Chapter V

Conclusion and Discussion

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5.1 Summary of the Results

The objectives of this study were to investigate first year Chinese college students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies and to focus on what metacognitive strategies the participants used in their academic reading and where, when, how and why they used these strategies.

The participants in this study were selected from the Law Department. They were non-English majors, who were enrolled at Yuxi Teachers College in September 2003.

Data were collected from a questionnaire, classroom observation and

interviews. The findings provided evidence that the participants had awareness and control of metacognitive strategies while reading academic texts. The findings also provided evidence that the participants used a variety of metacognitive reading strategies to plan, monitor, control, self-regulate, evaluate and remedy their comprehension in their academic reading. This study shows that metacognitive strategies play important roles in EFL academic reading. Students effectively orchestrate various strategies, actively applied to a variety of texts to facilitate self-management, self-regulation and self-evaluation in reading. This helps them effectively reflect on what makes reading difficult, what reading strategies are available, how they function, when they should be applied and why they help comprehension.

In summary, the results of this study revealed that the students of the two classes demonstrated control of a variety of metacognitive reading strategies. The Global Reading Strategies, they often used were: planning, using background knowledge, using context clues, checking understanding, guessing meaning, skimming and scanning, and using tables and pictures. The strategies they didn't pay much attention to were: noting length and organization, noticing what to read closely and what to ignore, and analyzing and evaluating the information.

For the Problem Solving Reading Strategies, they often used were: adjusting reading speed, reading slowly and carefully, guessing unknown

words, re-reading, and stopping and thinking. The strategies they didn't pay much attention to were: visualizing information, and thinking about difficulties while reading.

For the Support Reading Strategies, they often used: underlining and circling, translation, and using a dictionary. The strategies they seldom used were: reading aloud to help them understand what they read, asking question of the text, and paraphrasing and note taking.

In conclusion, the participants in this study used a variety of metacognitive reading strategies to plan, monitor, control, self-regulate, evaluate and remedy their comprehension in order to meet different goals and purposes. Even though they didn't know the names of these metacognitive reading strategies, they used these strategies to solve problems, and to meet with their needs or purposes.

The findings also provided evidence that the participants often relied on their native language (Chinese) while they were reading English. Most of them were not used to thinking in English. They used Chinese and translated English into Chinese in order to understand. The findings provided evidence that the participants had a firm command of grammar structure but they had vocabulary limitations.

5.2 Discussions

The data of this study clearly revealed that the participants had awareness and a reasonable control of their metacognitive strategies while they were reading. They used Global Reading Strategies, Problem Solving Reading Strategies and Support Reading Strategies to plan, monitor, control, self-regulate, evaluate, and remedy their comprehension in the process of reading, although they didn't know the names of the strategies they had used. This supports the idea that metacognitive strategies are very important for second language reading (Hammadou, 1991; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Vacca & Vacca, 1999). This is because when readers have metacognitive awareness, the monitoring system works more effectively. Often the monitoring process and the construction of meaning occur unconsciously until the reader detects a difficulty in understanding. When this happens, readers slow down and enter a deliberate, controlled state that involves a variety of active processing strategies (Palincsar, 1984, p. 118) in spite of having no idea of the names of these metacognitive reading strategies. Readers will select the strategies as tools to help them solve problems and accomplish their tasks.

Translating what is being read in a second language to the first language is a common strategy for a second language reader (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). It is interesting to find in this study that participants used

this technique of translation in their reading because it demonstrated that the students applied "comprehension input" to facilitate language learning. They said they used translation to help them remember the information. They said they used translated words to help them re-read the text. They said that it was easier for them to pick up meaning with a quick glance at familiar Chinese characters.

It is also interesting to find that the participants used self-regulation to deal with questions raised in reading. They said they could self-regulate reading strategies according to their goals. They said they liked to skim the questions before reading if they read for a test. This helped them save time and energy, and enabled them to focus on the important sentences and skip the unimportant ones. However, they said that if they read for learning, they liked to read the vocabulary list before they started reading. This helped them consider a new text as a whole. They needn't stop to look up the new words in the text while reading.

During the observation, the researcher observed that some students preferred to use finger or pen-pointing while reading. After class, the researcher interviewed the participants and asked them to explain why they wanted to do this. They said they used it because they would like to underline and circle the important information or unknown words or phrases and sentences. Moreover, it aided their concentration. They said they didn't get lost if they used finger or pen- pointing while reading.

In the interview, one question emerged after the interview data was analyzed and categorized. This was the question of whether the participants would do the same things in their reading as they said in their interviews. In order to answer this question, the researcher interviewed 4 students for each question. If the participants said they used the same strategy, the researcher presented two transcriptions for this study. If the participants responded differently, the researcher presented additional transcriptions. So in the analysis the researcher presented 2 or 3 students' interview transcriptions.

The most exciting thing about this study was that the researcher not only learned research methodology in the process of dealing with the data, but also obtained some interesting findings from it.

First, the researcher got to know what metacognitive reading strategies of first year students at Yuxi Teachers College had used, and how and why they used these strategies. She would never know the information if she hadn't done the research.

Second, she got a better understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses from this study. This was very important for her as a teacher. Because only when teachers know their students' needs, preferences, habits, limitations as well as problems, can they build flexible teaching methodology to help students effectively in reading.

Third, she also found some differences between the two classes in

the process of analyzing the data (see Table 1.6).

Table 1.6: The Differences of Metacognitive Reading Strategies Between Class A and Class B

Reading Strategies	Class A	Class B	Differences Between the Two Class
Knowing what to read closely and to ignore	77%	45%	32% (A)
Using tables, pictures and context clues	68%	80%	28% (B)
Thinking about difficulties	79%	47%	32% (A)
Re-reading	87%	65%	22% (A)
Guessing unknown words	91%	67%	24% (A)
Taking notes while reading	68%	37%	31% (A)
Using dictionary	57%%	77%	20% (B)
Paraphrasing	61%	43%	18% (A)

These findings will help both instructors and students to have a better understanding the differences between English proficiency and metacognitive reading strategies. They affect each other. On the one hand, metacognitive reading strategies are very important in reading. They help readers to monitor and orchestrate various strategies when readers were struggling in reading. On the other hand, relying on metacognitive reading strategies to improve reading comprehension has its limitations because a number of factors can influence the readers' ability to self-monitor and comprehend the texts. Such as lack of English

knowledge, this would restrain their own reading strategies. For example, the strategy: thinking about difficulties, the students in Class A were 32% higher than Class B. But the strategy: using dictionary, the students in Class B were 20% higher than Class A. The reasons to explain this may be because the higher the level, the better the students at monitoring and orchestrating their metacognitive strategies. The lower the English proficiency level they had, the less ability they had to orchestrate their strategies. That is why the students in Class A could monitor their difficulties while the students in Class B relied more on dictionaries in reading than Class A.

5.3 The Limitations of the Study

After analyzing the data, the researcher found that there was consistency between the participants' questionnaire, observation and interview responses. The participants provided the same information. However, There were still some limitations in this research.

First, it was difficult to measure how much metacognitive awareness could aid reading comprehension because it was involved psychological activities.

Second, how to define a positive and negative reading strategy.

Third, there were some limitations in the observation because some psychological activities could not be seen. Moreover, they were big

classes. There still existed some difficulties to observe them.

To answer the first question, this study used a triangulation to investigate the students' reading strategies. At the beginning of the study, the researcher measured the students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies by using a questionnaire. After that, she observed the students by using a checklist and note taking. Finally, she interviewed the students by using structured questions. The researcher did not distinguish the differences between successful readers and unsuccessful ones, even if the evidence showed some differences between the two classes. This study mainly focused on what metacognitive strategies the participants used and attempted to explain where, when, how and why they used these strategies. However, there were still some limitations to measure these strategies explicitly because some actions were involved psychological activities.

To answer the second question, an unexpected strategy has been found in this study, namely using finger or pen pointing while reading. This is controversial and difficult to define as a positive or negative strategy. Sosothikul (1992) states that finger pointing while reading is a bad habit, even though it is an aid to concentration. It slows one's reading speed because a person's hand cannot possibly move as fast as his mind. However, the participants claimed they had some benefits from this technique.

Finally, the researcher had found that there were still some limitations in observation by using a checklist. One reason was that it difficult to predict the students' reading actions or strategies. So she used note taking to make up for it and jot down the highlighted actions that weren't included in the checklist. She also walked around the class slowly and quietly when the participants were assigned to read their texts so that she could see a wide range of student's actions as many as possible. The other reason was some metacognitive reading strategies were involved psychological activities. They were thinking processes. It is difficult to observe them.

5.4 Implications

The results of this study provided evidence that the participants had awareness and control of metacognitive strategies to plan, monitor, control, self-regulate, evaluate and remedy their comprehension in their academic reading. They used a variety of strategies to facilitate self-management, self-regulation and self-evaluation to meet with their needs or purposes.

On the basis of the findings, the following classroom implications might be provided from this study.

First, the findings will provide instructors with some pedagogical suggestions helpful in determining students' strengths and weaknesses in

terms of strategy use. This in turn will help in developing effective and appropriate strategy instruction that should permeate the whole curriculum. Research shows instructors who are aware of their own metacognitive functioning tend to play a more significant role in helping students develop reading strategies.

Second, the findings will help instructors teach seldom or rare usage of strategies to help students to improve their comprehension. This is especially helpful for the students who are struggling in reading.

Third, the findings will help instructors provide students with opportunities to try new strategies by direct and explicit instruction.

Finally, this study will help students to be more aware of their metacognitive reading strategies. Only when students are aware of what they read makes sense, can they become more independent readers and gain confidence in reading.

Helping students become more skilled at using metacognitive strategies in the reading is vital. When the students understand where, when and how to use these strategies, and why these strategies should be applied, the potential benefits are great.

5.5 Recommendations

This study has provided some information on the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies of first year university level Chinese

students in their academic reading. The evidence in this study showed that the participants were aware of using a variety of Global Reading Strategies, Problem Solving Reading Strategies and Support Reading Strategies to plan, monitor, control, self-regulate, self-evaluate and remedy their reading comprehension. Recommendations for further studies are:

1). Additional studies should investigate what strategies efficiently facilitate students' reading comprehension while reading are.

2). Additional studies should investigate what other variables might affect students' reading strategies, such as investigations could focus on person variables, task variables and strategy variables, and the similarities and differences between successful and unsuccessful readers.

3). Because of their reading experiences, the participants focused on a decoding process and local level reading strategies (i.e., a word, a sentence or a paragraph) rather than the process of apprehending meaning or global level reading strategies (i.e., paragraph, between paragraphs and the whole text). It is suggested that reading strategy instruction should be given in English classes. Instructors should encourage students to use reading strategies in their academic reading as well as in other kinds of reading.

4). Students said they struggled with a limited vocabulary while reading. They often met a lot of new words in the text. Therefore,

vocabulary learning strategies should focus on dictionary use, context clues, word-formation clues in reading instruction in order to reduce the students reading problems.

5). Grammar-translation method should play a much smaller role in teaching methodology in a reading class, and more attention should be given to the process of constructing meaning or global level reading strategies (i.e., paragraph, between paragraphs and the whole text).

6). Instructors should not only focus on English knowledge but also teach reading strategies in English class. We should encourage students to use these strategies because the findings of this study provided evidence that students had a lack of knowledge of some reading strategies. These included strategies such as noting length and organization, what to read closely and what to ignore, analyzing and evaluating information, visualizing information, thinking about difficulties, reading aloud to help understanding, asking questions about the text, paraphrasing and note taking.

7). The researcher suggested that students be trained to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases. They should be instructed how to examine the relationship of the unknown words to the other words. Students expressed difficulties caused by limitation in their knowledge of vocabulary. In teaching perhaps more attention should be given to the development of vocabulary. In addition, explicit instruction in using clues

such as prefixes and suffixes could help students to deal with unknown words they encounter. Reading techniques, such as guessing meaning through context clues through recognition of definition, restatement, related information, examples, comparison and contrast, should be taught from the beginning.

This study identified some categories of metacognitive strategies, as well as Chinese college level students' strengths and weaknesses in using metacognitive reading strategies. Hopefully it will contribute pedagogical suggestions in College English instruction and promote higher quality teaching.