THE USE OF COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES IN READING ACADEMIC TEXTS AMONG THE STUDENTS OF STATE COLLEGE FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES (STAIN) BENGKULU, INDONESIA

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Abstract

The paper aims to explore comprehension strategies employed by English students at State College for Islamic Studies (STAIN) Bengkulu, Indonesia. Three research questions are proposed in this paper. 1) What are the students'reading strategies in reading academic text? 2) What is the most often used reading strategies and least often used reading strategies 3) Do females and males use different reading strategies? The participants of this study involved 60 students which consisted of 38 females (63.3 %) and 22 males (36.6 %). They are all from the second year of English study program under Tarbiyah (Islamic education) department of State College for Islamic Studies (STAIN) Bengkulu, Indonesia. The study adapted Mokhtary and Sheorey (2001) Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) questionnaire and it was administered to identify the participants'cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies. SORS contains 30 items which consisted of three subscales; Global Reading Strategy (GRS) 13 items, Problem Solving Reading Strategy (PSRS) 9 items and Support Reading Strategy (SRS) 8 items. The result indicated that the Global Reading Strategies (GRS) contributed the highest average score among Problem Solving Reading Strategies (PSRS) namely 3.49 and followed with Support Reading Strategies (SRS) 3.44 and Problem Solving Reading Strategies (PSRS) 3.43. The finding also showed that there were 15 often used reading strategies and 9 least often used reading strategies. The finding also indicated that there was no significant difference of the strategies used between female and male students.

Key words: SORS, GRS, PSRS and SRS

1. Introduction

We all agree that reading strategies play a fundamental role in reading academic text. Most of our time is spent for reading activities in term of various purposes. Moreover, for college students, reading becomes the most important activity for their academic success (Levine et al, 2004). However, few students realized the importance of reading strategies while reading academic texts. They sometimes cannot reach the intended messages from the texts due to limited knowledge about appropriate reading strategies (Yalcin and Sengul, 2004). Reading is considered as a complex problem when it is not supported by skills to understand the text meaning holistically. Academic reading requires critical reading process in order to digest the important academic content. Therefore, many EFL/ESL students are not ready to enter university because of high demanding tasks of reading required by the school or faculty to fulfill (Dreyer and Nel, 2003).

In line with this, appropriate reading strategies are needed to accelerate and build up students' awareness during reading. The sense of awareness is not coming spontaneously and naturally, but it should be practiced regularly and consistently through reading process. As Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008 cited in Rune & Ivar 2010) suggested that strategies are directed to be the important aspect in teaching. In other words, students must consciously decide to employ a particular strategy in order to construct meaning from text. In order to increase students'awareness of using appropriate and various successful reading strategies, therefore, the article reports the reading comprehension strategies used by English students at State College for Islamic Studies (STAIN) Bengkulu, Indonesia.

2   Review of Literature

2.1 Language Learning Strategies

There have been a number of researches on learning strategies in general and reading strategies in particular done both EFL and ESL context in the last four decades; (Anderson, 1991; Cohen, 1990, 1998; Hosenfeld, 1979; Macaro, 2001; Naiman, Fröhlich, & Todesco, 1975; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 1993, 2002; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Wenden, 1991, 2002; Wong-Fillmore, 1979). The researched findings showed the importance of learning strategies in order to achieve better learning target. Moreover, the findings also emphasized the use of effective reading strategies in term of scaffolding and modelling students on what, how and when to use appropriate reading strategies in reading. The issue of learning strategies was revealed from the unsatisfaction on students' learning achievement particularly on reading. For most EFL students, reading English materials are still considered as difficult tasks. They are dealt with some handicaps such as: limited vocabulary, grammar and structure of the texts and reading habits. Reading exposures for EFL students seem to be the proper media to improve all skills in English since English is not commonly used as a lingua franca for communication. Reading contains rich context to provide for students to develop their language skills.

Considering the importance role of language learning strategies in general and reading strategies in particular, it is necessary to put them into curriculum instruction at schools and college/university. The students are taught how and when to use the appropriate strategies in learning and reading academic contents. If it is possible that language learning strategies and reading strategies are given as compulsory subjects that must be taken by the students on the first stage on their study. The ideas are based on rational reasons of researches result done by by experts on those fields such as: Anderson & Vandergrift, 1996; Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; Janzen, 2001; Weaver & Cohen, 1997, 1997). Nunan (1996, 1997). They suggested that language learning strategies are considered to be inserted into one of the compulsory subjects/courses in the curriculum. It is regarded as logical reasons since most of the students' academic failure due to lack of reading capability. Anderson (1991) points out that there may be a lot of students know types of strategies, but few of them know well how to use the strategies successfully in reading.

2.2 Reading Strategy Research

Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) and Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) have conducted on identification of meatcognitive reading strategies of L2 learners. They have developed a new instrument called the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) designed to measure the metacognitive reading strategies of L2 readers engaged in reading academic materials. One of the first studies published reported the used of reading strategies between English native speakers and non native speakers of English. They asked three primary research questions: (1) Are there any differences between ESL students and English native students in their perceived strategies used while reading academic materials? (2) Are there any differences between male and female ESL students and English native students, respectively, in their perceived strategies used while reading academic materials? And (3) Is there a relationship between reported strategies used and self-rated reading ability? The results indicated that ESL students used more strategies than the English native students. Support reading strategies become favourable strategies employed by the ESL students and there was no significant difference of the strategies used between female and male students.

2.3 Cognitive and Metacognitive

Cognitive and Metacognitive terms refer to the way of thinking and regulation process of thought. Thinking process is occurred naturally and spontaneously in the brain, so its working system cannot be seen. However, it cannot be well developed and organised unless it practices routinely through training and scaffolding. Specifically, cognitive or cognition is defined as thinking and metacognitive or metacognition is thought device system which control the work of cognition in order to reach precise and directed goals (Vandergrift, 2002, Dhieb, 2006, Wosley, 2010 and Afflebach, et el, 2008).

In line with idea above, Anderson (2002) points out that metacognitive awareness lead the readers to be strategic ones. For example, readers know when they are in reading trouble and they are also able to overcome the problem by means of using appropriate strategies properly in accordance with the problem specifications. Good readers do not only employ series number of strategies but they also know how and when the strategies may work successfully. Successful readers are those who know the hidden intended meaning from the author. Moreover, they can also digest the meaning explicitly and implicitly.

2.4 Effective Instructional Strategies

Readers are supposed to learn how to apply effective reading strategies while reading. Effective reading strategies help readers comprehend the texts since they do not only learn to read but also read to learn. They learn something from the material that they read. Therefore, reading becomes the major concern in academic field. The role EFL/ESL teachers in this case are very crucial. They have to scaffold their students by modelling the strategies in a real reading process. The students are ought to practice reading the way their teachers do. The teachers should provide great opportunities for the students to practice reading. Philosophically, learn how to read is by reading. By reading a lot, they will automatically learn many aspects of reading dimensions such as vocabulary and reading skills like how to determine mine ideas, supporting details, inferences and making conclusion. A number of researches have discussed this above particular issue (see Anisderson & Vandergrift, 1996; Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999; Janzen, 2001; Weaver & Cohen, 1997a, 1997b).

Language learning strategies in general becomes the major issue in increasing the students' learning target. The curriculum is not only facilitating teacher to deliver the knowledge and value content but also how it enables to accommodate the students to reach better result by means of inserting the effective and appropriate strategies (Nunan, 1996). The following concepts can be adopted for reading instructional design: (1) reading preparation. In this step, the teacher explains about reading strategy, type of reading strategies and its technical procedures in using the strategy. (2) Modelling. The students are scaffolded how to use the strategies. (3) Students practice the strategies under the teachers' monitoring and (4) group work discussion. Students work cooperatively in their group to discuss certain topic and share the result to other groups. Each group contributes and participate actively in responding all ideas and opinion which come up from other groups. Janzen (2001) claims that the four steps above as sustainable process in helping students increase metacognitive awareness.

3   Research Questions

In order to explore the reading comprehension strategies used by English students at State College for Islamic Studies (STAIN) Bengkulu, Indonesia, the following research questions will be answered.
1.   What are the students' reading strategies?
2.   What are the most often and least often used strategies in reading?
3.   Do female and male students use different strategies in reading academic text?

4   Method

Descriptive quantitative method was applied to answer the research questions. Primer data was taken from questionnaire of 60 students by using Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS).   The data was analyzed by using SPSS software program.

4.1   Participants

Participants involved in this study were 60 students. 63.3 % or 38 students were female and 36.6 % or 22 were male students. They were all from English program of Tarbiyah (Islamic education) department at State College for Islamic Studies (STAIN) Bengkulu.

4.2   Material

Adapted Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) was administered to identify type of strategies used by the students during reading academic materials. The SORS contains three subscales;

4.3   Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS).

This instrument is used to identify students' strategies in reading academic texts. This instrument was developed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2001). SORS consists of 28 items and divided into three sub categories: GRS, PRS and SRS. SORS is arranged in a five likert scales (where 5= Always and 1= Never).

4.3.1   GRS (Global Reading Strategies) 13 items

It refers to global analysis of the text. "intentional, carefully planned techniques" which readers apply in order to monitor or manage their reading. Examples are: using pre-existing knowledge about the subject to aid text comprehension; taking an overall look at the text to see what it is about before reading in detail.

4.3.2   PSRS (Problem Solving Reading Strategies) 9 items

These are used when readers "work directly with texts" comprehension problems occur.

In order to solve these, strategies such as adjusting the speed of reading to text difficulty, picturing/visualising information to aid comprehension.

4.3.3 SRS (Support Reading Strategies) 8 items

Basic support mechanisms intended to aid the reader in comprehending the text" for example: translating from English into Indonesian while reading; highlighting information in text; paraphrasing ideas; etc.

5 Validity and Reliability of Instruments

The issue of validity and reliability of the instruments become a major concern in this study. Initially, the reliability of the Metacognitive awareness of Reading Strategies (MARSI) has also been tested by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2001). MARSI is a reading strategy which is used for native English readers but the components of MARSI are essentially involved in SORS. The internal consistency reliability coefficients of MARSI (as determined by Cronbach's Alpha) for its overall scales is .85 (very high). Based on the statistical analysis of SPSS *version* 18 coefficient Alpha of SORS is .72 for overall subscales.

6 Research Procedure

The participants were given 30 minutes to fulfil the items of questionnaire. Before that the instructions and directions were clearly explained in order to avoid misunderstanding among the participants. The participants were allowed to ask for clarity   while fulfilling the items**.**

7 Data Analysis Procedure

The questionnaires were analyzed descriptively and inferentially by using SPSS *version* 18 in order to answer the three research questions. First and second research question was answered descriptively to determine the participants' reading strategies as well as the most frequent and least frequent of strategies usage. The third research question was answered inferentially by using *t test* to find out whether there were any significance difference between the strategy used by female and male participants or not. If *t* value < 0.05 means there is significance differences between female and male in using reading strategies.

8 Results and Discussion

8.1 Research Question 1

The first research question was directed towards identifying the strategies employed by the students of the State College for Islamic Studies (STAIN) in reading academic materials. Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) by Mokhtary and Sheorey (2001) was administered to obtain the data of students' strategies in reading. The questionnaire contains 30 items which consist of three subscales; Global Reading Strategies (GRS), Support Reading Strategies (SRS) and Problem Solving Reading Strategies (PSRS). The average score of each subscale shows numbers of strategies that employed by the respondents. The mean score of the strategies used by the respondents are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Reported Use of Individual GRS Strategies

Name	Strategy	Mean	Std	
GRS 1	I have purpose in my mind when I read	3.90	.969	
GRS 2	I think about why I know to help me understand what I read	3.52	.930	
GRS 3	I take an overall view of the text to see what it is about before reading it	3.50	1.081	
GRS 4	I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose	3.50	1.066	
GRS 5	I review the text first by noting its characteristics like length and organization	3.10	1.231	
GRS 6	When reading, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore	3.52	.892	
GRS 7	I use tables, figures and pictures in text to increase my understanding	3.15	1.246	
GRS 8	I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading	3.93	.936	
GRS 9	I use typographical features like boldface and italics to identify key information	3.28	1.250	
GRS 10	I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text	3.12	.993	
GRS 11	I check my understanding when I come across new information	3.65	.988	
GRS 12	I try to guess what the content of the text is about when I read	3.75	.914	
GRS 13	I check to see my guess about the text are right or wrong	3.47	1.200	
PSRS 1	I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading	3.50	1.205	
PSRS 2	I try to get back on track when I lose concentration	3.97	1.008	
PSRS 3	I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading	3.50	1.050	
PSRS 4	When texts becomes difficult, I pay closer to what I am reading	3.37	1.235	
PSRS 5	I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading	3.02	1.142	
PSRS 6	I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read	3.18	1.186	
PSRS 7	When text becomes difficult, I re-read it to my understanding	3.75	1.188	
PSRS 8	When I read, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases	3.18	1.124	
SRS 1	I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read	3.00	1.378	
SRS2	When texts become difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read	3.93	1.339	
SRS3	I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it	3.98	1.033	
SRS 4	I use reference materials (e.g., dictionary) to help me understand what I read	3.80	1.232	
SRS 5	I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read	3.12	1.166	
SRS6	I go back and forth in the text to find relationship among ideas in it	3.00	1.058	
SRS7	I ask myself questions, I like to have answered in the text	3.03	.920	
SRS8	When reading, I translate from English into Indonesian	3.57		
SRS9	When reading, I think about information in both English and Indonesian		1.254	
GRS	*Global Reading Strategies*	*3.49*		
PSRS	*Problem Solving Reading Strategies*	*3.43*		
SRS	*Support Reading Strategies*	*3.44*		
ORS	*Overall Reading Strategies*	*3.45*		

Table 1 reported that the average score of GRS is the highest mean score among the two strategies (PSRS and SRS) namely 3.49 and followed by SRS was 3.44 and PSRS 3.43. The item of strategies in GRS which contributed the highest mean score was 3.93 (*GRS 8. I use the context clues to help me better understand what I am reading)* while the lowest contribution was 3.12 *(GRS 10. I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text).* Based on the averages score of each subscale, Global Reading Strategy was found as the highest mean score. It means that the readers used high frequency of the strategies while reading. This supports the findings of Mokhtary and Sheorey (2001) that ESL readers used more strategies than English native speakers. However, the striking finding showed that Islamic College students used GRS more than PSRS and SRS. It differs from Mokhtary and Sheorey (2001) which pointed out those ESL readers used more supporting reading strategies than the other strategies.

The use of GRS showed that students were more aware of using the strategies metacognitively in reading. They were monitored by metacognitive strategies when the reading texts were more difficult.

They realised when they were lost the meaning and changed more effective strategies (Anderson 2002). The ability to keep consistency in reading is very essential since the readers' understanding quality will increase along with their reading capability development (O'Malley and Chamot 1990).

In PSRS items, (*PSRS 2, I try to get back on track when I lose concentration)* was the highest mean score namely 3.97, While the lowest was *(PSRS 5. I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading)* namely 3.02.

In SRS subscale, the item *I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it (SRS 3)* is the highest namely 3.98, while the lowest are *SRS 1 (I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read) and SRS 6 (I go back and forth in the text to find relationship among ideas).* Both of the items have a mean score of 3.00.

8.2 Research Question 2

Research question 2 investigated the most often used and least often used reading strategies employed by students in reading academic text. It was found that the most often used strategies on each subscale were *GRS 8, 1, 12, 11 2; PSRS 2, 7, 3, 1, 4; SRS 3, 2, 4, 8, 9.* Table 3 illustrated the top five of 30 items of strategies on each subscale used by the students in reading. These strategies were reported as favourite strategies employed by the students while reading. It was computed based upon the fifth highest of mean score.

Table 2. The Most Frequent Used Reading Strategies

Name	Most Frequent Used Strategies	Mean
GRS 8	I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading	3.93
GRS 1	I have purpose in my mind when I read	3.90
GRS 12	I try to guess what the content of the text is about when I read	3.75
GRS 11	I check my understanding when I come across new information	3.65
GRS 2	I think about why I know to help me understand what I read	3.52
PSRS 2	I try to get back on track when I lose concentration	3.97
PSRS 7	When text becomes difficult, I re-read it to my understanding	3.75
PSRS 3	I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading	3.50
PSRS 1	I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading	3.50
PSRS 4	When texts becomes difficult, I pay closer to what I am reading	3.37
SRS 3	I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it	3.98
SRS2	When texts become difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read	3.93
SRS 4	I use reference materials (e.g., dictionary) to help me understand what I read	3.80
SRS 8	When reading, I translate from English into Indonesian	3.57
SRS 9	When reading, I think about information in both English and Indonesia	3.57

It was also found that not all of the strategies were used equally by students while they were reading academic texts. Some strategies such as: *GRS 5, 10, 7, PSRS 5, 8, SRS 1,6 and 7* were less favourable by the students. This is shown in table 3 below.

Table 3. Least Frequent Used Reading Strategies

Name	Least Frequent Used Strategies	Mean
GRS 5	I review the text first by noting its characteristics like length and organization	3.10
GRS 10	I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text	3.12
GRS7	I use tables, figures and pictures in text to increase my understanding	3.15
PSRS 5	I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading	3.02
PSRS 8	When I read, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases	3.18
PSRS 6	I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read	3.18
SRS 1	I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read	3.00
SRS 6	I go back and forth in the text to find relationship among ideas in it	3.00
SRS 7	I ask myself questions, I like to have answered in the text	3.03

8.3 Research Question 3

The third research question was directed to answer whether female and male students used different strategies in reading academic text. Table 4 shows the different mean scores of reading strategies between female and male. The difference is *1.26*.

Table 4. Mean Score of Reading Strategies of Male and Female Students

Students' Gender	Mean	N
Female	**61.71**	**38**
Male	**60.45**	**22**

Based on table 5 below, the *Levine's test (t test)* statistical analysis showed significant value at .739 which it was bigger than alpha value *(> 0.05)*. It means that there is no significant difference between female and male students' strategies in reading academic texts This supported the finding from Mokhtary and Sheorey (2001) which found that female students' reading strategies were not significantly different from males'. However, it was found that female students were using more strategies than male.

Table 5. Levene's Test of Equality of variances

F	df 1	df 2	Sig
.112	**1**	**58**	**.739**

9. Conclusion

The outcome of research results implicated that principally EFL/ESL college students knew the importance of strategies but were unaware of how to use those strategies successfully. As Anderson (1991) points out that knowing strategies will be insufficient unless students are able to apply those all strategies in real reading activities. Readers are suggested to use more than one strategy in overcoming   such complex reading texts. They should be alert in choosing appropriate strategies in accordance with the texts as well as the reading purposes.

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