยาลัยคริสเตียน

***ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์ร่วม คณะอักษรศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาผลของการสอนด้วยกลวิธี อภิปรายที่มีต่อความสามารถในการอ่านเพื่อความเข้าใจ ของนักเรียนชาวภูฏานที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาที่สอง และความคิดเห็นต่อวิธีการสอนด้วยกลวิธีอภิปราย กลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นนักเรียนที่กำลังศึกษาระดับเกรด 11 ในโรงเรียนมัธยมศึกษา เมืองทิมพู ประเทศภูฏาน จำนวน 81 คน กลุ่มตัวอย่างแบ่งออกเป็น 2 กลุ่ม คือ กลุ่มควบคุม จำนวน 43 คน ซึ่งได้รับการสอน ด้วยวิธีแบบดั้งเดิม และกลุ่มทดลองจำนวน 38 คน ซึ่งได้รับการสอนด้วยกลวิธี อภิปราย โดยมีการเรียน การสอนจำนวน 12 ครั้งๆ ละ 2 ชั่วโมง ข้อมูลวิจัย

เก็บรวบรวมได้จาก การทดสอบก่อนเรียน และหลัง เรียน รวมทั้งการสัมภาษณ์ ใช้สถิติ ANCOVA ในการวิเคราะห์คะแนนทดสอบก่อนเรียนและหลังเรียน จากการวิจัยพบว่า การสอนด้วยกลวิธีอภิปรายในกลุ่ม ทดลองมีประสิทธิภาพมากกว่าการสอนแบบวิธีดั้งเดิม ใน กลุ่มควบคุมอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ นอกจากนี้ นักเรียนมีทัศนคติที่ดีต่อการสอนด้วยกลวิธี อภิปราย จากการ ค้นพบในการศึกษาวิจัยครั้งนี้ ผู้วิจัยให้ข้อเสนอแนะว่า ควรใช้กลวิธีอภิปรายในการสอนอ่านเพื่อความเข้าใจ ของนักเรียนชาวภูฏานในระดับเกรด 11

Background of the Study

Reading is the most widely discussed topic among teachers and parents in Bhutan as Bhutanese ESL students were found to lack reading strategies and have poor reading skill (CERD, 2002). This was partly due to the fact that Bhutanese ESL teachers focused on teaching the literature content of the syllabi rather than developing their student's reading skill. Additionally, it was also observed that Bhutanese ESL teachers lacked sufficient knowledge and skill to promote language learning environment. This caused the student to have poor reading skill and lead to poor performance of English (LaPrairie, 2013).

Eskey (2005) found that L2 readers generally face difficulty in comprehending academic texts to some extent even if they possess adequate language competency. This could possibly be attributed to L2 learners' lack of proper

metacognitive strategy to administer their own reading effectively. Shokrpour and Fotovatian (2009) noticed that in reading comprehension, if students lack metacognitive they cannot self-plan, self-monitor, self-regulate and self-evaluate their own reading skills properly (Tavakoli, 2014). As a result, numerous researches have been conducted to enhance reading comprehension through metacognitive strategy in ESL/ EFL students in many education systems especially in the recent years.

However, most of the earlier studies have focused on investigating EFL students' knowledge and awareness about metacognitive strategy and merely investigated its frequency of use in language learning. There are very few studies, which had actually examined the effects of the using metacognitive strategy in improving students' acquisition of English as a second language. The present study therefore aims to investigate the effect

วารสารมหาวิทยาลัยคริสเตียน

ปีที่ ๒๒ ฉบับที่ ๔ (ตุลาคม - ธันวาคม) ๒๕๕๙

Research Questions

This research attempts to answer the following research questions:

- a. Is the metacognitive strategy more efficient than the traditional strategy in improving reading comprehension of Bhutanese students?
- b. What are the student's opinions towards metacognitive strategy in improving their reading comprehension?

Theoretical Framework

The research study is grounded in the Constructivist Theory of Learning propounded by Vygotsky's (1978, 1986), which emphasized the central role of social interaction in the process of learning. Othman, Mahamud and Jaid (2014) argued that when constructivist theory of learning is applied during reading lessons, metacognition plays a role to produce a constructivistic understanding when it comes to information acquisition that has

been accessed and read. When constructivist theory of learning is applied to reading lesson, students can construct knowledge and concepts with information obtained. Students can form understanding through the reflection based on interactions with objects and ideas displayed in the texts (Yahya, Ghazali, Shamsudin & Roselan, 2008).

Based on the above description, the theoretical framework for the study is adapted from Othman et al. (2014). They mainly focused in studying the application of metacognition strategy in reading and comprehension lessons comprising of three processes of reading i.e., before reading, during reading, and after reading. Students will be able to build knowledge and concepts about the information obtained from active text reading during reading and understanding lessons. The theoretical framework for this research is given in Figure 1:

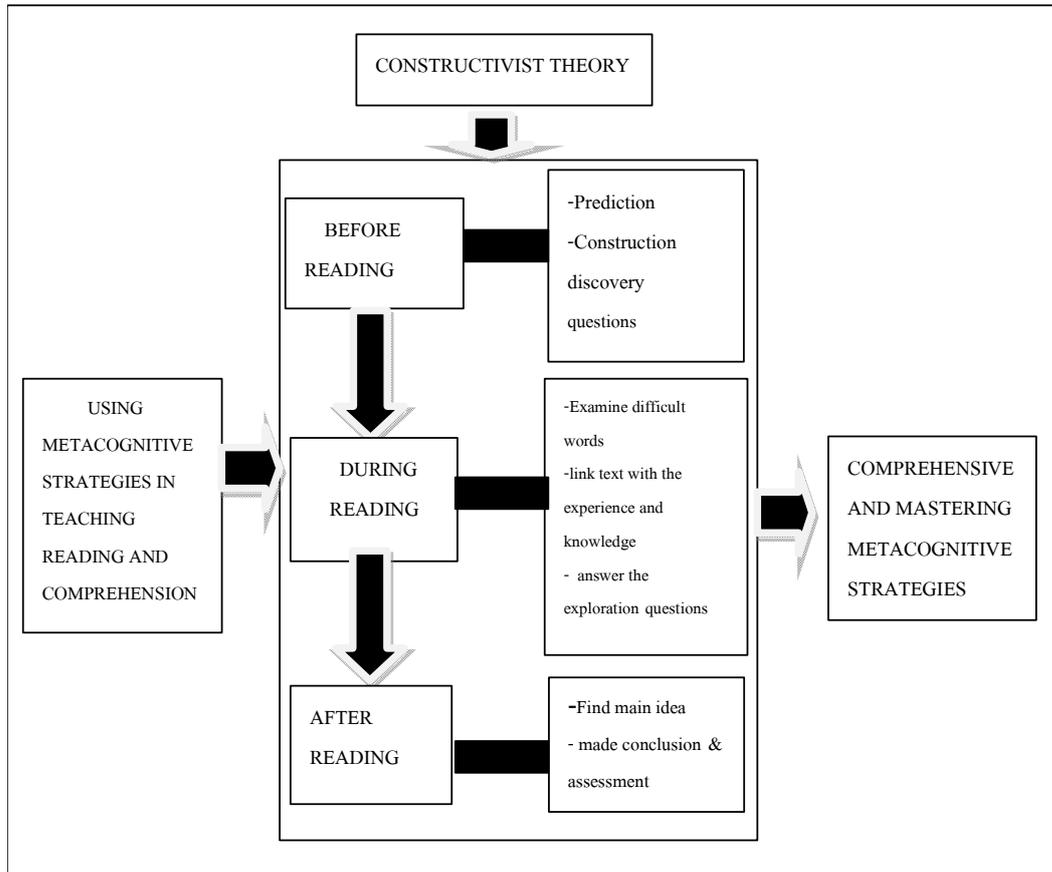


Figure 1: Theoretical framework on the research on the application of metacognitive strategy in reading and comprehension lessons (Adapted from Othman, et al. (2014).

The model is concise and can easily be remembered by students whenever they are exposed to a text. The figure shows the constructive application of metacognitive strategy during all three processes. With this model students will actively engage in guessing, discovering, and constructing questions before the actual reading begins. On the other hand, when reading the text students will continue interacting actively by examining difficult words, inferring knowledge, experience

and answering originated questions associated with the text. In the interim after reading, students will process the information acquired from the text reading by making summary and overall evaluation on core ideas that transpires in the text. This whole process in applying of metacognitive reading strategy can help readers in building a constructive understanding in acquisition of information. Metacognitive reading strategies will help learners to arrange and plan their language learning in an efficient, effective way.

Earlier Research on the Effectiveness of the Metacognitive Strategies for Reading Comprehension

Reading is regarded as one of the most essential skills for ESL/EFL language learners (Parris, Gambrell and Schleicher (2008). According to Yahya (2010), reading is an important verbal skill that needs to be accomplished by students so that they can explore knowledge thoroughly. Günes (2007) claims that reading involves a number of complex processes, which involve various functions of eyes, sound and brain such as seeing, perceiving, vocalizing, comprehending and constructing in the brain. Additionally, Bucuvalas (2002) and Williams (2008) claim that reading is eventually constructing meaning from printed text which, according to Maasum & Maarof (2012) requires the readers to know the accurate meaning of their text, go beyond the surface meaning of the text and have the capacity to interpret it in their own views.

According to Goldenberg (2011) the main goal for reading is "comprehension", and everything else is a means to this end. This view was shared by a number of researchers in EFL/ESL. Goodman and Goodman (2009) claim that "the study of reading is the study of reading comprehension" (p.92). Similarly McNamara (2007) claims that comprehension is the ability to go further than the words, to understand the ideas in a text and the relationship that exist between those ideas. Based

on Korabiak and Mete (2004), a reader is not considered to have mastered the reading skill if one does not know how to comprehend the text that has been accessed and read. Additionally, according to Yahya and Ghazali (2012), reading and understanding are constructive processes that support one another.

A number of previous researches have confirmed that successful comprehension does not happen involuntary. Being a successful reader is not a matter of chance and some happening; rather it depended on directed cognitive effort. According to Flavell (1976), the directed cognitive effort includes the active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of information processing activities referred to as metacognitive strategies. Regarded as high order executive skills, metaconginitive strategies are said to involve planning, monitoring and self-regulating activities (Tavakoli, 2014; Pammu et al., 2014).

Metacognitive strategies have widely attracted attention in the domain of education (Baker, 2005; Willcutt, & Palumbo, 2005; Othman et al., 2014). Eilers and Pinkely (2006) endorsed the use of metacognitive strategy for reading and comprehension lessons because it helped students to think methodically in all the three levels of reading processes namely, before reading, during reading and after reading (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Joshi, 2007; Othman et al., 2014).

Othman et al (2014) asserted that what was important in increasing students' understanding during the teaching of reading is the application of metacognition strategy such as guessing, building questions, highlighting difficult words and referring meaning in dictionaries and connecting meanings with sentence according to the context of the reading materials. When students actively engaged in carrying out those activities, they were encouraged to interact with each other and with their teachers. This instantly increased the students' understanding of the text. These activities therefore gave opportunities for students to learn from one another in explaining their understanding.

Numerous second language studies had examined the relationship between metacognitive awareness and L2 reading. To start with, Barnett (1988) showed a positive relation between L2 reading comprehension and strategies in use. In her study, as the L2 readers perceived the effectiveness of strategies, they used more reading strategies and achieve higher level of comprehension. Auerbach and Paxton's (1997) study also revealed that L2 readers who were more conscious of using metacognitive strategies for comprehending the text outperformed those who simply focused on the sentence level of the text. Additionally, Eilers and Pinkley (2006) found that metacognitive strategies (e.g., making presumption and inferences) could explicitly boost the comprehension of the L2 learners in the various text types.

The effectiveness of metacognitive strategies was discussed in a number of studies. Houtveen and Grift (2007) have carried out a quasi-experimental study in which the results showed that the application of the strategy implemented by teachers during reading lessons is effective in increasing students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, Boulware et al., (2007) examined whether the instruction that incorporated metacognitive strategy led to an increase in the reading comprehension of expository text and vocabulary. The result revealed that the metacognitive reading comprehension instruction significantly improved the academic achievement of the students both in terms of reading comprehension and vocabulary. Similarly, Zhang and Seepho (2013) also found that there was a significant positive correlation between the use metacognitive strategy and English reading achievement. Recently, in Othman et al's (2014) study, metacognitive strategy used by the students was also found to enhance their understanding of the texts.

Discussing the effectiveness of the metacognitive strategies, most of the earlier studies focused on EFL learners. There are very few studies which had actually examined the effects of using metacognitive strategy in improving ESL learners' reading skills. The present study, therefore, aims to investigate the effect of metacognitive strategy on teaching

English reading comprehension to Bhutanese ESL learners as the learners' opinion on metacognitive strategy instructions.

Methodology

Research Design

The present research employed the quasi-experimental method involving the quantitative approach in which a pre-test and post-test was conducted to two sample groups (i.e. experimental group and control group). The pre-test was carried out in the beginning to establish a baseline data and the post-test was conducted at the end after the intervention. Finally, a qualitative analysis of the experimental group's responses toward the metacognitive strategy was added.

Research Participants

The research sample came from students in one of the public higher secondary schools in Thimphu, Bhutan. Two sections were chosen through a purposive sampling technique from the seven sections (272 students) as the subjects were already assigned in groups by the institution. One section (38 students) was assigned as experimental group and the other (43 students) as the control group. The participants are at the same level of English proficiency (upper intermediate) as all of them have completed the Bhutan Certificate of Secondary Education (BCSE) examination.

Research Instruments

Research instruments consisted of reading texts, a set of comprehension tests and a semi-structured interview.

Reading Texts

Three reading comprehension passages were adapted from the book "Succeed in IELTS Academic 6 Practice Tests for the IELTS Academic Module" by Andrew Bestsis and Lawrence Mama (2013), published by GLOBAL ELT LTD.

Comprehension Test

Three comprehension passages were taken from the book "Succeed in IELTS Academic 6 Practice Tests for the IELTS Academic Module" by Andrew Bestsis and Lawrence Mama (2013). The test consisted of 40 items of subjective questions composed of a mix of multiple-choice questions, matching, choosing true or false and summary completion. Each of the answer was given the value of one for the correct answer and 0 for the wrong answer.

Semi-structured Interview

The researcher interviewed nine students randomly chosen from the experimental group. The students were asked whether they were familiar with the strategies before the instruction, whether the strategies were most helpful, and how they felt about the strategy instruction program and its effects on

their reading comprehension skills. The researchers recorded their respective responses and observed on how they reacted to the questions.

Data Collection Procedure

The data were gathered from 81 samples of grade eleven students for almost a month in April. There were 10 sessions of two hour instruction in every day class and one and half hours each for pre-test and post-test. The researcher selected two classes in one of the public higher secondary schools in Thimphu, Bhutan. One sample group consisting of 38 students served as the experimental group. This group participated in the metacognitive strategy program which aimed to enhance students' reading comprehension in English through direct teaching of metacognitive strategy. The researcher taught the participants on the application of metacognitive strategy in reading comprehension lesson by following the instructional framework of Othman et al. (2014). The researcher first introduced the metacognitive strategy to the students and gave them enough practice on how to use the strategy during all the three process of reading i.e. before reading, during reading and after reading. The other sample group which consisted of 44 students was control group. This group received the traditional strategy in teaching reading comprehension. After the metacognitive strategy program, nine

students were chosen randomly from the experimental sample group for a semi-structured interview which was conducted face to face during which the researcher observed, videotape, and recorded.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data acquired from the comprehension test were gathered and analyzed using ANCOVA to show the mean difference in the achievement between the two groups before and after the treatment session (pre-test and post-test). The ANCOVA analysis also showed the test of correlation between pre-test and post-test.

The qualitative data collected through the semi-structured interview were analyzed using Thematic Analysis (TA) which includes coding data and identifying categories within the data and drawing themes from those categories.

3. Results and Findings

3.1 Is the metacognitive strategy more efficient than the traditional strategy in improving reading comprehension of Bhutanese students?

The data gathered were analyzed using t-test to determine the significant difference of mean for reading comprehension achievement of participants who attended reading lesson using metacognitive strategy and those who attended reading lesson using the traditional

strategy in pre-test. First, as illustrated in Table 1, the T-test analysis showed that there was no significant between mean score of experimental group and control group as the p-value is 0.0647 (*p-value < 0.05). Therefore, the comprehension achievements between both groups were

the same before the treatment session. This similarity in the students' scores indicates that the participants in both groups had the same level of mastery in reading understanding before treatment session.

Table 1. T-test for mean difference of reading comprehension performance between experimental group and control group

Test	N	Mean	S.D.	T	P-value
Experimental group	38	14.18	3.360	.460	.0647
Control group	43	13.86	2.973		

*p-value < 0.05

After ten sessions (treatments), participants' comprehension performances based on the text read were measured

through the post-test. The findings are in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean Difference in Achievement by Group Controlling for Post-test

Treatment	Mean	S.D.	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Experimental Group	21.953	.594	20.770	23.135
Control Group	12.321	.558	11.209	13.433

After ten sessions (treatments), participants' comprehension performances based on the text read were measured

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As Table 2 indicates, the mean score of experimental group is 21.953 (S.D. 594) and control group is 12.321 (S.D. 558). The difference in the mean score between the experimental group and control group confirms that the students who received metacognitive strategy instruction performed exceptionally better than the control group with 95% confidence level. Meanwhile, the control group respondents exposed with traditional reading strategy showed comprehension performance that was very low compared to the experimental group that has been exposed and given the skill to apply metacognitive strategy in reading and comprehension lessons. Without exposure on the strategy, this control group did not show a good performance in terms of their understanding towards the reading text.

To conclude the findings of the research, ANCOVA results showed that there were statistically significant group differences in achievement for reading comprehension between the traditional strategy program and metacognitive strategy and that student's pre-test are positively associated with achievement. Group comparison shows that comprehension performances for experimental group being exposed with reading lesson using metacognitive strategy were statistically higher in achievement. Both the observed and adjusted means show that students in the experimental group performed better

than students in control group. Results also show that the greater one's pre-test, the greater will be one's achievement.

3.2 What are the students' responses towards metacognitive strategy in improving their reading comprehension?

The analysis of the contents of the interviews carried out with the students revealed that students had never been taught reading strategy before. Although they had employed some strategy in their reading activities, this was done subconsciously. They affirmed that metacognitive strategy not only helped them in all the three process of reading (before reading, during reading, and after reading), but also helped them to manage their time by looking for major points and key words in the text which made their comprehension faster and easier. It helped them organize their ideas and improve their working process. In addition to this, all students believed that the metacognitive strategy training they had received as part of the study was very beneficial. Almost everyone stated that they felt their reading skill had improved as a result of instruction and that they were more confident in their reading abilities.

Conclusion and Discussion

Investigating the effects of metacognitive strategy on teaching English reading comprehension to Bhutanese ESL

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learners and the learners' opinion on metacognitive strategy instructions, this research study has implications for learners, teachers, and teacher educators in the realm of TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) as well as education in general. Based on Pressley and Afflerbach (1995), in ESL/EFL context where learners have relatively less exposure to the language being learned, teachers can play a part in enhancing student's awareness of such strategies, and in facilitating them to become constructively responsive readers. This means teachers need to incorporate metacognitive strategy into their teaching methods and encourage their students to use the strategy as frequently as possible. This can help learners to assist their own learning process to improve their language skills and also can contribute to raising the importance of metacognitive reading strategy training for students with low achievement in reading. The learners need to recognize and appreciate more fully that developing and applying metacognitive reading strategy could improve their reading skill in their content subjects and also their academic performance.

In addition, in teaching reading comprehension lessons, teachers can initiate group activities or peer work that give students more room for social interaction. Encouraging them to participate in discussions based on the reading materials can considerably enhance their understanding on the text.

Besides, these activities give more opportunity for students to learn from one another in explaining their ideas and understanding.

This research provides further evidence for the benefits of metacognitive strategy training. All students, especially those who have comprehension problems, now have tools that can help them understand what they read. Concluding that the experimental group achieved significantly better result than the control group indicated that implementing the use of metacognitive strategy improved the reading comprehension of ESL students in Bhutan. Systematic explicit instruction on the concept of metacognition and helped the students to better comprehend this approach and how to apply it to different learning tasks on reading. The results of present study is consistent with the previous study carried out by Eilers and Pinkley (2006), Houtveen and GriftZ (2007), Shokrpour and Fotovatian (2009) Zhang and Seepho (2013) and Othman et al (2014) in which the metacognitive strategy was found to be effective in developing the learners' reading skills. The present study has therefore confirmed that reading comprehension could be developed through systematic instruction in metacognitive language learning strategies.

In conclusion, the use of metacognitive strategy in the reading process has been generally supported as a valuable aid for developing learners' reading skills.

A number of studies (Carrell, 1995; Chamot, 2005; Wenden, 2001) have addressed the positive effects of utilizing metacognitive strategy in the reading process. Assisting learners in becoming more successful learners, metacognitive strategy are effective in raising students' understanding of what being read and should be used in reading comprehension lessons.

Recommendation for Further Study

A recommendation for future research could be to give more opportunities for student to participate and use English

language through group discussions, peer monitoring and class as a whole. Various reading materials-e.g., magazines, newspaper, advertisements and official documents) could also be used in finding the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy to enhance their reading comprehension. Furthermore, more research is needed to investigate which strategies are used most among Bhutanese ESL learners and ESL teacher's attitudes towards the explicit teaching of metacognitive reading strategies in the classroom.

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