

## **Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Students' Awareness of Metacognitive Reading Strategies**

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### **Abstract:**

Metacognitive reading strategies and extensive attention to reading have a great deal contribution to better learners' comprehension of the texts they handle upon, in a way that more aware learners are of reading strategies, better their comprehension will be.

The purpose of this study, finding out Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' awareness level of metacognitive reading strategies. Accordingly, a sample of (385) students from different Iraqi preparatory schools in Baghdad city/Directorate of Education Al- Rusafa 2<sup>nd</sup>, for the academic year 2022/2023. The instrument is used to achieve the aim of this study: a Questionnaire of Metacognitive Reading Strategy Awareness. The finding reveals that the students have an insufficient level of metacognitive reading strategy awareness.

**Keywords:** Metacognitive Reading Strategies, Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire, Iraqi EFL preparatory school students.

### **I. Introduction:**

O'Malley and Chamot (1995) define metacognition as knowledge about cognition or the regulation of cognition. Metacognitive reading strategy awareness has become one of the most influential means to facilitate students' reading comprehension process in the field of second/foreign language studies. Metacognitive reading strategy awareness is defined as any choice, behavior, thought, suggestion, or technique used by a reader to help their learning process (Cook, 2001; Oxford, 1990).

Moreover, Metacognitive reading strategy awareness refers to strategies that help students regulate or monitor their strategies. They are notions of thinking about thinking, and are defined as planned, intentional, goal-directed, and future-oriented mental processing that can be used to accomplish cognitive tasks (Salataki & Akyel, 2002; Phakit, 2003).

The problem of the present study is succinctly investigated through responding to the following question: What is Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' awareness level of metacognitive reading strategies?

## **II. Literature Review:**

### **2.1 Reading Strategies:**

Reading strategies are defined as “how readers interact with the written texts and how these strategies help to enhance text comprehension which include mental plans” (Rajoo & Selvaraj, 2010, p. 1301). According to Block (1986), reading strategies show how readers decide what they want to read, what parts of the text they want to focus on, how they make sense of the text, and how they deal with parts or phrases they don't understand. Students can be taught how to make these decisions, (R. K. Elaf, 2022). English as a foreign language in particular suffer from a different focus on learning or teaching (Alsaadi & Shahad Hatim, 2016).

According to Li (2010), reading strategies are intentional and self-aware strategies that readers employ to improve their chances of comprehending or remembering textual information. Amirian (2013) mentions, reading strategies can reflect how readers tackle a task, how they understand what they read, and what they do when they become confused. Due to their concealed nature and the need for introspective data-gathering methods, the majority of learning strategies cannot be observed in the classroom, (Sundus A.J. 2022).

According to Mokhtari and Reichard (2002), there are variations between good and poor readers regarding their reported reading strategies, reading strategies employed, and knowledge of reading strategies. Poor readers read the material word for word without strategies. While good readers are aware of what they are reading and why they are reading, they also employ specific plans and strategies to check their own understanding and overcome obstacles (Habeb & Abbas, 2018). These strategies include:

#### **2.1.1 Predicting:**

Magliano et al. (1993, p. 35) demonstrate that "prediction strategy involves thinking about what might be coming next. It is applied by effective readers that means, they used pictures, headings, and text as well as personal experience to make predictions before they begin to read". Therefore, it requires active mental activity when reading and anticipating information and events in the text.

According to Duffy (2009), prediction is important in comprehension. Excellent readers predict meaning, they do it by predicting what they believe will occur in the passage and modifying their predictions as they read. Predictions are made while one reads and make a beneficial connection between the reader and the written material. It also increases the reader's interest by keeping their attention on the subject.

### 2.1.2 Inferring:

According to Prezler (2006), inferences are evidence-based guesses, i.e. in case of reading: students use their prior knowledge schema to make inferences about the text. Zimmermann and Ellin (1997) say that inferences are the conclusions the author intends the reader to draw about the unsaid paragraph based on what the writer actually says.

In light of this, Duffy (2009) defines this reading strategy as finding comprehension in the writer's words that is not clearly demonstrated in a book. Rios and Valcarcel (2005, p. 60), state that "inference is the use of syntactic, logical, and cultural clues to find out the meaning of unknown elements". Consequently, this reading strategy relates to the integration of what is represented in the text and what learners have to know through the previous knowledge. Here, reading comprehension will be strengthened since the students are aware of the text's clues that are concealed by the use of prior knowledge that enables them to develop conclusions about the problem presented during the reading process.

### 2.1.3 Summarizing:

Duffy (2009) believes that summarizing is the creation of a brief retelling of a text. It may include the main idea or theme, the focus is on describing it in a brief from the text's major points. Mickulecky and Jeffries (1996) assert that a good summary includes the main ideas and the major supporting points. Using keywords from the book or their own, readers can learn what the topic is about by retelling only the important and relevant ideas (Pressley, 2006).

Paran (1996) indicates that text summarization assists students in synthesizing the concepts of the text in a way that allows them to fit the material into their schema. Synthesizing makes it easier to make generalizations and come up with ideas, as well as to combine new information with the already known.

After completing the process of comprehension, it requires students to arrange or rephrase the main concepts of a given passage in their own words to generate a condensed version that includes just the most important points. (Wilhelm, 1997).

### 2.1.4 Guessing:

Reading new or unfamiliar words in a text seems to be one of the hardest things for readers to do when they are trying to understand what they are reading. In order to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context to save time and to continue reading without interruption or referring to a dictionary, guessing is the most effective way to solve this problem (Clarke & Nation, 1980). This reading strategy focuses on the student's ability to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words using the context of the written text, as well as the reader's vocabulary to support and reinforce the guessing process.

According to Nuttal (2005), a number of textual aspects influence the capacity to predict the meaning:

- The characteristics of the word itself;
- The level of difficulty of the text;
- The presence of contextual clues; and
- The familiarity with the topic.

However, learners who are able to predict unknown vocabulary based on context have a powerful aid to comprehend and will ultimately read more quickly. The contextual guessing strategy is emphasized by Nagy (1995) when language students lack an understanding of the language itself (vocabulary, grammar, or other linguistic elements to read a given text). This strategy is frequently used to infer the meanings of unknown words based on context.

The advantage of this strategy is achieved by the notion that guessing has been advocated instead of dictionary use because stopping to use a dictionary interrupts the flow of reading (Sullivan & Brown, 2015).

### **2.1.5 Paraphrasing:**

Paraphrasing can be defined as rephrasing or rewording what students read or hear in their own words, i.e. using different words of the same language. It differs from translation in that translation involves using different words to say the same thing in another language (Godefrey, 2013).

In this strategy, the learners are not tasked with proving their own accuracy, but rather with revealing and explaining every truth associated with their topic. So, its objective is to transmit the meaning of the original message so that the reader may comprehend the paragraph adequately (Hall, 2004).

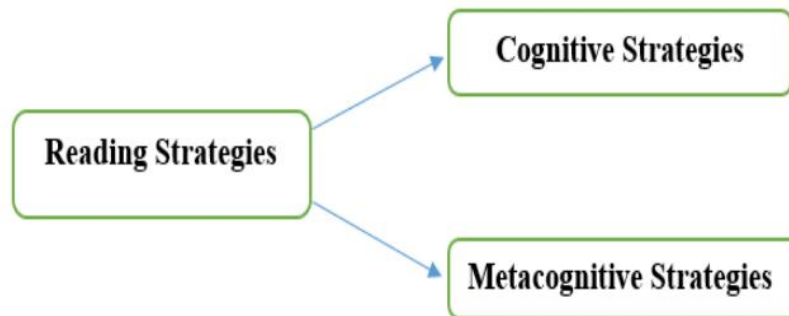
Schumaker et al. (1984) explain the importance of this strategy, which accurately conveys the writer's meaning and opinion in a simpler, clearer, and shorter way without changing the meaning, while keeping the basic logic of the arguments, and the passage's order of ideas, and even the examples.

### **2.2 Reading Strategy Classification:**

Cognitive and metacognitive strategies are the two basic categories of reading strategies. The most important presumption is that the student and the teacher would take care of the structure spontaneously (Krebt, 2017). By practicing, analyzing, and constructing input and output structures, cognitive strategies are applied to help the reader gain meaning from the text. While metacognitive strategies allow students to evaluate and reflect on their cognitive processes throughout reading (Davies & Biscoeteau, 1993).

**Figure 1**

*The Two Major Categories of Reading Strategies (Davies & Bistodeau, 1993)*



### 2.2.1 Cognitive Reading Strategies

Cognitive strategies are intentionally implemented mental processes that manage cognitive processes and content to achieve goals and solve problems (Chen, 2002). The most common reading strategies among language students are mainly cognitive strategies. The importance of these strategies increases with the students' age. Allowing students to apply these strategies as effectively as possible is a suitable strategy for their development. Moreover, cognitive strategy practice may cultivate reading strategies that will make students strategic and flexible learners (Nikolov, 1990).

According to Semtin and Maniam (2015), cognitive reading strategies are specific learning strategies that employ in the learning process, such as relating the new words in mind and writing down the main idea. These strategies assist and direct students in comprehending the reading material by rereading, skimming, analysing, and summarising it, as well as by using their native language to produce ideas.

By using cognitive strategies, students are able to control their attention while comprehending a reading passage. Cognitive strategies refer to what students need to grasp when they read, how to make the reading relevant, and what to do if they face obstacles or difficulties. In practice, despite the fact that this strategy can assist or enhance students' comprehension of the reading material they encounter, it may also impair or impede text comprehension (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Cognitive content is not necessarily made up of independent coherent elements, but rather perceived as souvenirs or mental representations of facts and experiences, emotions and events (Krebt, 2022).

In conclusion, cognitive reading strategies involve direct interaction with the written text, aid in facilitating comprehension, and directly manipulate coming information to increase comprehension. Williams and Burden (1997) say that these strategies help students understand what they are reading by making them use higher-order thinking, guess the topic based on the context, use a dictionary, summarize,

write down, use linguistic clues, use text markers, skip the hardest parts, and repeat words or phrases.

### 2.2.2 Metacognitive Reading Strategies

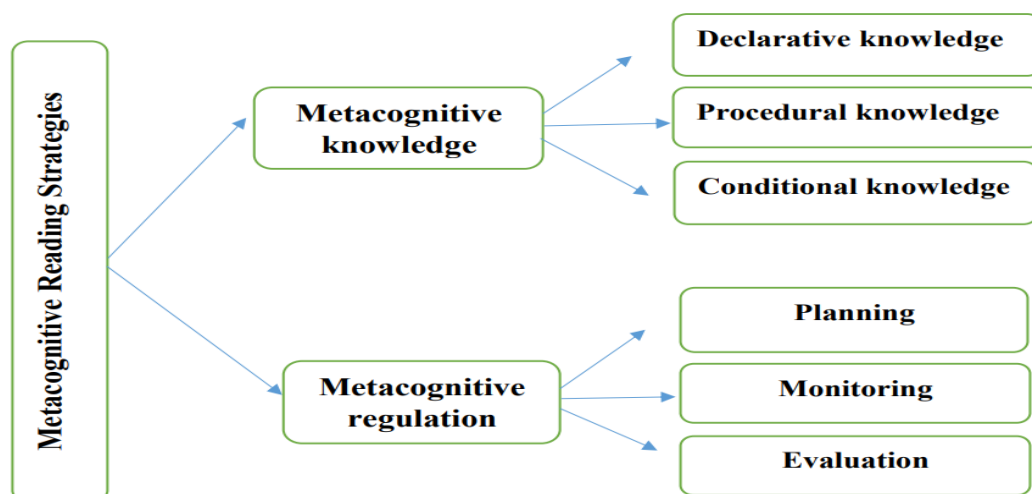
The first signs of metacognition emerged near the end of the nineteenth century when William James (1840–1910) wrote a chapter called "study of the mind from within" in his book "The Principles of Psychology" in 1890. Since then, there has been a focus on metacognition, which is defined as knowing one's own knowledge, and the learning process. The consciousness of one's own learning process improves that process (Chadwick, 1988).

The term "metacognition" was introduced for the first time in Flavell's classic article "Meta Cognitive Aspects Of Problem Solving" (1976). Metacognition is defined by Flavell as "individual's knowledge about his/her cognitive process, and employing this knowledge to inspect cognitive processes" (Flavell, 1976, p. 232). Iwai (2011) believes that metacognitive reading strategies are important for reading comprehension since they involve planning, monitoring, controlling, and evaluating the reading process.

Flavell (1979) and Brown (1987) define metacognition as knowledge of cognition and its regulation. The knowledge section includes declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge. Declarative knowledge is the understanding of tasks and strategies for doing them. To have procedural knowledge is to know how to utilize the necessary strategies to complete a given task. Conditional knowledge is knowing when and why to employ a specific strategy. The regulation section provides mechanisms for planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning. As illustrated in the following figure:

**Figure 2**

*The Structure of Metacognitive Reading Strategies (Brown, 1987; Flavell, 1979)*



### 2.2.2.1 Knowledge of cognition:

The term "knowledge of cognition" (metacognitive knowledge) refers to knowledge of the learning process in reading. For instance, a learner may be aware that a scientific academic journal may take longer time to read than a work of fiction. The cognitive process is influenced by knowledge of strategies. It consists of declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge (Schraw et al., 2006). Carrell (1998) defines metacognitive knowledge as the answers to the following questions: (know what), (know how), and (know why). It is essential knowledge in reading, since students are unable to answer (what), (how), and (why) that mean they are less likely to improve their reading proficiency (Baker, 2013).

### 2.2.2.2 Regulation of cognition:

Regulation of cognition; also called metacognitive regulation or monitoring, is the process of controlling and evaluating how one learns. Planning, monitoring, and evaluating reading strategies are aspects of regulatory control. It includes activities before reading (planning), checking the learning process (monitoring), and evaluating (reflecting on the strategy) are examples of planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Anderson, 2008).

If language learners know what kind of strategies they have to use in order to keep track their progress, they can learn the language faster. According to Anderson (2008), improving reading comprehension involves five different phases. These include preparation and planning for learning, during this phase, students organize their tasks so they can reach their goals faster and with more control. Selection and use of strategies, these strategies can assist in problem-solving when encounter difficult text. Monitoring of learning, it is the most effective strategy for determining if a reader is on the right path of learning. Orchestration of strategies, an essential metacognitive skill is knowing how to organize several strategies. Evaluation of strategy usage and learning, in the final step, students evaluate or categorize their strengths and weaknesses to determine how effectively they can accomplish specified tasks.

According to Brown (1987), the two components of metacognition are interconnected.

## III. Methodology

### 3.1 Population and Sampling

The population in this study is Iraqi EFL 5th preparatory school students in Baghdad of General Directorate of Education Al- Rusafa 2nd during the academic year 2022/2023. As a sample, (385) students are randomly selected for the present study.

### 3.2 Instrument

The instrument has been used in order to collect the required data:

- Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Questionnaire.

The questionnaire of Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies is adapted from Kouider Mokhthetari and Carla Reichard (2002). It is comprised of (30) items which are divided into three categories: global, support, and problem-solving reading strategies in order to assess students' awareness of metacognitive reading strategies. In terms of the questionnaire's practical application, a four-point Likert scale is used. Given the alternatives (always, usually, sometimes, and never).

### 3.3 Reliability

A group of (40) Iraqi EFL preparatory school students from the Educational Directorate of Baghdad is randomly selected for the purpose of conducting the pilot administration of the questionnaire. The pilot administration is carried out in order to achieve the following goals:

1. The clarity of items and instructions in the questionnaire.
2. The amount of time participants set aside to complete answering the instrument.

The reliability of the metacognitive reading strategies is proven by re-administrating them on the pilot sample two weeks after the first administration. Then the Pearson correlation coefficients of the first and second scores are calculated, and the correlation coefficients are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Reliability Coefficients of Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire*

Strategies	Reliability Coefficient
Global Reading Strategies	0.90
Support Reading Strategies	0.88
Problem-Solving Strategies	0.87

## IV. Results:

To find out Iraqi EFL preparatory school students' awareness level of metacognitive reading strategy, the metacognitive reading strategies questionnaire is administered to the research sample. After sorting the answers, the arithmetic averages for each strategy has been extracted, and for the purpose of finding out the significance of the difference between the arithmetic mean for each strategy and its



theoretical average, the t-test has been used for one sample, and the results are shown in table 2.

**Table 2**

*The Arithmetic Mean, the Standard Deviation, and the T-Value of the Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire*

Metacognitive Reading Strategies	N.	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Theoretical Mean	T-value		Significance 0.05
					calculated	Critical	
Global Reading Strategies	385	32.031	5.443	32.5	1.690	1.96	Not Significant
Support Reading Strategies	385	22.262	3.679	22.5	1.268	1.96	Not Significant
Problem-Solving Strategies	385	20.260	3.073	20	1.659	1.96	Not Significant

The table shows the following:

1. The arithmetic mean of the participants' scores on the (global reading strategy) is (32.031), the standard deviation is (5.443), the theoretical mean is (32.5), and the calculated t-value is (1.690), which is lower than the critical t-value (1.96) at the level significance (0.05) and a degree of freedom (384), which means that the participants' sample use this strategy at insufficient level.
2. The arithmetic mean of the participants' scores on the (support reading strategy) is (22.262), the standard deviation is (3.679), the theoretical mean is (22.5), and the calculated t-value is (1.268), which is lower than the critical t-value (1.96) at the level significance (0.05) and a degree of freedom (384), which means that the participants' sample use this strategy at insufficient level.
3. The arithmetic mean of the participants' scores on the (problemsolving strategy) is (20.260), the standard deviation is (3.073), the theoretical mean is (20), and the

calculated t-value is (1.659), which is lower than the critical t-value (1.96) at the level significance (0.05) and a degree of freedom (384), which means that the participants' sample use this strategy at insufficient level.

## V. Discussion of Results

The goal of the current study is to show how Iraqi EFL preparatory school students are aware of metacognitive reading strategies, as they are considered the main beneficiaries of learning English. Awareness is sought with regard to how students are aware and comprehend these metacognitive reading strategies. The current study reveals that Iraqi EFL preparatory school students have an insufficient level of awareness of metacognitive reading strategies.

## VI. Conclusions

In accordance with preceding survey and discussion related to the finding, aim, and question of this research, the conclusion has been drawn that Iraqi EFL preparatory school students have an insufficient level of awareness of metacognitive reading strategies.

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