



## THE IMPACT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF META COGNITIVE READING SKILLS ON THE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PROFICIENCY OF READING SKILLS

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### ABSTRACT

Reading becomes a very difficult task until the learner gets familiarized to the linguistic aspects of the second language (L<sub>2</sub>). Even though attempts are taken to improve the learners' proficiency in reading skills, there are developmental differences in the proficiency in each learner. Reading is a cognitive process which occurs as a result of the interaction among the readers, text and the context in which the reader must utilize metacognitive knowledge. This study attempts to explore whether the knowledge of Meta cognitive reading skills have an impact on the development in the proficiency of reading skills. Fifty- five first year arts students following a degree were taken as sample for the study. A qualitative and quantitative mixed methodology was utilized for the study. A questionnaire was administered to the participants to gauge the strategies of reading skills they adopt. Pre and post tests were carried out to find the differences before and after the experiment in processing the metacognitive reading skills of the participants. Teachers' observation and relevant literature were utilized. The analysis of data collected revealed the fact that the Meta cognitive reading skills have direct and positive impact on the development in the proficiency of reading skills. The study recommends that the target groups should be issued questionnaires and a needs analysis should be carried out to enable the readers of different proficiency levels to achieve their proficiency in the reading skills. The study has an implication of finding out the proficiency levels in other three skills in the target language at the beginning and to amend the syllabus to suit their proficiency levels to improve their proficiencies by developing their metacognitive processive skills.

**Key words:** second language learners, reading skills proficiency, meta cognitive skills

### Introduction

English is taught as a Second Language in Sri Lanka from the primary to tertiary levels. Reading at the primary level is indispensable as it has a direct impact on the other three skills: listening, speaking and writing. Majority of the second language learners in Sri Lanka, have less exposure to the target

language. The factors such as family, educational, economic, social and religious backgrounds have either negative or positive impact on the learners' development in reading skills proficiency. When reading skill is neglected at the primary and secondary levels it becomes a herculean task to teach and enable the learners to develop proficiency in it. It is found that those who start reading and

develop it with intrinsic motivation are proficient not only in reading but in other three skills too.

### Reading skills

Reading and comprehending takes place in a continuum of identifying letters, words, trying to pronounce correctly, infer, guess meaning, read between lines and understand the text with their previous knowledge. Linguistic elements such as morphology, phonology, semantic and syntactic of the target language should be familiar to understand general to academic materials. The familiarity of the nuances of the word formation, the spelling rules, the pronunciation, the meaning and the contextual functions of the words should be grasped by the reader to read with the correct accent and to pick up the reading speed, the punctuation and the meaning of the text. Reading skill is not acquired by majority of the second language learners. The learners need training in reading and they should follow strategies of reading skills. The correct guidance from their background and schools should motivate learners to develop reading as a hobby and develop it as a habit and continue it in their whole life. Researchers have scientifically explored the skills that are involved in developing reading skills. The recent researchers have found that the meta cognitive skills have a direct impact on one's proficiency in reading skills.

### Metacognition

Metacognition incorporates both linguistic and cognitive activities. According to Flavil (1976) metacognition is "one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them, for example the learning relevant properties of information and data". In 1987 he further elaborated the meta cognitive operation in to three categories which are consciousness, task, and strategy. Meta cognitive skills are how one remembers the letters and reads them. The speed in which they could read an L<sub>2</sub> material, and how fast they get familiarized to the phonemic, morphemic syntactic and semantic aspects /element of the target lang. The cognitive skills in acquiring the L<sub>1</sub> is not always similar in acquiring the L<sub>2</sub> reading proficiency. The learner is fully exposed to L<sub>1</sub> environment whereas the exposure to L<sub>2</sub> speaking environment varies

according to one's geographical family, educational L<sub>2</sub> environment.

### Objective

The objective of the study is to explore whether the knowledge of meta cognitive reading skills have an impact on the development in the proficiency of reading skills.

### Methodology.

Fifty- five first year arts students following a degree were taken as sample for the study. A qualitative and quantitative mixed methodology was utilized for the study. A questionnaire was administered to the participants to gauge the strategies of reading skills they adopt. Pre and post tests were carried out to find the differences before and after the experiment in processing the metacognitive reading skills of the participants. Teachers' observation and relevant literature were utilized.

### Literature review

Vygotsky's (1978) postulated a theory on the development of higher mental functions. He elaborated the relation- ship between self-consciousness and self-regulations in learning and about the significance of the development of cognitive processing which takes place in a learner. Flavell researched on these processes and coined the word 'metacognition'. He describes that "one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them, for example the learning relevant properties of information and data". (Flavell, 1976, p. 232). Flavell categorized the metacognitive operations into three categories such as consciousness, task and strategy. Researchers such as Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002 and others agree that important aspects of reading skill are awareness and monitoring of one's comprehension processes. Phakiti (2006) found that second language readers often encounter "unfamiliar words, syntactic structures or topics that make them to consciously evaluate and examine alternative sources or use context clues". Ghyasi, Safdarian, & Farsani, (2011).found that the reasons are the learners do not have sufficient vocabulary to

understand the reading materials and due to their low level of reading strategy knowledge.

### **Analysis**

#### **Pre and post reading tests**

Fifty- five students at the tertiary level were taken as sample for the study. At the beginning a pre test was conducted to test the participants' proficiency level in reading skills. Forty participants who obtained more than forty -five marks were named as group A. They were considered as the experimental group and the rest were named as B and they were regarded as controlled group. The participants were taught reading skills in common. The group A was given special lessons on the strategies of reading skills and were imparted the knowledge of the Meta cognitive skills involved in reading. A common reading test was conducted at the end of the study. The controlled group did not show much difference in their performance in the post test. When compared to the controlled group the experimental group obtained more marks. The experimental group obtained good marks in their performance in reading skills and showed improvement remarkably when compared to their performance in the pretest.

#### **Questionnaire**

A questionnaire was administered to the participants to find out the strategies of reading skills they adopt. The controlled group disclosed the fact that they do not read materials in L<sub>2</sub> regularly. They mentioned in the questionnaire that they read only when they are compelled to read to fulfil a task. The experimental group stated that they often read materials in L<sub>2</sub> as they are eager to find the latest news, events and even literature related to their subjects. The data collected from the questionnaire reveals the fact that the controlled group is not motivated and therefore they have not developed any particular effective strategy to read and to develop their proficiency in the same. Whereas the experimental group showed motivation to read in L<sub>2</sub> from their childhood which enabled them to develop the reading habit which enabled them to obtain individual reading skills reading strategies and metacognitive reading skills. The analysis of

questionnaire survey shows that the experimental group has adopted reading skills and made use of the meta cognitive strategies which were taught during the experiment to perform the tests. The study reveals the fact that by obtaining the knowledge of meta cognitive reading skills experimental group was able to develop their proficiency in reading skills.

#### **Teachers' observation**

The experimental group was taught about the strategies of reading and the meta cognitive skills which are involved in developing the reading skills proficiency .The teachers were able to demonstrate the cognitive processes in reading such as the role of memory in guessing meanings, inferring, comparing, matching words, juxtaposing , finding connotative and denotative meaning of words with their past reading skills which they adopted and the role of their cognitive experiences in developing or not developing the proficiency in reading skills. .The participants were enlightened about the role of meta cognition in the ability they possess to pronounce new words by remembering the pronunciation patterns in L<sub>2</sub> and other linguistic elements such as following the word formation rules, structure and grammar of the target language. The teachers found that the participants in the experimental group realized that the reading strategies that were taught and the function of the meta cognitive skills demonstrated by the teachers enabled them to increase their proficiency in reading skills. The study enabled both the teachers and the participants in the experimental group to experience how easily they could read and complete different and difficult tasks without much struggle and also to develop their proficiency in the same with the knowledge of reading skill strategies and the meta cognitive skills.

The teachers observed individual differences in the reading skills in the participants at the beginning. During and at the end of the study they observed the fact that the experimental group developed the reading skill proficiency after obtaining the knowledge about the meta cognitive skills in reading and practicing by doing various reading skills tasks. The experimental group

performed in the post reading skill remarkably and scored better marks when compared to their performance at the beginning. The posttest also brought out the benefits of obtaining the meta cognitive knowledge and developing effective reading skills. They found fewer individual differences in the use of reading skill strategies among the experimental group.

### Conclusion

The study reveals the fact that the metacognitive skills of the learner has a direct impact on one's reading skill proficiency. The study confirms the fact that the cognitive process and regulations of the process are highly influenced by one's motivation, goals, perceptions of ability attribution and beliefs as the contexts such as social and cultural norms or knowledge. The study has an implication of imparting the awareness of the cognitive and meta cognitive processes which are involved in developing the proficiency in other three skills listening, writing, and speaking.

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