EFFECTS OF METACOGNITIVE SCAFFOLDING ON READING STRATEGY USE AND READING PERFORMANCE OF CHINESE EFL TERTIARY STUDENTS

LI LIJUAN

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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by

LI   LIJUAN

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CET-4 : College English Test Band 4

CG   : control group

EFL   : English as a Foreign Language

EG   : experimental group

ELT   : English language teaching

ESL   : English as a Second Language

HU   : Hebei University, China

GLOB : global strategies

MOE   : Ministry of Education

MS   : metacognitive scaffolding

PROB : problem solving strategies

SORS : Survey of Reading Strategies

SUP   : support strategies

ZPD   : zone of proximal development

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Li, L. & Kaur, S. (2011). *Promoting Chinese students' reading autonomy through questioning*. Paper presented at the 9th Asia TEFL International Conference, Seoul, Korea.

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KESAN PERANCAH METAKOGNITIF TERHADAP PENGGUNAAN STRATEGI PEMBACAAN DAN PRESTASI PEMBACAAN DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR CINA PERINGKAT TERTIARI YANG MEMPELAJARI BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA ASING

ABSTRAK

Sebagai kemahiran bahasa yang penting diantara empat kemahiran bahasa, pembacaan sememangnya menerima perhatian yang khas dalam situasi pengajaran dan pembelajaran dalam bidang Bahsasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Kedua (ESL) dan Bahasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL). Di Cina, pengajaran pembacaan EFL sentiasa diberi keutamaan. Terkini, satu reformasi pengajaran pada peringkat kebangsaan diinisiatifkan untuk mentransformasikan pedagogi berpusatkan guru kepada berpusatkan pelajar dan untuk melibatkan strategi-strategi pembelajaran di dalam kurikulum bagi memupuk para pelajar yang berdikari. Walaubagaimanapun, majoriti guru EFL masih menggunakan pedagogi konvensional di dalam kelas bahasa. Tujuan utama kajian ini ialah untuk menyiasat kesan perancah metakognitif terhadap penggunaan strategi pembacaan pelajar dan prestasi pembacaan. Kajian ini berdasarkan teori-teori berikut: teori konstruktivisma sosial, khasnya teori yang dicadangkan oleh Vygotsky (1978) seperti konsep *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), konsep metakognitif (Flavell, 1978) dan model pembacaan sosiokognitif (Ruddell & Unrau, 2004). Kajian ini berlangsung sepanjang 17 minggu dan telah menggunakan rekabentuk kuasi eksperimen. Kajian ini melibatkan 80 pelajar tahun kedua EFL bukan beropsyen Bahasa Inggeris dalam dua kelas di Universiti Hebei, Cina. Kumpulan rawatan (n=41) diajar dengan perancah metakognitif dan kumpulan kawalan (n=39) diajar menggunakan pedagogi konvensional. Kaedah pengumpulan data terdiri daripada satu soalselidik strategi pembacaan, teks bacaan kefahaman, pemerhatian kelas dan temuduga individu berstruktur separa. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa berbanding dengan pedagogi konvensional, penggunaan

perancah metakognitif di dalam kelas pembacaan secara signifikan mempromosikan penggunaan strategi pembacaan pelajar, memperbaiki prestasi pembacaan pantas dan meningkatkan kefahaman membaca dalam kalangan perlajar. Walaubagaimanapun, ia tidak efektif secara signifikan di dalam peningkatan prestasi pembacaan umum atau prestasi dalam pembacaan teknik secara mendalam. Tambahan pula, perancah metakognitif memperbaiki kefahaman dan kelajuan bacaan pelajar di samping mendemonstrasikan kesan positif ke atas pembacaan dan pemikiran pelajar dalam aspek mengambil inisiatif, menumpu perhatian dan memaparkan penggunaan perancah metakognitif dalam pembacaan dan pembelajaran. Ia berupaya mengubah peranan guru dan pelajar dalam mencapai pembelajaran berpusatkan pelajar dan membantu menjadi pembaca yang strategik dan menjadi pelajar autonomi. Kajian ini yang berbentuk kajian tinjauan di dalam konteks EFL Cina membawa implikasi bahawa guru EFL digalak menggunakan perancah metakognitif untuk meningkatkan kebolehan pembacaan dan pembelajaran pelajar. Guru juga disyorkan agar menggunakan perancah metakognitif di dalam kelas pembacaan sambil mempertimbangkan faktor sedia ada yang khas di dalam konteks EFL Cina seperti kewujudan tekanan ujian dan pengaruh pedagogi konvensional serta kebudayaan tradisional Cina terhadap aktiviti pembelajaran dan pengajaran.

EFFECTS OF METACOGNITIVE SCAFFOLDING ON READING STRATEGY USE AND READING PERFORMANCE OF CHINESE EFL TERTIARY STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

Being particularly important among the four language skills, reading has always received special attention in the EFL teaching and learning situations. In China, the EFL reading instruction has always been given primary prominence. Recently, a nationwide teaching reform was initiated to transform the teacher-centred pedagogy to a student-centred one and to include learning strategies into the curriculum in order to cultivate autonomous learners. However, majority of EFL teachers still tend to use conventional pedagogy in language classrooms. The main aim of this study was to examine the effects of metacognitive scaffolding on students' reading strategy use and reading performance. This study draws on the following theories: the social constructivism theory, particularly the learning theories proposed by Vygotsky (1978) and his concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD), the concept of metacognition (Flavell, 1978) and the sociocognitive reading model (Ruddell & Unrau, 2004). This 17-week study employed a quasi-experimental design. The respondents comprised 80 Chinese EFL non-English major second year undergraduates in two intact classes in Hebei University, China. The experimental group (n=41) was instructed using metacognitive scaffolding (MS) and the control group (n=39) was taught using conventional pedagogy. Data collection methods included a reading strategy questionnaire, reading comprehension tests, classroom observations and semi-structured individual interviews. The findings of the study reveal that in comparison with conventional pedagogy, the use of metacognitive scaffolding significantly promoted students' reading strategy use, improved their speed reading performance and enhanced their reading comprehension. However, it

was not significantly effective in improving students' general reading performance and performance in in-depth reading. In addition, metacognitive scaffolding demonstrated positive effects on students' learning proactivity, thinking ability, concentration and memory as well as exhibited significant effects on students' metacognition in reading and learning. It changed the roles of teacher and students in the learning process, achieved student-centred learning and helped students become strategic readers and autonomous learners. Being an exploratory study in the Chinese EFL context, this study suggests that EFL teachers should use metacognitive scaffolding to enhance their students' reading and learning abilities. Teachers are also recommended to employ metacognitive scaffolding in the reading classroom while considering existing factors unique to the Chinese EFL context such as existence of test pressure and the influence of conventional pedagogy and traditional Chinese culture on learning and teaching activities.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Reading is an indispensible skill for human beings to learn about the world. It provides the access to the messages engraved in the written signals by the writers even centuries ago or from a distant corner of the world. For most students, reading is one of the basic academic skills and serves as the major source of new information about all sorts of topics. The ability to read is not only a critical language development but also a crucial indication of students' academic achievements.

The ability to read effectively in English is seen as a necessity in view of the fact that English is the world's primary language for international communication (Graddol, 2006) and the lingua franca for a large proportion of the world's population at various occasions (Jenkins, 2007). Carrell (1988, p. 1) pointed out that reading is critical for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL hereafter) and "for many students, reading is by far the most important of the four skills". Therefore, EFL reading ability is given primary concern in China from primary to tertiary education. This is evidenced in the highest weight that reading takes either in curriculum design or in key national English examinations. Traditionally, EFL reading instruction in China emphasises language knowledge and skills. In response to the social and economic development of the country, English education in China is tasked with the responsibility to produce a work force with high language competence and learning ability. The English language teaching reform commenced nationwide at the turn of the century, requiring reading instruction to convert its focus to reading strategy and reader autonomy (Higher Education Department, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2001).

However, the tradition of language focus still persists in classroom teaching (Han, 2010). Passively listening to the teacher who imparts mainly the language knowledge, most students still cram up the vocabulary and grammatical structures when they read the text word by word (X. Zhang, 2009; Zhu, 2013). On the other hand, even though some studies and practices on reading strategy instruction have been conducted in China, more empirical studies are still needed (Huang & Lin, 2007; Zhao, 2009).

The present study is an effort in this national context to explore a plausible teaching approach to be applied in the College English reading classroom. It examined the effects of metacognitive scaffolding on promoting Chinese EFL tertiary students' reading strategy use and reading performance. This chapter introduces the background of the study by presenting a brief profile of China and its education system. Historical developments and the current state of English language education is summarised, followed by an introduction of the College English teaching programme in Hebei University which is the context of the study. Also presented are the problem statement, research questions and the significance of the study. At the end of the chapter, the definitions of key terms are presented.

1.2 A Sociolinguistic Profile of China

China, officially the People's Republic of China, is the third largest country in the world. As announced by the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China (The Government of China, 2005), the country occupies a large area of the East Asia continent and extends until the west shore of the Pacific Ocean. With a territory like a rooster, China covers approximately 9.6 million square kilometres land area and about 4.7 million square kilometres sea area. China borders 14 nations and shares the maritime boundaries with eight nations. Currently under

the Chinese government administration, there are 34 provincial-level divisions, including 4 municipalities, 23 provinces, 5 autonomous regions and 2 special administrative regions. Beijing is the capital of China (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Map of China

China is the most populous country in the world although the percentage that the Chinese people occupy in the world population has dropped from 22% in the early 1980s to 19% in 2010 (Xinhuanet, 2011). The sixth national population census showed that Chinese population amounted to more than 1.37 billion in 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). A total of 91.51% of the Chinese population are of Han nationality and the rest are composed of 55 minority nationalities (The Government of China, 2011).

China is a multilingual country with more than 80 languages (Ibid). Chinese is the common language of the Han people and is used by most Chinese people. The Chinese language consists of the standard Chinese and a variety of dialects.

Putonghua (or Mandarin) is the standard Chinese and official language of China. It is also the language used by all Chinese people worldwide. There are seven major dialects of Chinese, each consisting of various local dialects and colloquial expressions. Among the 55 minority nationalities, two nationalities (Hui and Man) have converted to use Chinese totally and 53 keep their own languages although some also use Chinese at the same time (Ibid).

China is an old country with 5,000 years of history. The ruling of feudal dynasties dominated most of the Chinese ancient history and lasted for more than 2,000 years. In 1949, the People's Republic of China ended the wars and chaos and led the Chinese people into the socialist society as it is today. In the long history, Confucianism was the dominant ideology and is influencing Chinese culture even nowadays. The core ideas of Confucianism are humanism, emphasising the virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and fidelity which are the key elements of Chinese ethics and values. Under the impact of Confucianism, the traditional Chinese culture values morality and personal dignity despite difficulties or temptations, elevates collectivism instead of individualism and encourages the hardworking and enterprising spirits (L. Chen, 2009). Lenience, filial piety and fraternity are also considered important ethical codes by the Chinese people.

1.3 The Education System in China

For the Chinese people, education is not only an access to knowledge and wisdom. It also promises power, wealth and social status. Therefore, paramount importance is laid on education and parents are willing to sacrifice everything for their children's education, an example of which is the age-old story of Mencius' mother moving three times trying to find a proper place for her son to receive better education and to grow up to be a good man. People's concern with education is also

embodied in the respect to teachers. In old times, teachers were addressed as *Xiansheng*, which means "born before me" and implies that teachers know more, or *Shifu*, which means "teacher father" or "master" and suggests that teachers enjoy full respect from their students. The high esteem that teachers enjoy is also highlighted in the saying "to be my teacher for one day is to be my father for my lifetime". Teachers are believed to be the authority of knowledge and models of virtue. They are obeyed unconditionally by students. Presently teachers are still highly respected although they do not enjoy authority as absolutely as before. Students habitually obey their teachers' orders and follow their teachers' instruction.

At the national level, education has been viewed by the leadership as having a vital role in the national social and economic development. Education has often been elevated to a high status that is related to the nation's vicissitudes. After the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, much effort was put into developing the cause of an education for the general public and has achieved remarkable success. By 2008, the national illiteracy rate dropped from 80% in 1949 to 3.58% for adults and nearly 0% for children and youth. Meanwhile, the enrolment rate of primary schools and junior secondary schools jumped from below 20% and 6% respectively in 1949 to 99.5% and 98.5% (Ministry of Education, 2009). However, with more than 54 million people (4.08% of the population) still illiterate, merely 8.93% having finished university education and most people having attained only secondary education (14.03% senior secondary education and 38.79% junior secondary education) (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011), the Chinese government still has a long-term and arduous task to educate the Chinese people and improve the quality of the population.

Chinese education is directed to the public, run by the nation and supervised and managed by the Ministry of Education (MOE hereafter). All Chinese citizens are entitled to equal opportunities to be educated regardless of their ethnics, race, sex, occupation, property or religious belief (The Government of China, 2006). Education in China begins with an optional preschool education for the 3-year-olds. All school-age (6 and above) children and adolescents are required to attend compulsory education (primary education for 5 or 6 years and then junior secondary education for 3 years) (Ministry of Education, 2004; The Government of China, 2006). The following senior secondary education provides students with different opportunities either to attend general senior secondary schools which prepare them to receive higher education 3 years later or to attend vocational or specialised schools for 3 or 4 years and then enter the work market.

Collectively, preschool education, primary education and general secondary education are referred to as basic education (Ministry of Education, 2004). In accordance with the MOE's regulations, curriculum design for basic education is identical nationally complemented with some local-designed courses (Ministry of Education, 1993, 1996). All the courses focus on the teaching of basic knowledge and skills while emphasising the cultivation of students' morality. Textbooks are examined and approved by the MOE or the educational administration department of local provincial government. Due to overpopulation, the instruction is conducted in crowded classrooms which are normally well over the number of 45 students per class as suggested by the MOE.

With the publication of the Guideline of Basic Education Curriculum Reform (Trial) (Ministry of Education, 2001), the reform to enhance the quality of basic education was conducted and has expanded to 21 provinces by 2009 (Ministry of

Education, 2009). The efforts are especially laid on changing the over-focus on the book knowledge to the cultivation of positive and active attitudes toward study. The reform also puts emphasis on changing students' habitual receptive and rote learning to active involvement, interest in exploring and multiple learning abilities. However, under the assessment that retains the emphasis on knowledge and the pressure to gain high scores in the examinations, the curricula in the secondary education are still loaded with knowledge-based and test-oriented instruction.

According to the Higher Education Law in China (Ministry of Education, 1999), Chinese higher education is divided into curricula and non-curricula education in full-time and part-time mode. Curricula higher education consists of speciality education, undergraduate education and postgraduate education. Graduates from secondary schools participate in the National College Entrance Examinations and attend colleges or universities if they meet the requirements. Speciality education lasts for two or three years while undergraduate education requires four or five years of study. Graduates from colleges or universities can attain postgraduate education by passing the Postgraduate Entrance Examinations and study at the master degree for 2 or 3 years. Similarly, they have to pass the examinations at the doctoral level before they pursue the doctoral degree.

To meet the needs of the country for more well-educated manpower, higher education institutions in China began to increase the number of student enrolment in 1999. Presently, the scale of higher education in China is the largest in the world and the elite higher education in China has transformed into mass higher education (Ministry of Education, 2009). In 2013, for example, more than 1.7 million people were enrolled in postgraduate education and nearly 24 million undergraduates were registered in regular higher education institutions (Ministry of Education, 2013).

With more students enrolled, it becomes a primary and core task for higher education to enhance the teaching quality. In 2007, the MOE along with the Ministry of Finance implemented the Teaching Quality and Reformation Project for Undergraduate Education. Various aspects were included in this nationwide teaching reform such as professional structure adjustment, curriculum and teaching material construction and sharing, teaching model reformation and teacher development. With much effort placed on the integration of advanced theories into teaching practices, higher education in China has stepped into a stage of reformation and innovation.

1.4 English Language Teaching in China

English in China is a foreign language as people have limited exposure to it and seldom use it in communication, a case in accordance with what Carter and Nunan (2001) defined as a foreign language. However, English has incrementally penetrated into the life of the Chinese people in some way. Some English words (e.g. OK, Cool, bye-bye, CD, etc.) are spoken and heard often. The street nameplates in many cities are written in both Chinese and English. Many academic journals require an English title and abstract for the articles. Some specialised English channels or programmes are found on TV. In sum, English language has become an important part of the Chinese people's life (G. Chen, 2010).

The importance of English is evidenced in education. There are more than 400 million English learners in China, that is, about one-third of the Chinese population (China Daily, 2010; Wei & Su, 2012), the largest number of English learners in the world (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). Foreign language education in China is mostly about English. The learners of other languages account for less than 1% of the English learners (Wen, Su, & Jian, 2011). "Among the people with foreign-language learning experience in Mainland China, as many as 93.8% had studied English" (Wei & Su,

2012, p. 11). Therefore, English is addressed as "the first foreign language" in China (W. Hu, 2009). In recent years, knowing a foreign language, especially English, has been regarded as a necessary quality for a civilised citizen (Y.-m. Li, 2010).

To date, English holds a very high place in the curriculum at all levels in China. English is a compulsory course for secondary and higher education and is taught in many primary schools. It is also common for kindergartens or preschools to teach English to 3-year-old children. The extracurricular English classes are very popular and many people readily attend the English-training schools and institutes despite the high tuition fees (China Daily, 2010). English score accounts for about a quarter of the secondary school graduates' total score of the National College Entrance Examinations which are usually regarded as being able to change one's life and destiny in China. More than 65% of the college and university students spend more than a quarter of their study time on English (Cai, 2010). They are eager to learn English well, especially to get the certificate of the National College English Test Band 4 or Band 6 (CET-4 or CET-6) which is a crucial factor to be considered for their academic achievements and successful application for jobs in the near future (Jiang, 2008; C. Wang, 2010). Therefore, many students work hard at English all day and some even ignore their study of the major subjects (Z. Hu, 2011).

1.4.1 Historical Development of English Language Teaching in China

The history of English language teaching (ELT hereafter) in China can be traced back to the 19th century when the mission schools took the main role of English studies. The first Chinese initiative of teaching English began with the founding of Tongwen Guan in 1862. Many government-funded schools were established afterwards and eventually took the place of the mission schools in the early 20th century (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). After the establishment of the People's

Republic of China in 1949, foreign language teaching shifted from English to Russian due to the alignment of China with the Soviet Union. In the late 1950s, the important status of English was recovered. However, the development of ELT was disrupted during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), a time of social and economic setback in the Chinese history when education inevitably experienced a breakdown. It was after 1978 when the government adopted the Open Door policy that the ELT in China was revived fundamentally (Bolton & Graddol, 2012; Jin & Cortazzi, 2002).

Grammar-translation method is the pedagogy that has deeply influenced the ELT in China. It was widely adopted before the 1980s and is still commonly used in quite a number of EFL reading classes nowadays (J. Chen, 2012; S. Zhang, 2010). The audio-lingual approaches became popular in the 1950s together with drills and substitution tables. By the late 1970s, "functional and situational approaches became more common but were often synthesised with the more traditional grammar-translation approaches" (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002, p. 54). Communicative approaches were introduced into the ELT in China in the 1980s and began to be emphasised by the syllabus since the 1990s especially in the last decade. However, they were not well practiced in the classrooms. Currently, the pedagogy that dominates the English programmes is teacher-centred and knowledge-based which is addressed as conventional pedagogy in this study.

1.4.2 Current State of English Language Teaching in China

In primary and secondary schools, English is a general language course which integrates reading, writing, listening and speaking. Reading takes the top priority and occupies the majority of the class time and about half of the total score of key national English examinations. Following the teaching guidelines for all subjects in basic education, the ELT in basic education focuses on the language knowledge

particularly vocabulary and grammar. In 2001, the MOE started the ELT reform in basic education. Five elements were specified to realise the goal of developing students' ability to use the English language, namely, language skills, language knowledge, affection and attitude, learning strategies and cultural awareness. However, although more non-linguistic elements were included, the focus on language knowledge and skills still persists and the development of students' cognition and thinking abilities continues to be ignored as reported by in-service teachers from a number of primary and secondary schools (Han, 2010). The language focus is reinforced by the assessments which measure mainly students' mastery of basic knowledge. Knowledge-based and test-oriented teaching and learning continues to be prevalent in the ELT in basic education because students' test scores are linked not only to their academic achievements and successful entrance to a higher level of education and future career, but also to the teachers' teaching quality assessment and professional ranks, bonuses and honour.

To date, the ELT reform in basic education has not yet been spread to all provinces of China although it has been initiated for more than a decade. Some places began the reform even as late as 2010. Therefore, the effects of the reform have not been felt clearly in higher education (S. Wang & Wang, 2011). The traditional emphasis on language learning and the pressure to gain high scores in the examinations impact students dramatically on their learning strategies which are sustained in their study in higher education.

At the tertiary level, the ELT is implemented in two different programmes. One is the programme for English majors who are prepared to be specialists in English linguistics, literature, translation or other fields where high proficiency in English is required (Cai, 2003). The other programme, College English, is designed for non-

English majors. The present study was situated in the College English programme. Therefore, the situation of College English teaching is presented here in more detail.

Developed from a course that existed only in name before the 1980s (Jiang, 2008), College English is a language course compulsorily taken by all non-English major undergraduates in China (Higher Education Department, 2007). The teaching of College English is graded into 6 bands (Band 1 to 6). Proficiency tests are used to assess students' achievements in their study of each band. The tests for Band 4 (CET-4) and Band 6 (CET-6) are particularly organised by the Higher Education Department of the MOE and held twice every year nationally. Undergraduates should pass at least CET-4, which means they have fulfilled the general requirements of College English study. Students who have passed CET-6 are regarded as having met the higher requirements of College English study.

At the turn of the century, the ELT in China faced criticisms for the fact that after years of study, students still lacked skills to communicate orally in English and they have low practical ability even though they can gain high scores in tests (C. Liu & Tan, 2003; Y. Zhang, 2002). To enhance the quality of College English teaching, the MOE launched the College English teaching reform in 2004. According to the College English Curriculum Requirements (Curriculum Requirements hereafter) (Higher Education Department, 2007), the guidelines of the reform, the objectives of College English teaching are not only to cultivate students' comprehensive competence in using the English language, particularly their listening and speaking abilities, but also to develop their learning autonomy and to enhance their cultural literacy. In addition to language knowledge and skills, learning strategies and intercultural communication abilities are specified as the major components of College English teaching. Modern information technology is advocated to be

integrated into College English teaching to develop courses based on computers and internet and to create better environments for students to study English. The Curriculum Requirements emphasises in particular the shift from the traditional teaching model which is teacher-centred and language-focused to a learner-centred one in which the teacher not only imparts the language knowledge, but more importantly, develops students' ability to use the language and to learn independently. It is the objective of the College English teaching to develop a new model by which students are guided with using learning strategies and achieving autonomous learning, a model that is directed to the cultivation of students' capacity for lifelong learning (Higher Education Department, 2007).

The ten-year reform has brought about spectacular changes in various aspects of College English teaching. According to a national survey conducted by the MOE among 530 universities from 31 provinces on the current state of College English teaching in 2009-2010 (S. Wang & Wang, 2011), the reform has been generally accepted by almost all universities and implemented in more than half of the universities in China. The goal to improve students' comprehensive ability in using English has been acknowledged as the most important teaching objective by almost all universities. Projectors and multimedia equipment have been widely used in the College English classrooms. Nevertheless, English language knowledge and skills are still regarded as the most important content of the course by the majority of universities (62.6%). The major teaching mode is still teacher lecturing with students listening and taking notes although teachers are aware of the importance of students' autonomous learning. Because teachers are used to teaching in the way that they were taught (Shu, 2005), together with a situation of crowded classrooms, overloaded work and less chance for teachers to access further education (H. Wang,

2009; Zhou, 2008), the transformation of the teaching focus from language knowledge to learning strategies and learner autonomy is still a big challenge faced by both researchers and educators in China.

1.4.3 The EFL Reading Instruction in China

The instruction of EFL reading in China has always been treated with special attention. Reading proficiency has been the major concern of both teachers and students at all levels of education. The Syllabus of College English in 1986 (1st edition) and in 1999 (2nd edition) both specified the cultivation of students' reading ability as the primary focus of College English teaching (Cai, 2003). Since 2004, the ELT reform has laid more emphasis on listening and speaking. However, as Prof. Dr. Wang Shouren (2006), chairman of the National College English Teaching Committee, has noted, the emphasis on listening and speaking does not mean the weakening of other language skills. Reading has always been and will still be a primary input of language acquisition and the premise and foundation of listening and speaking. This is verified by the findings of the national survey in 2009-2010 that reading was still ranked as the most important language skill by most of the investigated universities (S. Wang & Wang, 2011). As a result, reading remains to be the major component of College English teaching. Reading comprehension keeps taking a large proportion of the total scores of both the national College English Test and the Postgraduate Entrance Examination.

At the turn of the century, the MOE initiated the College English teaching reform and stipulated learning strategies as one of the essential components of the College English curriculum. Research and practices on learning strategies including reading strategies have been conducted in recent years. However, compared with the studies on other language skills, the research on reading strategies is limited (Wen &

Wang, 2004). Some conceptual studies were carried out but empirical studies were scant (Wu, 2006). Most studies were superficial and more in-depth empirical studies are still needed (Duan, 2012; Huang & Lin, 2007; Zhao, 2009).

1.5 Profile of Hebei University

The present study was conducted in Hebei University (HU hereafter) in Baoding City, Hebei Province in northern China. HU is the only key comprehensive university in Hebei Province. It is also the only university in Hebei Province that is funded by both the MOE and the provincial government. Originally founded in Tianjin City in 1921 as the Tianjin Industrial and Business University, the university gradually developed into a comprehensive university and was established as Hebei University in 1960 and moved to Baoding City in 1970. There are about 8,000 academic and administrative staff and more than 70,000 students in the 29 colleges/departments of the university on six campuses (Hebei University, 2012).

1.5.1 College English Teaching in Hebei University

About 3,000 new students enrol in HU every year. They are required to participate in the placement test before commencing their College English study. The test locates the top 10% students with the highest scores who will then be placed in different classes. The rest of the students are streamed into approximately 80 classes according to their majors with about 40 students in one class. The English language proficiency levels of students in one class are different, but the majority are at the intermediate level compared with the students from other universities in China.

The College English course is conducted at four levels (E1 to E4) sequentially in four semesters. At the end of each semester, students sit for the final examination which integrates assessment of listening, reading and writing abilities and participate in the oral test which assesses their speaking ability. They take the national College

English Test Band 4 (CET-4) at the end of the 3rd semester. They can re-take the CET-4 in the 4th semester if they are not satisfied with their scores.

The College English course is divided into three types of classes at each level: the reading and writing class, the listening and speaking class and the self-study class. The reading and writing class is held for 90 minutes every week in the multimedia classroom with a blackboard, a computer, a projector and multimedia equipment. The listening and speaking class is conducted for 90 minutes every other week in the language labs. Students take the self-study class for 90 minutes every week in the language labs with a computer at each seat connected to the local area network and study on their own the materials provided online by the textbook publisher.

The teaching of the College English course is conducted by two groups of teachers from the Foreign Languages Teaching and Research Department in HU who teach the first year and second year students respectively. Each group comprises about 30 teachers. The same teacher teaches the same students all levels of College English for four semesters.

This study was held in the E3 course. At the time of the research, there were 26 teachers teaching about 3,200 non-English major E3 undergraduates. They were mostly lecturers (57.7%) and teaching assistants (26.9%) at a young age (M=34.23 years old) but with relatively much experience in the ELT (M=10.15 years). They held either BA (61.5%) or MA (38.5%) degrees in English. Most teachers were female (80.8%). These teachers had taught the same students for one year before the study. Each teacher taught at least two classes of students.

After HU participated in the national ELT reform in 2004, the teachers were exposed to a series of training workshops on theories of teaching and learning such as cooperative learning, communicative teaching and learning strategies. They were

also encouraged to experiment and practice these concepts and theories to promote teaching quality. However, according to the researcher's observations from the years 2004-2010 as a faculty leader, conventional pedagogy still prevails in most classrooms in which the teacher explains the vocabulary and sentences and asks the students to answer questions or do exercises. Although reading strategies are defined in the textbooks and introduced by the teacher, students are not given sufficient practice opportunities. Few strategies are applied in students' learning practice except for those habitually used in secondary schools. On the other hand, although teachers are aware of the importance of passing the learning responsibility to students, they are detained from doing so either because of the ingrained belief in the teacher's authority or due to the lack of experience about how to do it.

1.5.2 The College English Reading Instruction in Hebei University

The College English reading instruction in HU is conducted in the reading and writing class which is developed from the intensive reading class in the pre-reform period. Although efforts are made to integrate both reading and writing instruction in the class, the focus is still kept on reading to a large extent while writing occupies a very small proportion of the class time.

The College English reading instruction in HU has undergone dramatic changes since the university participated in the national ELT reform. Originally via only chalk and blackboard, the instruction is now delivered along with Power Point slides in the multimedia classrooms. Students have access to both print and online learning materials. The teaching content has been expanded from the original exclusive focus on the language knowledge to include some cultural communication information. However, reading strategies are still insufficiently instructed with only a brief introduction and few practice opportunities. Text structure is analysed but is

limited to dividing the text into several parts and then telling the main idea of each part. Majority of class time is allocated to activities such as explaining the meaning of the words and sentences and analysing the grammatical structures. Overall, the reading instruction in HU follows the conventional pedagogy and focuses on the language knowledge with limited strategy instruction.

1.6 Statement of the Problem

Research findings have shown that reading strategies are conducive to successful reading comprehension and are closely related to better reading performance (Alderson, 1984; Hudson, 2007; Madhumathi & Ghosh, 2012; Phakiti, 2003). Good reading strategy use can "minimise failure and enable students to take advantage of learning opportunities" (Cubukcu, 2007, p. 106).

The positive correlation of reading strategies to students' cognitive development and academic learning is recognised by Chinese educators. Nevertheless, although the Curriculum Requirements emphasises the importance of reading strategies, it does not specify the teaching objectives and focuses concerning reading strategy instruction. The reading instruction practice is still dominated by the traditional knowledge-based teaching model. Although with sparse reading strategy exercises, the reading instruction is not targeted at improving students' reading strategy use and remains to focus on the explanation of vocabulary, grammar and text sentences (Shao, 2014; Shu, 2006; X. Zhang, 2009).

So far, although considerable importance have been attached to reading by teachers and learners in China, the effects of reading instruction and learners' reading abilities are far from satisfactory (Y. Li & Wang, 2010). In the conventional language-focused EFL reading instruction context, students have formed a habit of reading word by word, targeting on the literal meaning of the words and relying

heavily on sentence-by-sentence translation and low level strategies (Shang, 2010; Shao, 2014). After years of study, most students are still not good at reading and their scores in the reading comprehension tests are rather low (Xiang, 2011). The Chinese EFL students are in great need of guidance to promote their reading strategy use and to improve their reading performance. However, the reading strategy instruction in quite a number of universities in China has not been fully implemented and the existent research on reading strategy instruction is not adequate in the aspects of instructional approaches and empirical data. There is an urgent necessity to conduct research in the related field to help solve the problem.

Metacognitive scaffolding has been reported to be effective in significantly improving the learning outcomes of students (Jbeili, 2003; James & Okpala, 2010; Molenaar, van Boxtel, & Sleegers, 2011). However, little research has been conducted in China on the effects of metacognitive scaffolding on students' reading strategy use and reading performance. Therefore, this study is a valuable attempt to solve the stated problem, to fill the research gap and to provide new insights into the pedagogical innovation in the context of tertiary EFL reading instruction in China.

1.7 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore the effects of metacognitive scaffolding on the reading strategy use of Chinese EFL tertiary students.

2. To examine the effects of metacognitive scaffolding on the reading performance of Chinese EFL tertiary students.

3. To investigate the experiences of Chinese EFL tertiary students about using metacognitive scaffolding in the reading classroom.

4. To investigate the experiences of the EFL teacher about using metacognitive scaffolding in the reading classroom.

1.8 Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of metacognitive scaffolding on the reading strategy use of Chinese EFL tertiary students?

2. What are the effects of metacognitive scaffolding on the reading performance of Chinese EFL tertiary students?

3. What are the experiences of Chinese EFL tertiary students about using metacognitive scaffolding in the reading classroom?

4. What are the experiences of the EFL teacher about using metacognitive scaffolding in the reading classroom?

1.9 Significance of the Study

This study is an attempt to employ metacognitive scaffolding (MS hereafter) in the EFL reading instruction in the Chinese higher education context. Specifically, it examines the effects of MS on the reading strategy use and reading performance of non-English major undergraduates in HU. This study provides insights into the students' reading process and reading performance as well the teaching process using MS in HU, thereby provides useful information for other local universities in China with similar student population and teaching context.

In addition, this study intends to increase the awareness of the significance of reading strategies in EFL reading in China. The findings of the study can help the students in HU and other local universities realise the usefulness of reading strategies in reading and convert their over-focus on the language knowledge to using strategies while reading. This is especially important in a reform age when efforts are

committed to cultivating strategic readers and autonomous learners. The study can also help the general student population in China and other similar contexts with a different perspective to read their academic materials and to understand their strategy use and reading process.

Furthermore, the teachers in HU and other universities can benefit from the study by being encouraged to reconsider their direct lecturing pedagogy for more alternatives in EFL teaching and learning. The findings of the study provide the teachers with useful feedback as to the effectiveness of MS when applied in the reading strategy instruction in their efforts to improve teaching quality. This is especially valuable presently when the teaching quality is being criticised and the professional quality of the Chinese EFL teachers needs to be improved (Zhou, 2010). It is hoped that this study can facilitate a possible improvement on the teaching quality of ELT in general.

This study also has significant implications to curriculum development and syllabus design in Chinese higher education. Since the turn of the century when the national ELT reform was initiated, the universities in China are tasked to decide their own syllabus based on the Curriculum Requirements to implement individualised teaching (Higher Education Department, 2007). The findings of this study provide useful reference for HU and universities with similar traits to develop a syllabus that incorporates reading strategy instruction and to design their curriculum accordingly regarding improving students' reading strategy use and reading performance. Furthermore, it is hoped that the findings of the study can provide the MOE with recommendations on the improvement of ELT and give impetus to the advancement of the national College English teaching reform.

It is also hoped that this study can contribute to the field of EFL teaching and learning in Chinese higher education because, although research on reading strategies and reading strategy instruction has been conducted for decades in other countries, it is only recently that Chinese educators and researchers began to focus on this area. As one of the first endeavours to apply MS in the Chinese EFL context, the findings of this study may contribute to the knowledge base in this area by providing some useful empirical data and serving as a future reference. It is hoped that the study can elicit further research findings in ELT on what teachers and researchers can do to help students become strategic readers and autonomous learners.

1.10   Limitations of the Study

This study is an attempt to explore the effects of MS in the Chinese ELT context. Specifically, the study focuses on the effects of MS on the students' reading strategy use and reading performance. A total of 80 non-English major second year undergraduates from two intact classes in HU participated in the study. The relatively small sample size might not give it the statistical support for findings to be directly generalisable to the whole population of Chinese EFL tertiary students. Nevertheless, the results obtained from the selected sample can provide useful insights into the effects of MS on students' reading strategy use and reading performance considering the insufficient studies of this nature in the EFL context in China.

The two EFL teachers involved in the study taught the EG and CG respectively. Their different characteristics may influence their teaching and hence might affect the study's validity. This study acknowledged this possibility and delimited this by establishing teachers' homogeneity before the study. With their willingness to participate in the research and the similarity as to age, education background,

teaching experience and teaching proficiency, this study managed to diminish the effects that the differences between the teachers might exert on the study.

Furthermore, the interviews were conducted by the researcher herself. In case of any limitations that may be caused by the researcher bias, classroom observations, questionnaire and tests were employed to help establish triangulation which helped minimise the biases that might exist in the data collection and analysis procedure via a single instrument.

1.11 Definitions of Key Terms

In the present study, some terms may carry different connotations for other people or in other contexts. To avoid misunderstanding or conceptual confusion and to make clear the meaning of the terms or concepts as they were employed in this study, the definitions of key terms are provided below.

Metacognition: refers to "the knowledge of the readers' cognition about reading and the self-control mechanisms they exercise when monitoring and regulating text comprehension" (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002, p. 249).

Scaffolding: refers to the process of assisting a learner to solve problems or accomplish tasks which would be out of reach if unassisted and then fading the help as the learner develops increasing competence or expertise (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976).

Metacognitive scaffolding: refers to the scaffolding of students' metacognition in reading which comprises students' knowledge of and regulation about reading strategy use. Specifically, it refers to the progressively supporting process with a series of questions of "what", "how" and "why" before and after students' reading to help them plan, monitor and evaluate their reading strategy use.

Reading strategies: refers to "deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode text, understand words and construct meanings of text" (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008, p. 368).

Reading strategy use: refers to the Chinese EFL tertiary students' use of reading strategies as investigated by the reading strategy questionnaire, classroom observations and interviews in this study.

Reading performance: refers to the Chinese EFL tertiary students' reading comprehension performance which is measured by reading comprehension tests and investigated through classroom observations and interviews in this study.

Chinese EFL tertiary students: refers to the non-English major second year undergraduate students in Hebei University, China.

Conventional pedagogy: refers to the teacher-centred and language-focused pedagogy conventionally used in the Chinese EFL classrooms.

1.12   Summary

The present study is situated in China, the most populous country in the world with a long history of esteem to education. The emphasis of education on imparting knowledge is reflected on the ELT in China. Presently, the national efforts have been committed to the reform to integrate strategy instruction into the College English curriculum. However, the traditional focus on language knowledge prevails in the EFL reading classrooms and more empirical studies are needed on reading strategy instruction. This necessitates the present study which aimed to explore the effects of metacognitive scaffolding on students' reading strategy use and reading performance. Although limitations existed, the study can still benefit university teachers and students in China, provide insightful suggestions to the policy makers and enrich the literature in ELT in the Chinese context.