Metacognitive Reading Strategies Awareness and Usage in Reading Practices of Law Students

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between reading practices and awareness and metacognitive reading strategies by undergraduate law students. In terms of lexical and syntactic features, legal English is distinct from other types of English for Specific Purposes. Lengthy and convoluted sentences of legal language embedded extensively with archaic phrases and foreign terms make it incomprehensible for law students, the novice readers. Promoting the awareness and conscious usage of metacognitive strategies in understanding legal language will facilitate law students' academic and professional success. A reading achievement test was conducted. The Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (Revised) developed by Mokhtari, K., Dimitrov, D. M., & Reichard, C. A., (2018) was administered to a sample of 2nd-year law students. The data obtained using the above instruments indicate a significant correlation between the metacognitive reading strategies awareness and reading proficiency of the law students. It is suggested that explicit teaching of these strategies will positively impact the reading habits of the law students for whom effective reading is imperative in their profession.

Keywords: Metacognitive Reading, Strategies Awareness, Usage in Reading, Practices of Law Students, linguistic features, Reading process.

INTRODUCTION

Legal language used extensively across the globe by legal professionals such as lawyers, judges, legislative drafting technicians, and other persons of the legal fraternity has unique features (Chumsukon, M. (2020). The comprehension of legal texts characterized by legalese engrossed with foreign terminologies and maxims is an essential skill to be mastered by the members of the legal fraternity (Chumsukon, M. (2020). The complexities of the linguistic features of legal text challenge the comprehension ability of the novices, especially the learners of the Indian Law schools for whom English is a second language. Mastering legal language comprehension is an arduous task, as it differs from commonly used English in many aspects, such as lexical, morphological, syntax, and semantics (Majebi, O., Oduolowu, E. (2021). A deep understanding of the text is not a natural process (Dutta, S. (2020). Still, it is acquired gradually through self-regulating actions that involve planning, monitoring, and evaluation which are essential to the reading process (Alexander, Jetton, 2000). This self-regulating and strategic behavior improves the reading process and enhances the overall learning process by augmenting attention and memory across the curriculum (Paris et al., 1991); (Abubakar, A. I. (2021). The individuals' awareness of their mental processes of understanding and the consequential outcome is defined as metacognitive awareness (Flavell,1976). Metacognitive reading awareness is the readers' awareness of their application of strategies to construct the meaning of the text (Jauhari, J. (2020). This study attempts to identify the relationship between the law students' metacognitive reading awareness and use and their actual reading processes (Havryliuk, I. (2020).

Reading and understanding

Reading is a dynamic process where the reader interacts with the text using linguistic and schematic knowledge to elicit the meaning (Arisman, R. (2019). The interactive approach, a combination of identification and interpretation skill, is a growing body of research on reading. (Alyousef, H. S.,2005); (Muraina, K. O., G, S. M., Kabir, Z. M. (2020). Barnitz John explains the reading process as "It could be assumed in mainstream linguistic-reading theory that the reader-listener-writer-speaker's knowledge of the world, his experiential background, his linguistic awareness, and language experiences -- all interact through mental processes as he comprehends 'a written discourse." Kenneth S. Goodman (1967) perceives reading as "psycholinguistic guessing game." He further states that reading involves an interaction between thought and language, and skillful reading is the ability to select the 'productive cues' and derive meaning from the text (Egbedeyi, T. F. (2020); (Fonte, R. J. B. ., Yazon, A. D. ., Tan, C. S. ., Buenvinida, L. P. ., Bandoy, M. M. . (2021). Reading, an integral part of academic affairs, also plays a significant role in the professional context (Damayanti, V. V. W. Irniasari, R. (2020). The objective of any English as a Second Language or English for Specific Purposes curriculum is to meet students' specific linguistic and pragmatic needs (Anna M. Johns and Donna Price-Machado, 1969). The effectiveness of the curriculum is proved when the learners can use the target language in the target situation efficiently and confidently (Tony Dudley-Evans, and Maggie St John, 1998); (Ahmad, S., Hussain, I. A., & Ali, A. (2020). Though reading activities are a part of second language teaching in the Indian educational system, awareness and understanding of the reading strategies employed are scarce, especially in the legal profession, where reading and comprehending intricately woven text contributes largely to professional progression (Hamid, L. (2021); (Cuerdo, R., B. Ison, M. J. ., T. Oñate, C. D. . (2021).

Metacognitive Reading Strategies

Employing reading strategies improves reading comprehension. Reading strategies are result-oriented actions undertaken by the readers to construct the meaning of the text (Andayani, A.,

Julaeha, S. (2019). The process of reading and understanding a text is difficult to observe because the usage of strategies happens at a subconscious level of the readers. Reading skills and reading strategies are different (Dollente, R. D. ., Tan, C. S. . (2021). Reading skill is a natural and unconscious process, whereas reading strategy is reflective (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). Pereira-Laird and Deane (1997) explains the cognitive and metacognitive strategies as:

"Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and regulation activities that take place before, during, and after any thinking activities such as reading. In contrast, cognitive strategies refer to integrating new material with prior knowledge. Cognitive strategies that students use to acquire learn remember, retrieve and understand the material while reading include rehearsal, elaboration, and organizational strategies." (p. 190)

A Paradigm shift from focusing on the teaching methodology to the learning strategies employed by learners is evident in the recent research (Purpura, 1997); (Wirastuty, R. Y. (2019). Metacognition is a higher-order skill that involves the reader's awareness of his thought process, applied comprehension strategies, and monitoring these strategies to construct meaning from the text (Ghaith, 2003). This cognitive strategy is a mental process set that makes learners think about their thinking (Bada, A., Jita, L. (2021). Oxford (1990) states that learners use metacognitive strategies for focused attention to set purpose, monitor, organize, and assess their comprehension process (Donato, N. M. (2021). The metacognitive strategies can identify proficient and inept readers (Arvianto, F. . (2021). Skilled readers recognize various ideas and construct the meaning of a text based on their global knowledge (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002) ; (Abubakar Ismaila, A., Kadage Tukur, abdullahi, Amoson Gambari, I. (2019). In 2002, Mokhtari & Reichard framed the Metacognitive Reading Strategies Inventory MARSI to measure different levels of readers (Capacio, L. J. (2021). The Metacognitive reading strategies Inventory has been adapted and validated by many researchers (Fitriansyah, F. (2020). Temur and Bahar (2011) investigated the Turkish university students' metacognitive awareness strategies and concluded that gender was one of the key elements that impact reading

strategies usage (Deti, R. ., Mandasari, V. . (2021); (Ereje, B. R., Ambag, S. C. (2020).

Challenges in Reading and Understanding Legal text

In terms of lexical and syntactic features, legal English is distinct from other types of English for Specific Purposes (Gecolea, C. M., Gecolea, P. G. . (2021); (Abdulhamid, M., Dauda, S. (2019). In terms of lexical and syntactic features, the complexity of legal English is a result of the development of the legal language as a reflection of sociopolitical conditions throughout history and the juridical tradition it comes from, the Common Law of English-speaking countries (Naparan, G. B. (2020). Hence, knowledge of the legal system is a prerequisite to comprehending the legal language. The opaqueness and obscurity of the legal language challenge comprehension of legal texts (Efendi, M., Ambarita, A. ., Pargito. (2021). Hiltunen (1984) classifies the legal text into Academic, Legislative, or Statutory writings and Juristic. All these texts are part of larger legal discourse and share common characteristics. The students of law need to gain mastery over various legal texts. Legal reading materials and the purpose and approach of reading for law students are different from other academic reading. Most of the reading assignments of the law students are Legislative or statutory writings or case books with limited explanatory text. The students are expected to understand the facts, identify the legal issues involved, recall the rules learned, and apply the rules in a different factual situation.

Lexical features of Legal text

Legal language, like any other profession, has its specialized vocabulary. It is characterized by the cautious approach to avoiding vagueness of meaning or misinterpretation (Han, J.G., Park, S.-Y. (2019). A deeper knowledge of legal lexicons and understanding of their function in the context will facilitate the legal professionals to navigate seamlessly through the complex and interwoven legal texts. The use of old or archaic adverbial expressions such as herewith, aforementioned, starting now, hereof, thereinto makes the tone more formal and is a unique characteristic of legal language. The legal language is attracted to the archaic language when it strives to be more formal (Tiersma, 1999); (Yuliana, Y. (2019). Another feature of

the legal language is the larger adaptation of French and Latin terms. Legal language is highly infused with foreign terms and expressions (Ginting, M. B. (2020); (Wirastuty, R. Y. (2019); (Mbaya, L., Abu, G. O., Caiaphas Makadi, Y.,Umar, D. (2019).

Syntax

The sentences of a legal language are densely constructed and also lengthy. The length of the sentences and the comprehension are inversely proportional (Anggraeni, S. W., Anwar, A. S., Rahayu, S. (2020); (Mbaya, L., Abu, G. O., Caiaphas Makadi, Y.,Umar, D. (2019). Prolixity, a common feature of legal language, makes the text incomprehensible to the readers, especially the novices (Emayavaramban, M., Kandasamy, R. K., Muthusamy, S., Manickam, M. (2020). The guarded and cautious approach to avoid ambiguity, unique word order, and embedded clauses lead to the complexity of legal language. Legal language consists of convoluted sentences with archaic phrases embedded extensively. Crystal & Davy (1969) point out that "it is especially noticeable that any passage of legal English is usually well studded with archaic words and phrases of a kind that could be used by no one else but lawyers." The compound sentences comprise multiple clauses, and the complex sentences consist of many interdependent clauses connected to the main clause at the end of the sentence (C.A, E., A. A., D. (2019). According to Hunt (1965), syntactic complexity refers to 'the length and amount of embedding, and frequency of sophisticated structures such as nonfinite clauses.' The elongated complex sentences combined, through coordination and subordination, contribute to the lexical complexity of the legal text (Diessel,2004). Though it is argued that the prolixity, ambiguity, and complexity of the legal texts are necessitated for their utility, these characteristics make comprehension difficult, and the readers need to adopt and employ reading strategies to understand the unique legal language (Caňo, M. C., et al., 2021).

Teaching and learning the nuances of reading and understanding legal English, especially in the non-native context, is gaining momentum in ESP and ESL research. It is essential to add an element of self-awareness to the reading habit of the learners to encourage reflection and improve the consciousness of the reading process. They need to be equipped with the transferring skills

to use the strategies in a situation different from the original learning situation. Promoting the awareness and conscious usage of metacognitive strategies in understanding legal language will facilitate law students' academic and professional success (Baral, R., Sahu, N., Meher, V. (2019); (Dehipawala, S., Schanning, I., Tremberger, G., Cheung, T. C. D. (2021).

The present study is a conscious effort to gain insight into how law students employ reading strategies to comprehend the legal language and raise the learners' awareness regarding the strategies they apply while reading (Jacob, O. N. (2020). The study on Metacognitive Strategies awareness has been conducted on a variety of academic backgrounds, but to the best of the knowledge of this researcher, an investigation on the metacognitive strategies awareness and use by law students has not been undertaken (Caiaphas Makadi, Y., Stephen Sati, abecca, Dankaka, I. (2019).

Metacognitive reading has been classified in different ways. Mokhtari, K., Dimitrov, D. M., & Reichard, C. A. (2018) classification has the following strategies: Global Reading, Problem - Solving, and Support reading (DS, Y. N., Sadiah, T. L., Dewi, S. M. (2020). Global reading strategies involve reading, previewing the text, checking the relevance of the content, identifying the key information, and critical analysis and evaluation of the information. Problem-solving strategies include the monitoring techniques such as adjusting the speed and pace, maintaining focus, checking comprehension, decoding the meaning of unknown words from the context. Support reading strategies are the mechanism invoked, such as taking notes, reading aloud, using the dictionary, and highlighting the important information. These strategies will help the readers understand, decode the meaning of the reading material, analyze the reading process, and reconstruct the meaning where necessary (Badmus, O. T., Omosewo, E. O. (2020); (O. T. Badmus , E. O. Omosewo (2020).

Research Question

Is there a significant relationship between law students' Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategy and their reading practices?

Instruments

The instruments utilized to collect data in the present study are a reading test and an established questionnaire developed by Mokhtari, K., Dimitrov, D. M., & Reichard, C. A., (2018).

Method

A survey design with a quantitative approach was employed in the present study. To collect data, 51 second-year BBA LLB students of the Faculty of Law were selected by employing a purposive sample technique. A reading test consisting of 25 items was administered. A questionnaire is the most appropriate tool to measure and evaluate the metacognition of many students ((Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Metacognitive Reading Strategy Inventory(Revised) developed by Mokhtari, K., Dimitrov, D. M., & Reichard, C. A., (2018) to measure three constructs (a) Global Reading Strategy, (b) Problem Solving Strategy, and (c) Support Reading Strategy was administered to identify the metacognitive reading strategy awareness and use of the learners. Studies on metacognitive awareness of reading strategies were conducted in different academic contexts across the globe. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, this study has not been conducted in the legal education context (C. Job, G., Opeyemi, A. (2019).

The MRS questionnaire consists of 15 items, each of which consists of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1(I have never heard of this strategy before) to 5(I know this strategy quite well, and I often use it when I read). First, the learners were administered the reading test, and later they were provided the Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire for responses. The doubts of the students were clarified, and they were instructed to read the questionnaire carefully, reflect upon the items mindfully and circle the appropriate point in the Likert scale representing the frequency with which they used the strategy expressed in the relevant statement.

Results

The reading test was conducted for 25 marks and based on scores; the readers were categorized into Good Readers whose scores were 19 to 25, Average Readers whose scores were 11 to 18,

and Poor Readers whose scores were 10 and below.

Table 1: *Reading Test Score Frequency*

Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
19-25	Good Readers	13	25.49
11-18	Average Readers	27	52.94
0-10	Poor Readers	11	21.57
Total		51	100

Table 1 illustrates that among 51 participants majority of the students are capable readers. The highest score is 92 percent. 13 participants have scored above 75 percent and were categorized as good readers. 27 participants who have scored between 48 and 72 percent are considered average readers, and the 11 participants whose scores are less than 44 percent are categorized as poor readers (tables 2 and 3).

Table 2: *Participants' awareness of Reading Strategies in terms of Subscales*

	Global Reading Strategies	Problem-solving Strategies	Support Reading Strategies	Total Reading Strategies
Good Readers (13)	257	264	281	802
Average Readers (27)	529	508	552	1589
Poor Readers (11)	129	130	167	426

Table 3: *The Mean and Standard Deviation of the three subscales of MRS*

	GRS Mean	PPS Mean	SRS Mean	TRS Mean	SD
Good Readers	3.95	4	4.3	4.11	0.189
Average Readers	3.9	3.76	4.1	3.92	0.17
Poor Readers	2.34	2.36	3.03	2.58	0.392

To answer the research question of whether there is a relationship between law students' Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategy and their reading practices, the ratings of Good, Average, and Poor readers on the subscales of structured metacognitive reading strategies (Mokhtari, K., Dimitrov, D. M., & Reichard, C. A., 2018) Global, Problem-Solving and Support reading strategies were separately calculated. Tables. 3 shows Good readers adopted the strategies with high frequency. The total mean of good readers was 4.11. Another significant factor to be noted from the above table is there is only a negligible difference between the total mean of the Good and Average readers. The Average reader's total mean is 3.92. The correlation between the students' awareness and metacognitive strategies and reading test score r=.95 shows a strong positive association between the two variables.
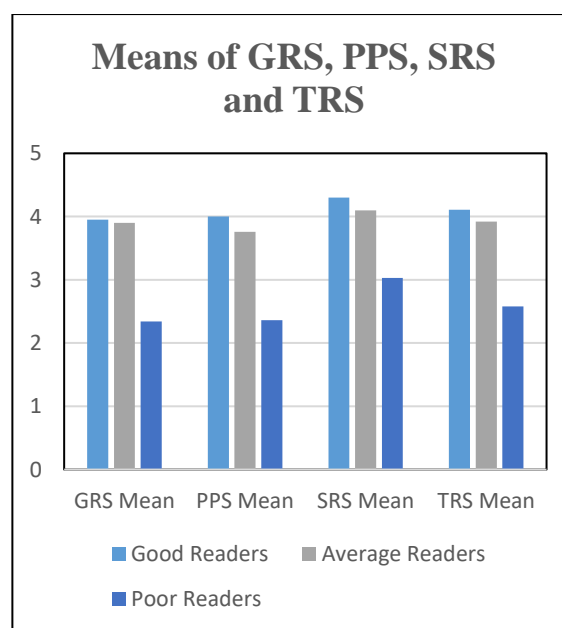

Figure 1: *Visual Representation of the means of the Three Subscales of MRS*

The comparison between the Good, Average, and Poor readers' awareness of Global Reading Strategies means, Problem-solving strategies means, Support Reading Strategies means, and Total Reading means illustrated in Figure 1. Good readers possess a high metacognitive reading strategy awareness compared to the average and poor readers.

Discussion

Mokhtari et al. (2018) designed the Metacognitive Reading Strategy Questionnaire to understand the learners' level of awareness and use of the metacognitive reading strategies. Accordingly, this study was undertaken to understand the level of awareness of the 2nd year BBA LLB students and identify the relationship between the reading practices and the awareness of the metacognitive reading strategies of the participants. The study demonstrates a strong relationship between their reading practices and their level of awareness and use of the metacognitive reading strategies. The students were classified as good, average, and poor readers based on the reading test scores. Good readers have a high level of awareness of metacognitive reading strategies compared to average and poor readers. Also, it can be claimed that there is a strong relationship between the awareness and use of the strategies and the students' reading scores. There is no significant difference between the awareness level of the good and average readers.

Guide to interpreting scores on the MARSI-R instrument,

•   High level of awareness (3.5 or higher)

•   Medium level of awareness (2.5-3.4)

•   Low level of awareness (2.4 or Lower)

According to Mokhtari et al. (2018) interpretation of awareness level, students of both good (TRS Mean = 4.11) and average (TRS Mean = 3.92) readers categories exhibit a high level of awareness. On the other hand, the students classified as poor readers (TRS Mean = 2.58) exhibit a medium level of awareness. There is no low level of awareness found in this study. The awareness and application of the strategies depend on the factors such as the student's age, language proficiency, and the nature of the reading materials (Mokhtari and Reichard (2002). Among the three subscales of strategies majority of the participants have responded more positively to the support reading strategies. Only a marginal difference is observed in the awareness and usage of Global reading strategies and Problem-Solving strategies.

The students are efficient, particularly in vocabulary, identifying the main idea and key information in the text. Basic reading techniques such as underlining and circling important information and using reference materials such as dictionaries are reported by many students. But frequent use of dictionaries may impede the reading speed of the readers. The students should develop the ability to guess the word's meaning from the context. Likewise, discussing with others to check their understanding is also used by many students. Stopping to think or reflect on what is being read is a key Problem-solving strategy that has received fewer ratings. As they progress in their profession, self-monitoring their understanding is an important strategy to be developed. Next to reflecting on reading, the students of all categories have the least interest in previewing the text before reading. Previewing the text will activate the pre-existing knowledge base and helps to relate the content and construct meaning. The readers manage the information in the newly read text and connect this new knowledge with pre-acquired knowledge. This facilitates the reader to have a deeper understanding and new insights. Another important aspect of reading is maintaining focus. A significant inference evident about this problem-solving strategy is those good readers were able to be focused even after distractions. Still, the rating level of the poor readers for this strategy is relatively low.

Conclusion

It is very much evident from the present study that the reading strategies play a significant role in reading and comprehending the text. Though these strategies were not explicitly taught, the good readers were aware of and applied these strategies extensively while reading. Even the students categorized as poor readers have a medium level of awareness. Hence, explicit teaching of these strategies will positively impact the reading habits of the law students for whom effective reading is imperative in their profession. It is suggested that metacognitive reading strategies need to be integrated into the Legal English curriculum. The English language teachers shall explain each strategy and encourage the learners to apply it in their reading practices.

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