THE USE OF READING STRATEGIES AMONG MALAYSIAN ESL UNDERGRADUATES WHEN READING PRINT AND HYPERTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the reading strategies used by Malaysian ESL undergraduates when reading print and hypertext materials. For this purpose, the theoretical framework of metacognition was employed. A mixed-method approach was adopted whereby two questionnaires – Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) and Online Survey of Reading Strategies (OSORS) were used to quantitatively analyse the learners’ awareness of the metacognitive reading strategies and the qualitative data were gathered using verbal protocols. This study aimed to differentiate the learners’ use of strategies when they engage in reading tasks of two different media – traditional print reading as well as hypertext materials. Five undergraduates from the TESOL programme at a Malaysian private university were asked to read biographies, a form of expository text to analyse their reading strategies. The data gathered showed that the use of reading strategies was similar in terms of the proposed metacognitive strategies which are categorised into the three subscales; Global, Problem-Solving, and Support strategies with varying degrees dependent on the medium of reading. The study also found higher frequency of strategy use when the learners read online, although they employed Problem-Solving strategies significantly higher than strategies of other subscales. This led to the discovery of reading difficulties among themselves, in terms of textual display, vision problems, and restricted access to materials.

Keywords: Reading Strategies, Metacognition, Print, Hypertext, Undergraduates


1.0 INTRODUCTION

The construction of meaning through the interaction between the readers and the text depicted reading as an active and fluent process. More often than not, Anderson (2003) cautioned that learners’ abilities – in particular, among those learners of English as their second language, demonstrated reading performance which was below average, as compared to reading in their first language (Zarrabi, 2015). Due to the difference in the type of reading materials, the research focused more on investigating the distinctiveness, if any, in light of the employment
of reading strategies. Therefore, this present study seeks to classify and analyse the types of strategies used by Malaysian ESL undergraduates when reading print and hypertext materials by addressing the following research questions:

1. What strategies do students use when reading print materials?
2. What strategies do students use when reading hypertext?
3. Is there a difference in the use of reading strategies when students read print materials and hypertext?

This study employed mixed-method design hence the findings reflected both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The researchers hypothesized that there would be differences between the use of reading strategies when students read print materials as compared to reading hypertext. The descriptive analyses on the reports of participants’ use of reading strategies (print vs. hypertext) during the first phase of the study were provided. Then, Think-Aloud sessions were conducted to explore the strategies used by the subjects while reading the academic texts in both media.

1.1 Cognition in reading comprehension

Learners need to recognise the cognitive abilities i.e. skills and strategies required to be in control of their reading while concurrently applying them accordingly in order to attain reading comprehension. This concurs with Grabe and Stoller’s (2011) description of “fluent” comprehension in reading – an interactive process. These virtual cognitive interactions revealed the role of working memory (Baddeley, Eysenck, & Anderson, 2009); from rapid word recognition to sentence analysis up to monitoring learners’ comprehension as reading takes place.

1.2 Metacognitive reading: the skilled readers

Describing characteristics of skilled readers from the viewpoint of (metacognitive) strategy use was mainly attributed to their problem-solving skills i.e. possession of traits like conditional, declarative, and procedural knowledge (Razi & Cubukcu, 2014). Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) also addressed that the grasping of textual information on the surface through general world knowledge prior to making valid inferences about the texts as the trait which sets skilled readers from the unskilled ones.

1.3 Hypertext reading

The use of strategies for learners to achieve comprehension when reading print and hypertext should differ. Several studies have provided evidence for this claim (e.g. Doss, 2009; Zarrabi, 2015) yet surprisingly, the difference noted was in a way that strategies predicted for use in print reading were prevalent in reading hypertext, but the latter necessitated additional comprehension skills and strategies.
2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-method design i.e. reading research survey (quantitative) and verbal protocol reporting (qualitative) to inform each other thus fully explain the phenomenon (Kymes, 2007). Limitations of this research design were noted i.e. verbal protocols are likely to involve a small sample size (Schellings, Aarnoutse, & Van Leeuwe, 2006), besides the conformation to the existing construct of metacognitive strategies i.e. questionnaires on print reading by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) and its adapted version by Anderson (2003) for online reading. Within the boundary of this present study, English language proficiency is considered to be of higher importance (cf. gender) in becoming “accomplished readers” – the responsiveness to deal with the complexities of reading on the Internet (Afflerbach & Cho, 2009). This enabled the participants to report quality verbalisations, hence significant use of strategies. The selection of samples i.e. five undergraduates from the TESOL programme at The University of Nottingham (Malaysia Campus) was made based on their ability to fulfil the task of verbalising their thoughts in English during the verbal protocols.

3.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data gathered, the researchers were able to find some interesting results as follows.

3.1 Reading research survey

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there is a statistically significant mean difference between the use of reading strategies in two different media. The t-test results showed a non-significant trend \( t(4) = 2.449, p = .07 \) towards the predicted direction of having differences in the use of strategy i.e. asking themselves questions they like to have answered while reading the hypertext \( (M = 2.8, SD = .447) \) as compared to reading in print \( (M = 2.2, SD = .836) \). Meanwhile, no significant differences between the use of reading strategies were found in the remaining items \( (all \ p > .05) \), thus the null hypothesis is failed to be rejected. Similarly, a paired-samples t-test on each subscale, simultaneously comparing MARSI and OSORS was also carried out. It can be deduced that there are differences in the use of strategy i.e. the students use more Global strategies when they read hypertext \( (t(4) = 8.157, p = 0.001) \) than reading in print version. Problem Solving strategies are second to be commonly used by the students as when they read online text \( (t(4) = 9.179, p = 0.001) \). However, there was no significant difference between the use of reading strategies with respect to the Support subscale \( (t(4) = .237, p = .825) \) thus the hypothesis is accepted.

The subjects reported the highest usage of Problem-Solving strategies, followed by those from Global and Support subscales accordingly. Problem-solving strategies while reading illustrated a combination of both deliberate actions and cognitive abilities to achieve reading comprehension. Therefore, the need for learners to have self-regulation over their own skills and strategies is essential in reading, in which their metacognitive awareness is noteworthy. Similarly, the data obtained from OSORS depicted learners’ employment of metacognitive awareness which followed the sequence of frequency of that when learners read in print: Problem-Solving, Global, and Support. Six out of the eight problem-solving strategies were those used in print; reading slowly, getting back on track when they lose their concentration, adjusting reading speed, pay closer attention to text, stop from time to time to think, and rereading text for understanding. However, learners reported the additional use of
visualisation for memorization and distinguish fact and opinion strategies when they read hypertext.

3.2 Verbal protocol

Learners reading the text in print demonstrated their use of Cognitive subscale, followed by Metacognitive subscale, and Support subscale. Reading hypertext, meanwhile, showed a slight increment of Metacognitive subscale whilst the remaining subscales were reported equivalent. The least percentage of 50% from this qualitative finding confirmed the learners’ awareness of their reading strategies. Additionally, the subjects in this study (despite satisfying the notion of being skilled readers) stressed their preferences to read print materials over reading hypertext based on a single reason i.e. note taking (Support). The retrospective interviews also provided insights on the learners’ difficulties related to online reading, based on three premises: textual display (the length hindered the act of navigating i.e. scrolling down the text strained the eyes), the vision problem (astigmatism and visual impairment which are notable factors which impeded reading), and the access (some scholarly articles required them to purchase for full access).

4.0 CONCLUSION

This study shows that there is a fine line in the use of metacognitive reading strategies when students read either print or hypertext materials. The notion of metacognition is therefore prevalent in reading research following the subjects’ awareness of metacognition as witnessed in their use of all the strategies, irrespective of the textual forms nor the shift in the medium. Technological advancement has enabled reading activities to be done anywhere and anytime. Nonetheless, the level of comprehension does not necessarily be equivalent. This calls forth the exploration of the thought processes when reading activity is ongoing which would allow the learners to consciously decide what to do to attain their specific reading goals.

In terms of pedagogical implications, This study gives insight to the learning context, indicating that cognitive factors played a major role to understanding learners’ metacognition – the use of metacognitive strategies was significant on top of its awareness among highly skilled readers. Therefore, language teachers should note how the cognitive processing interact with other factors e.g. affective, genders, the planning of classroom instructions with regards to teaching reading skills in English, as well as the development of the reading tasks.

For further research, it is suggested that reading instructions should be made extensive in order to review the existing practices to teaching reading and its materials. Metacognition, as part of the integral domains to explain reading comprehension, should be made tangible to students of this age i.e. integration of higher order thinking skills. It is also suggested that replicating this study in a different context e.g. ESL/EFL learners of varying native language(s) and expanding the sample size would contribute to a greater understanding of metacognition following the significant generalization of the effect size.
REFERENCES


