METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS AND USE OF READING STRATEGIES ON THE NARRATIVE TEXT BY IRAQI EFL COLLEGE STUDENTS

MUNAIF Y DHAHER ALQATRANI

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By

MUNAIF Y DHAHER ALQATRANI

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Kesedaran Metakognitif dan Penggunaan Strategi Membaca Teks Naratif oleh Pelajar Kolej EFL Iraq

Abstrak

Kajian ini bertujuan menyelidik tahap kesedaran metakognitif strategi bacaan dalam kalangan pembaca EFL dan penggunaan strategi bacaan untuk memahami teks naratif. Kajian ini dijalankan di Universiti Basrah Iraq dan respondennya ialah pelajar Arab di Jabatan Bahasa Inggeris, Kolej Pendidikan. Kajian ini dijalankan berdasarkan soal selidik yang diedarkan kepada para pelajar untuk mengkaji kesedaran mereka tentang strategi bacaan. Soal selidik ini merupakan versi terjemahan bahasa Arab daripada Kesedaran Metakognitif daripada Inventori Strategi Bacaan (Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory, MARSI). Di samping itu, suatu ujian kefahaman bacaan turut dijalankan. Korelasi di antara pelajar yang baik dan yang lemah dalam pemahaman teks naratif dikaji. Kajian juga menentukan strategi bacaan yang paling digunakan dan kurang digunakan pembaca. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kedua-dua pelajar, iaitu yang baik dan yang lemah mempunyai tahap kesedaran metakognitif yang tinggi tanpa adanya perbezaan yang signifikan di antara tahap kesedaran mereka. Bagi pembaca yang baik, terdapat suatu korelasi yang amat signifikan, iaitu di antara kesedaran metakognitif global, sokongan serta penyelesaian masalah. Namun demikian, bagi pembaca yang lemah, terdapat hanya satu korelasi yang signifikan, iaitu di antara kesedaran metakognitif dan penyelesaian masalah. Darjah kesedaran responden dan penggunaan tiga jenis strategi bacaan mempunyai tertib yang sama. Turutannya ialah, strategi bacaan penyelesaian masalah, strategi bacaan global, dan strategi bacaan sokongan. Empat strategi bacaan penyelesaian masalah, dua strategi bacaan global dan dua strategi bacaan sokongan adalah strategi yang paling digemari atau banyak digunakan untuk memahami teks naratif. Sementara itu, tiga strategi bacaan global dan dua strategi bacaan sokongan adalah strategi yang tidak begitu digemari atau paling kurang digunakan. Penyelidikan ini adalah signifikan dalam usaha membantu pelajar EFL membangunkan kemahiran pemahaman mereka, terutamanya dalam teks naratif. Ia menyedarkan para pelajar dan guru tentang penggunaan strategi bacaan untuk mencapai pemahaman yang lebih baik dalam tempoh yang singkat. Kajian ini juga mempunyai beberapa implikasi pedagogi dan saranan untuk kajian pada masa depan.

Metacognitive Awareness and Use of Reading Strategies on the Narrative Text by Iraqi EFL College Students

Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine EFL readers' metacognitive awareness level of reading strategies and use of reading strategies to comprehend the narrative text. The study was done in Basrah University, Iraq and the respondents are Arabic students in the College of Education – Department of English language. The study was carried out by giving the students a questionnaire to investigate their awareness of reading strategies which is an Arabic translated version of Metacognitve Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) and a reading comprehension exercise. The correlation between good and poor readers' awareness of reading strategies in comprehension of the narrative text was investigated. Also the study examined which reading strategies are more frequently and less frequently used by the students. The study revealed that both good and poor readers have a high metacognitive awareness level of reading strategies with no significant difference between their level of awareness. There is a fairly strong significant correlation between the good readers' metacognitive awareness of global, support, and problem solving reading strategies. However there is only one significant correlation between poor readers' metacognitive awareness of global reading strategies and problem solving reading strategies. The respondents' awareness degree and use of the three types of reading strategies have the same order. First comes the problem solving reading strategies then global reading strategies and finally support reading strategies. Four problem solving reading strategies and two global reading strategies are the most frequently used to comprehend the narrative text, while three global reading strategies and two support reading strategies are the least used strategies. This research is significant to help EFL students to develop their proficiency in comprehension especially of the narrative text. It alerts both students and teachers on the use of reading strategies to achieve better comprehension within a shorter time. This study has some pedagogical implications and recommendations for future studies concerning this field of study.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0   Introduction

Reading is one of the basic and most important tools of language learning; actually it might possibly be the tool for learning in all fields of knowledge. It is the way that all the knowledge in the arts and sciences is transmitted through generations. This importance makes us think of the best means and ways to improve and develop this learning skill which is reading comprehension. In the literature, a major strand of reading comprehension concerns reading strategies and metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. These form the focus of the present study.

In this research, the aim is to find out the good and poor readers' metacognitive awareness level of reading strategies and also to find out if there is a significant difference between good readers' metacognitive awareness level of reading strategies and poor readers' level of metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. The study hopes to find out which reading strategies are used most and least by the study respondents to comprehend narrative texts. It is also to discover the common strategies used by readers for this text type.

In this chapter, the researcher will try to give a brief description of the present research. This covers the background of the study, the reasons that motivate him to do this study, research objectives and questions and also the basic plan to carry out the research.

1.1 Background of the Study

Broadly, the term *reading comprehension* stands for the skills or procedures that students (in the case of the present study, English Language learners) follow to understand texts in their books or other study materials and extract the main ideas of the material. Snow (2002) defines the term *reading comprehension* as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. It consists of three elements: the reader, the text, and the activity or purpose for reading. In addition students must follow some strategies in order to comprehend texts in the best way, these strategies are called reading strategies or comprehension strategies. Students in the sample taken (Iraqi university students) do not give much importance to the reading strategies though they may use them spontaneously when they read a text. Also they do not have sufficient knowledge about which reading strategy is best for a certain type of text.

Another point to note is reading comprehension in English can be problematic for Iraqi students as the system of education does require reading in English. The Iraqi learning and teaching system is a general system that tries to give pupils and students general knowledge about nearly all the sciences and arts, to prepare Iraqi learners to specialize in certain fields of knowledge at the university level. In the beginning stages, the Arabic language (which is the mother language of Iraqis) is basically the main language of instruction. At the advanced level of learning, English is used to show and explain certain terms especially in the scientific fields such as general science, chemistry, physics, biology, and mathematics. Arabic is still the

main language until the university level except in the case of foreign language learning.

According to the Iraqi Foreign Language Learning Program, Teaching English language begins in the fifth primary class. In Iraq, students must pass two academic levels before they reach the university level; primary level which consists of six stages and children join this level when they are six years old, and the secondary level that fellows the primary level and it consists of six stages too.

At the primary level, pupils take four to five classes per week and each class is about 45 minutes. The English book is divided into units; each unit begins with a dialogue that takes 5 to 10 minutes. After that there will be the oral practice and students learn grammatical rules from the oral practice. This activity takes about 15 to 20 minutes according to the importance of the material. Then the rest of the class time will be for doing exercises. At the end of the lesson the teacher gives his pupils some homework to do.

Teachers teach pupils (learners in the primary stage) English letters, some simple grammatical rules, simple vocabularies, simple dialogues and the pupils write very simple paragraphs. The examinations are mostly conducted orally in the primary level. The teacher asks the pupil to say (read) a dialogue from the textbook, and then he asks them about some vocabulary. After that he gives them a very small passage to read. Teaching English becomes more serious in the secondary stage. But still the same unit classification is in the book and the class time is the same. The dialogues here are longer and more difficult vocabulary is used. A typical lesson has oral practice and dictation, and pronunciation. After that the reading passage which is a

long passage with difficult vocabulary is used. In addition, there is a novel or a play written in a simplified way used in the preparatory stage which is the second part of the secondary stage. In this stage, the exam will be divided into two parts; oral and written. In the oral exam, the dialogue is also used but there will be a long passage to read and the teacher will ask some questions about the novel and the other passages in the textbook. The written exam will test the grammatical rules, and vocabulary. Pronunciation may also be tested by giving the samples of the sound and options of words to choose which one has this sound or sometimes vice versa, and also by asking examples of words that have the sound. The written exam may also include a written passage and some questions about passages taken from the textbooks.

Teachers begin giving students (learners in the secondary level) more difficult materials such as more complex grammatical rules and more difficult vocabularies. Students write more complex paragraphs and different types of letters in the form of composition. They read a simple novel (for example, Oliver Twist written by Charles Dickens) or a simple play written in native English (e.g. the Merchant of Venice written by William Shakespeare studied in the sixth secondary stage). In the final secondary stage (sixth stage) teachers begin teaching students conversation rules and try to make students use English in conversations during English classes. Most of the teachers do not follow a specific teaching method and they create their own method in language teaching which is a mixture of the structural approach and grammar-translation approach. The use of English also increases in the other fields of study. So according to this program, students should have the ability to use the English language professionally at the university level.

At the university level, students do not study general knowledge as before and now they are specialized in certain fields of study. The curriculum now is different; there are no fixed lessons or books for each class. The university level requires an advanced level of knowledge that depends on accessing sources about the field of the study that students specialize in and most sources are written in English language. Some sources are written by Arabic writers or translated to Arabic. In most colleges, the examinations are taken using English language such as colleges of medical studies and other colleges. The use of English language is still limited to the scientific idioms and theories, and some resources that help students to manage and control their study; though in some colleges' courses are fully studied in English language especially in the medical colleges and departments of English language.

In Iraq, there are three main colleges that have English language departments; College of Languages, College of Arts, and College of Education. The first two colleges teach grammar, linguistics, English literature, phonetics and phonology, and composition and comprehension. The third college, College of Education (where the sample of this research was taken from), teaches grammar, linguistics, English literature, phonetics and phonology, composition and comprehension, assessment, methods of teaching especially language teaching, and psychology. Teaching English grammar in this level is done by studying certain sources, for example, in first stage they study a book entitled "Comprehensive English Grammar" which has been changed now to "English Grammar in Use". In the second stage the reference book is "Introductory English Grammar" and the grammar book in the third and fourth stage is "University Grammar of English". The students usually read the book and memorize the grammatical rules. They try to understand the new methods of

grammar in the fourth stage such as Transformational Grammar. As external material for all the university level students in all colleges, they teach a basic course in using the computer except in computer science departments. In these three colleges, all the materials are taught and written in English except for psychology. Also all the examinations are taken in English.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Generally, Iraqi students, who are learners of English as a foreign language, face problems in reading comprehension.

Before the university level, students do not read texts in the English language except what they read in the English language textbooks. Teachers in the secondary level emphasize on teaching students grammatical rules and repeat these rules again and again because they believe that if the students master the grammatical rules they can use the vocabulary they learn in language communication (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Teachers teach grammar in a mathematical form i.e. they put the grammatical rule in a form of mathematical equation and ask the students to practice by filling up this equation. So the teachers stress on giving the students grammatical rules and make them memorize a lot of words, and on the other hand, they do not emphasize on giving them enough practice.

In reading the teachers tell them to read passages and memorize the words and their meaning in the index. Nearly most of the texts given before the university level are narrative texts. Teachers give marks for word pronunciation and reading fluency

without paying enough attention to the meaning of the whole passage. The teachers generally do not give much attention to reading comprehension before the university level. They encourage writing more than reading such as writing some passages about certain characters they study in their textbooks and translating some small passages from Arabic to English and vice versa.

As a result of how English is taught and learned in school, students face much difficulty in comprehending texts in the future. At the university level, they face difficulties in using the language because they have no practical experience in language use before especially in reading and listening. So they find it difficult to understand comprehension texts at the beginning. So the students must depend on themselves in developing their comprehension level by using the vocabulary they learned before the university level. They try to use aids to understand what they read either by using dictionaries or some may try to guess the unknown words from the context. Good readers try to connect the important ideas in the text to form a main idea. After a period of time, they begin using skills that they have learned before to understand the materials. At this stage , differences in students' reading level will appear clearly (high level or skilled readers and low level or poor readers). As highlighted earlier, one of the reasons behind this difference is that some teachers in the two levels before the university emphasize grammatical rules more than vocabulary learning and explaining the meaning of the difficult English words in their native language on their own. Students are expected to develop and increase their vocabulary. With limited vocabulary students find it difficult to progress further. Another reason is students use English language only when studying for English language examinations.

In addition, it seems that Iraqi students do not have enough knowledge about reading strategies and what strategies are suitable for them in dealing with reading materials. In fact some of the school teachers hadn't heard of the term "reading strategies". The observation of the researcher and many other English teachers from different levels of language learning in Iraq is that poor readers (low level readers) tend to comprehend texts in a word to word fashion directing attention to the word and structure of the passage. The more skilled readers focus on meaningful relations within the text. These are just some indications of strategy awareness and use.

Especially for students in the College of Education mentioned earlier, it is important that they achieve a high reading proficiency level. Many of these university students struggle in comprehending English texts. One of the text types they deal with is narrative texts and it is the most used type of texts of the academic materials, for example, students study comprehension, composition, and national education which depend mostly on narrative texts. In the second stage, the narrative text use increases in students' materials as they study fiction, comprehension, composition, national education, and general English literature. Third stage materials are more developed in using narrative texts. At this stage students study novels, drama, national education, and essay writing. The final stage in the English language department is the preparation stage for students to be teachers and they study novels, drama, and history of English literature and also most of the students do their final research project in the field of literature. So it is clear that the narrative text is one of the most important types of texts used in teaching English as a foreign language. Students struggle with such texts and need reading skills to help them perform

reading tasks. Therefore this study hopes to explore their use of reading strategies on narrative texts to improve their comprehension.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to measure the students' awareness of reading strategies and to find out their use of reading strategies to comprehend the narrative text type. The objective is also to do a comparison between low level students and high level students in awareness of reading strategies. This will be applied on a group of students at the university level (College of Education-Department of English) to understand their knowledge of reading strategies in relation to one text type. The students' reading proficiency levels will be different (some of them are good readers and the others are poor readers). The study objectives are:

1- To find out the good and poor students' level of metacognitive awareness of reading strategies.

2- To find out whether the level of good readers' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies differs significantly from the level of poor readers' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies.

3- To find out if there is a significant correlation between the metacognitive awareness of problem solving strategies, support reading strategies, and global reading strategies among good readers.

4- To find out if there is a significant correlation between the metacognitive awareness of problem solving strategies, support reading strategies, and global reading strategies among poor readers.

5- To find out which reading strategies are used to comprehend the narrative text.

1.4 Research Questions

The study goal is to investigate the students' awareness and use of reading strategies in relation to the narrative text type, and the role of this awareness in improving text comprehension. So the research questions will be as follows:

1- What is the level of good readers' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies?

2- What is the level of poor readers' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies?

3- Is there a significant difference between the level of good readers' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies and the level of poor readers' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies?

4- Is there a significant correlation between good readers' metacognitive awareness of problem solving strategies, support reading strategies, and global reading strategies?

5- Is there a significant correlation between poor readers' metacognitive awareness of problem solving strategies, support reading strategies, and global reading strategies?

6- Which reading strategies are used to comprehend the narrative text?

1.5   Research Hypotheses

A hypothesis is the simple theory that the researcher puts forward and tries to prove whether it is correct or not through his research. There are certain criteria for the good hypothesis that should be followed. These criteria are: first 'it should be based on sound reasoning'; second 'it provides a reasonable explanation for the predicated outcome'; third' it clearly states the expected relationship between defined variables'; and finally, 'it is testable within a reasonable time frame' (Sutrisno, 2011,p.1). According to these principles, this study's null hypotheses for research questions 3, 4 and 5 are:

RQ 3 Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between the level of good readers' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies and the level of poor readers' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies.

RQ 4 Null Hypothesis: There is no significant correlation between good readers' metacognitive awareness of problem solving strategies, support reading strategies, and global reading strategies.

RQ 5 Null Hypothesis: There is no significant correlation between poor readers' metacognitive awareness of problem solving strategies, support reading strategies, and global reading strategies.

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher has designed a research plan which will be discussed in chapter 3. In this study, the sample was a group of students at the university level. Some of them were poor readers and the others were good readers.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The overall significance of the study lies in the importance of reading as the main tool in learning especially in language learning. Another point is the importance of developing the methods of language learning especially in reading comprehension. This study is significant for us because it emphasizes the importance of reading strategies especially for low-level students. Reading strategies should be taught to students to improve their level of comprehension.

This study will help the students (both good and poor readers) to understand and comprehend texts and study materials in a more effective way that will allow them to save time to study more materials and will help them give better answers in the

examinations. Better readers will produce better writers because if the students understand the materials well this will give them more ability to express the ideas that they have understood on paper. Finally it will improve their overall performance in education as Eggen (1996) maintained that metacognitive knowledge create good thinkers and ultimate learners.

This research will help the poor readers to do better academically because it will lead them to read and understand the materials in a strategic way. In other words it will give them a set of strategies that will help them to understand well and to score well and even to reduce the time they spend in reading materials.

Also this research will be useful for the teachers as well. When students can understand materials faster than before, it will reduce the effort of the teachers in the class and will give the teachers a chance to give the students more and new materials to develop their academic skills.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in that the sample was taken from one university in Iraq which is Basrah University College of Education – English Language Department.

There were 78 students taken from two stages in this department; third and fourth stage. So the results of this fairly small sample cannot be generalized to all university students in Iraq or all EFL learners in Iraq.

The participants did not do the comprehension exercise in one sitting but they were allowed to take the exercise home. As a result some of the students did not hand up the exercise papers to the researcher in order to be included in the study data and some of them did not answer the exercise completely by neglecting some items of the exercise. So this reduced the number of the study participants even further. Furthermore, participants may subconsciously or intentionally revise their response in that their report reflects what they believe they have done or are willing to report rather than what they actually did (Schwarz, 1999). Students' self report is also a limitation of the study.

A related limitation of taking home the comprehension exercise is that the researcher could not ensure that the respondents did the test seriously and individually. In actual fact to overcome this limitation the think aloud technique to ask the respondents to verbalize their thought processes would be ideal. However time constraints did not permit this. Another technique would be interviews. Again there would be problems in the college context. The researcher could not do interviews with all the students or use think aloud protocol as it would affect their class timing and also the researcher could not meet them after class. As a way to reduce this limitation of the take home exercise, the researcher conducted separate interviews with two willing respondents to triangulate the data.

1.8 Operational Definition of the Terms

Cognitivism: The term cognitivism refers to the human mental activities and information process that happens in the brain and causes their behavior as Widlöcher (2005) said

> "The term refers to those sciences that study systems for representing understanding and the processing of information. Included in the term are certain areas of speculative research (philosophy of mind), artificial intelligence, semantic, syntactic, and lexical models(linguistics), the study of human activities (psychology),and the neuronal basis of those activities" (p.308).

Reading is defined as decoding and translating symbols which are letters in order to extract meaning from the text for different goals, learning, work, entertainment or other purposes as explained by Cline (2006)

> Reading is decoding and understanding written text. Decoding requires translating the symbols of writing systems .... . Understanding is determined by the purposes for reading, the context, the nature of the text, and the readers' strategies and knowledge. (p.1)

Reading comprehension is the method of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through communication and involvement with written language (Snow, 2002).

Reading strategies is defined as the mental operations involved when readers approach a text effectively and make sense of what they read (Barnett, 1988).

Metacognitive reading strategies: Metacognition is the awareness of the reader's own learning process that can be regulated and monitored (Harris and Hodges, 1995). Iwai (2011) thinks that metacognitive reading strategies are crucial in reading comprehension in that readers use planning , monitoring , regulating and evaluating their reading process as followed according to Iwai (2011),

> " metacognitive reading strategies are classified into three groups of planning (pre-reading), monitoring (during reading), and evaluating (post-reading) strategies, and each group has a variety of strategies that require readers' metacognitive processing" (p 153)

Narrative text is the type of text that tells a story using sequential order. The narrative text has intention to amuse and to tell the story. Narration can be used to reach any aim: to inform or educate, to convince or persuade, to entertain or please, or to state strong feelings and passion (Wati, 2010).

1.9 Summary of Chapter One

In this chapter, the researcher has given an introduction of the research focus which combines between metacognitive awareness and use of reading strategies, the narrative text type and students' proficiency level of comprehension in Iraq. This chapter has discussed the background of the study, problem statement, objectives of the study, research questions, research hypotheses, significance of the study, and the limitations of the study. The next chapter will give a review of the theoretical literature and related studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0   Introduction

This chapter will discuss the theoretical framework and the related studies of the present study. First, the cognitive perspective, definitions and details of the main characteristics of reading comprehension theories will be presented. Also some clarifications of the main principles of the reading operation, namely; reading strategies, reader, and text will be given. At appropriate parts of this chapter, related studies have also been reviewed.

2.1 Review of the Theoretical Literature

The main purpose for reading is to comprehend the ideas in the material. Without comprehension, reading would be empty and meaningless (Casper, Catton, & Westfall, 1998). As such, students need a systematic way to read and comprehend texts especially academic texts. Some theories have been reviewed in this research regarding how comprehension takes place. In this research we will focus on the Schema Theory, Mental Model theory, and the Propositional Theory. These theories are rooted in cognitivism which will be discussed first.

2.1.1 Cognitivism

Cognitivism is the human brain mental activities and information process that happens and resulted as their behavior.

Cognitivism also refers to the process of thinking and information analysis, the results will appear as human behavior. A similar explanation is as follows,

> "Cognitivism is based on the thought process behind the behavior. Cognitivism stresses the acquisition of knowledge and internal mental structures. In other words, it focuses on how information is received, organized, stored, and retrieved by the mind" (Jung, 2008, p.3).

During the 1960s, discontent with the inadequacies of behaviorism, another school of thought, was developing as well as behavioral thinking. The cognitive aspects were put forth. The behaviorist point of view could not easily explain why people attempt to organize and make sense of the information they learn. One example includes remembering general meanings rather than word for word information. Among learning psychologists there emerged a growing realization that mental events or cognition could no longer be ignored. Cognitive psychologists share with behaviorists the belief that the study of learning should be objective and that learning theories should be developed from the results of empirical research. However, cognitivists disagree with the behaviorists in one critical aspect. By observing the responses that individuals make to different stimulus conditions, cognitivists believe that they can draw inferences about the nature of the internal cognitive processes that produce those responses. Many ideas and assumptions of cognitivism can be traced back to the early decades of the twentieth century. Of all

theories, the theories of Jean Piaget of Switzerland are the ones that have provided psychology with very elaborated account of developmental changes in cognitive abilities. As explained by Widlöcher (2005)

"ever since the 1960s, an important body of thought has developed in reaction to the presumed behaviorism according to which intellectual activity is beyond the grasp of any form of scientific investigation. Cognitivism has marked a return to a scientific approach to mental activity that has materialized in the development of the cognitive sciences" (p.308).

Reading is a cognitive process or in other words a mental activity that is connected with the action of using a text to extract information and store it in the human memory to use it later in performing other tasks such as writing.

The best cognitive views of reading comprehension stress on the interactive nature of reading and the constructive nature of comprehension (British Council, BBC, 2006). Cognitivism is very much related to reading comprehension as can be seen in the following sections on reading theories.

2.1.2 Reading Comprehension

Reading is a cognitive process of understanding a written linguistic message. Reading comprehension is the capacity of understanding information presented in written form (Center for Advancement and Learning, CAL, 1997). Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive ability that involves assimilating text information with the background knowledge of the reader and resulting in the explanation of a mental representation (Meneghetti, Carretti & De Beni, 2006).

Goodman (1979) views reading as a "psycholinguistic guessing game" (p.498), allowing readers to depend more on their actual syntactic and semantic knowledge structures than on the awareness of graphic and sounds as he said below:

> "More simply stated, reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game. It involves an interaction between thought and language. Efficient reading does not result from precise perception and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time. The ability to anticipate that which has not been seen, of course, is vital in reading, just as the ability to anticipate what has not yet been heard is vital in listening." (p. 498)

The following section covers three main theories of reading comprehension from a cognitivist prospective.

2.1.3 Theories of Reading Comprehension

Gunning (1996) as cited in (Casper, et al., 1998) identifies three main theories of reading comprehension. These theories are Schema Theory, Mental Model Theory, and the Propositional Theory.

Gunning (1996) defines a schema as the organized knowledge that one already has about people, places, things, and events. Kitao (1990) cited in (Casper, et al., 1998) says the schema theory involves an interaction between the reader's own knowledge and the text, which results in comprehension. This schema, as defined by Gunning, can be very broad, such as a schema for natural disasters, or more narrow, such as a schema for a hurricane. Each schema is "filed" in an individual compartment and stored there. In attempting to comprehend reading materials, students can relate this new information to the existing information they have compartmentalized in their minds, adding it to these "files" for future use. Based on

the Schema Theory, depending on how extensive their "files" become, their degree of reading comprehension may vary.

Schema theory is the theory that represents the formation of the human knowledge in the memory and a schema is a small part of a big storage of information gained from our life experiences and ideas (Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, 2005). Beleaguered, reliant readers often lack the schema necessary to make links before reading, while reading, and after reading (Dilbeck, 2011). Schema is like the cabinet of the files of the mind, inside the schemata filing cabinet, there are records, the number of records and the breadth of the files depend upon the knowledge or experiences of the reader (Dilbeck, 2011). Enriching schemata requires the student to add files, add information to these files, and to contribute information to existing files (Dilbeck, 2011). Schema must be constructed and made active right through the reading process (Dilbeck, 2011). All what we see, hear or perceive in any way in our life is the source of the background information that will be organized in our brain and it is the base which we use to understand what will come next.

> "Our knowledge is organized into structures called "schemata" (plural for "schema"). A schema is a "mental information organizer" that helps us make sense of what we see, hear, or otherwise experience. We fit new information into an existing schema, which also "fills in the blanks" of what we may not directly perceive"(Blachowicz, 2008, p.28).

Schema theory also presents a realistic description of reading comprehension, popular among researchers as well as practitioners. It provides a rich and detailed theoretical explanation of the everyday perception that we understand and learn what is new in relation to what we already know. It also accounts for the everyday phenomenon for the different descriptions and opinions in interpreting stories, movies, and news events- we give different opinion than the others because we deal with the phenomenon from very different background experiences and knowledge (Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, 2005).

In relation to reading comprehension, schema theory has shown a way for educators to check texts according to the students' knowledge and cultural backgrounds to appraise the likely relations that they would be able to make between ideas extracted from the text and the schema that they can add to the reading task. Schema theory also supported a structural view of comprehension (Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, 2005).

All the readers try to formulate the most coherent model of the meaning of the text, and this is the most important evidence for constructivist viewpoint. It shows uncertainty about where the meaning can be found, whether it is in the author's mind or it is hidden in the text. So each reader constructs his own model of meaning according to his experience and during this interface between the text and the reader, comes the idea of the schema theory (Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, 2005).

Another major theory is the Mental Model. This model can be thought of as a mind movie created in one's head, based on the reading content. Gunning (1996) gives a detailed description of this process, stating that a mental model is constructed most often when a student is reading fiction. The reader focuses on the main character and creates a mental model of the circumstances in which the character finds him or herself. The mental model is re-constructed or updated to reflect the new circumstances as the situation changes, but the items important to the main character are kept in the foreground. Perkins (1991) says that sometimes misconceptions about important concepts reflect misleading mental models of the topic itself or the subject matter within which it sits. There are, however, interventions the teacher can do to help the reader to stay on track and create a more accurate picture. One suggestion is for the teachers to ask the students to disclose their mental models of the topics in question, through analogy, discussion, picturing, and other ways. This information gives the teacher insight on the student's knowledge gaps and misconceptions, therefore allowing them to help students reconstruct a more accurate picture.

The final explanation of comprehension the researcher would like to discuss is the Propositional Theory. This involves the readers constructing a main idea or macrostructure as they process the text. These main ideas are organized in a hierarchical fashion with the most important things given the highest priority to be memorized (Gunning, 1996).

The three theories are linked together in explaining the process of reading comprehension from a cognitive perspective. When we read, the information is divided into schema that are organized and related together according to the main

ideas so that it is being remembered easily in order to be used as a background for understanding or explaining subjects. Sometimes the information about something we read comes to us in the form of a movie that we can imagine the page we read in front of our eyes. This helps to fill the files with knowledge systematically and professionally to be used in the future (Dilbeck, 2011). The reader should use reading strategies to make it easy to acquire information from the text and also to link this information with his background knowledge stored in his mind. Then comprehension will happen.

2.1.4 Reading Strategies (Metacognitive Strategies)

Most researchers agree that cognition and metacognition differ in that cognitive skills are necessary to perform a task, while metacognition is necessary to understand how the task was performed (Garner, 1987).

Metacognition can be defined as the awareness or analysis of one's own learning or thinking processes, knowledge of one's own thoughts and the factors that influence one's thinking. It is the knowledge of one's own thinking processes and strategies, and the ability to consciously reflect and act on the knowledge of cognition to modify those processes and strategies. It is also defined by Harris and Hodges (1995) as the awareness of one's own learning process that can be regulated and monitored. Metacognition is also thinking about thinking (Kuhn, 2004). And it also includes one's attitudes towards learning (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Flavell (1978) as cited in Carrell, Gajdusek, & Wise (1998), the first to propose the concept of metacognition, viewed it as consisting of two dimensions: knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition. Examples of specific metacognitive strategies may include (a) establishing objectives in reading, (b) evaluating reading materials, (c) repairing miscomprehension, (d) evaluating the progress of readers' understanding of text, (e) analyzing the text and paragraph structure to clarify the author's intention, (f) adjusting reading speed and selecting cognitive strategies accordingly, and (g) engaging in self-questioning to determine if the objectives have been reached (Carrell et al., 1998, pp. 100–101).

Thus reading is a metacognitive process as well as a cognitive process (Pang, 2008). While cognitive strategies refer to deliberate actions that readers take in their efforts to understand texts, metacognitive strategies emphasize the monitoring and regulative mechanisms that readers consciously use to enhance comprehension (Pang, 2008). Readers make use of metacognition while reading. They analyze their cognitive processes and use the necessary strategies that give them the ability to discover meaning in text (Dilbeck, 2011).

Students with good versus poor reading skills demonstrate distinct metacognitive behaviors before, during, and after reading an assignment compared to students with poor reading skills. The following chart from Cook (1989) cited in (Center for Advancement and Learning, 1997, p.1) summarizes these behaviors.