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Review

The Role of Syntactic Awareness and Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategies in Reading Comprehension of EFL Learners (DMU English Majoring Students in Focus)

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This paper explores whether syntactic awareness or metacognitive awareness reading strategies is strong predictors of reading comprehension. It also addresses the relationship among syntactic awareness, metacognitive awareness reading strategies and reading comprehension achievement. To attain this objective, descriptive research using a correlational research design was employed. 30 participants were selected from a population of 50 2nd year English majoring students using simple random sampling. The participants were asked to respond to a MARSQ developed by Taraban, Kerr and Ryneason (2004) and researcher-made tests of syntactic awareness and reading comprehension. Pearson product moment correlation and stepwise multiple regression analysis were used in data analysis. The results of the correlation analysis showed that among the variables namely, EFL learners' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies, high correlation holds for the relationship between syntactic awareness and reading comprehension, but there were no significant correlation with metacognitive awareness reading strategies. The stepwise multiple regression analysis results also revealed that EFL students' syntactic awareness plays a significant role in predicting their reading comprehension achievement compared to metacognitive awareness reading strategies. Finally, some useful implications and recommendations which are of significance to educators, teachers and researchers are proposed based on the research findings. Accordingly, the result contends that instructions on developing reading comprehension should put syntactic awareness competencies in priority and then focus on activation of background knowledge and use of reading strategies for the success of reading comprehension.

Keywords; syntactic awareness, metacognitive awareness, reading comprehension achievement

Background of the Study

English has become the dominant language in many countries including Ethiopia, because it is an international language and many referenced materials are written in it, so for effective communication using the target language, the four language skills: (speaking, writing, listening and reading) including the sub skills like grammar, vocabulary and translation need to be well practiced. Among these skills reading comprehension is one of the most important

skills to be acquired during a language course. Moreover, one requires the integration of these linguistic units and other reader based variables (i.e., interest level, relevant background knowledge of the topic, foreign language abilities, and awareness of the reading process etc.) in the process of reading comprehension. Hence, readers actively participate in the construction of knowledge in a complicated manner. To learn English well, one must be able to read well.

As comprehension is a personal creation of meaning, reading comprehension is considered a problem that students of English as a foreign language (EFL) face. Reading comprehension involves a complicated cognitive process. Because comprehension is an internal process that requires thoughtful and deliberate interaction between readers and text (Nation, 2001). Readers must concurrently process various information to understand the context of reading. In EFL/ESL learning, cognitive theory explains how the human brain processes existing or prior language knowledge and then applies that information to a reading text. Smith (2004) claimed that the knowledge a reader needs in order to understand written language must be stored in the long term memory.

It is believed that reading comprehension is a cognitive structure. In other words, reading comprehension is a process by which the readers utilize their prior knowledge and transfer it to the written text. According to Mitchell and Myles (2004), a cognitive theory has two main approaches. These are the processing approach and the constructionist approach. The processing approach focuses on language learners' ability to process linguistic information and their language. Learners store language information in their long term and short-term memories, and then utilize this information when necessary (Mitchell and Myles 2004). Constructionists believe that learners acquire language "through usage, by extracting pattern and regularities from the input, and build ever-strong association in the brain" (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p. 98). ESL/EFL reading comprehension is not easy because most learners need sufficient time to develop their cognitive ability. Success in reading comprehension is usually seen as fundamental to success in academic performance (Chen, 2009).

Though currently in Ethiopian school system English is taught as a foreign language beginning from kindergarten and is used as a medium of instruction for some subjects from grade seven to all subjects in secondary, preparatory and higher education institutions, EFL teachers complain that quite a lot of students after many years of study have low performance in English. This may be due to the fact that they are not given opportunities to read a lot. Most of the class time is devoted to learning about the language: that is, learning grammar and learning to read through translation. Students are taught in traditional way (i.e., teaching about the language or usage, rather than teaching the language itself for

practical use or communicative purpose). They approach their reading comprehension assignment by putting all their efforts and concentration into the passages they read. They carefully read the passage word by word. When reading and encountering unfamiliar word, they stop reading and looking up the meaning of the word in a dictionary. This reading behavior hinders their reading comprehension. Hailemichael cited in Birhanu (2010) indicates nearly at all class levels, the English language proficiency of Ethiopian students is low. Most EFL secondary school teachers complain that English language competence of high school students in general and their reading comprehension in particular is limited and it is not adequate to the level required for effective comprehension. Moreover, research conducted in different contexts also indicated the causes of this incompetence in the target language, particularly in reading comprehension are attributable to limitations, such as syntactic or grammatical knowledge and metacognitive awareness reading strategies the reader possess in the processes of reading comprehension (Chen, 2009; Guo, 2008).

Syntactic awareness is one of the essential construct in reading comprehension. Regarding this, many researchers in L1 and L2 depicted that syntactic awareness, generally conceptualized as understanding of rules of grammar and sentence structure also plays an important role for reading comprehension (Bowey, 1986; Tunmer et al 1987). The importance of syntactic awareness in reading comprehension of EFL learners has also been established by (Carlisle et al 1999). Some studies indicated that syntactic knowledge might not affect second language learners' reading comprehension (e.g. Ulijn, 1984; Ulijn & Strother, 1990). However, other studies have shown that knowledge of grammar structures plays a critical role in affecting reading comprehension (Perfetti, 1989; Rayner, 1990; Tannenhaus, 1988).

In addition, Grabe (1991) stated that the degree of syntactic knowledge that second language learners' may influences their reading comprehension. In other words, learners who lacks syntactic ability seems not are able to achieve a higher level of reading process and readers' need of L2 syntactic knowledge to integrate their background knowledge and word meaning (Koda, 2005). For example, when a person reads articles or newspapers or other academic texts in an EFL/ESL, in order to verify one's own background knowledge and to predict the content, he/she needs to have knowledge of the grammatical structures of the text and metacognitive reading strategies.

Reading comprehension skills are important for English language learners. Reading comprehension has multiple definitions and explanations. One of the definitions of reading comprehension is stated as follow:

Reading comprehension is a process that involves the orchestration of the readers' prior knowledge about the world and language. It involves such as predicting, questioning, summarizing, determining meaning of vocabulary in context, monitoring one's own comprehension, and reflecting. The process also involves such is governed by a specific context, and it is independent on social interaction. It is the integration of all these processes that accounts for comprehension. They are not isolable, measurable sub factors. They are holistic processes for constructing (Weaver, 1994, p.44).

Most Ethiopian EFL students could not master reading comprehension adequately. This lack of reading comprehension has repercussions for the whole educational system. Reading whether L1, EFLor ESL is considered as a cognitive enterprise that entails three components including, reader, text and activity (Guo, 2008). Thus, readers must utilize metacognitive awareness and invoke the conscious use of reading strategies, in order to comprehend texts successfully. Auerbach and Paxtoa cited in Guo (2008) defining metacognitive awareness as the process "entailing knowledge of strategies for processing texts, as the ability to monitor comprehension and the ability to adjust strategies as need" (p. 204-241).

In most cases, the role of syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension has been well documented in L1. However, few studies have recognized the role of these constructs in ESL learners' reading comprehension. It is necessary to know whether students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies predict reading comprehension or not. Accordingly, the contribution of EFL students' syntactic awareness, and metacognitive awareness reading strategies to predict reading comprehension was chosen particularly for those students learning English as a foreign language.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Reading is one of the four major skills of English as a foreign language and comprehension is generally the ultimate goal of teaching reading and so reading comprehension is the "essence of reading". Accordingly, the development of reading comprehension is also the essence of reading development. Qian, (1999) and Nation, (2006) as cited in Chen (2009) state that many studies have investigated the relationship between ESL and L1 students' vocabulary knowledge and their reading comprehension and the majority of these studies

presented the importance that vocabulary plays in students' reading comprehension. It is further noted that these studies, however, tended to focus more on monolingual students than EFL/ ESL or bilingual learners. In fact, for bilingual or EFL students' syntactic knowledge and metacognitive awareness usually play essential roles for comprehending a reading content (Ibid: 10)

Reading research on the contribution of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness to predict reading comprehension was conducted primarily with native English speaking population to examine which reading skill components contribute to reading comprehension in L1 with children and adults (Davis, 1944, Tunmer, et al., 1987). Moreover, though in practice, these constructs cannot be discussed separately with regard to reading comprehension, most ESL studies have focused on either the role of syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies separately; few have examined the predictive power of vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness combined when readers are reading. For example, while the vocabulary knowledge studies showed that students liked to use vocabulary rather than syntax to determine the context of reading comprehension. For instance, the cross sectional studies conducted on Chinese learners to see the predictive power of vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness in reading comprehension indicated that students used syntactic knowledge more often than vocabulary knowledge (Cain, 2007).

However, in relation to a sociocultural context of EFL learners like in Ethiopia, where English is designated as an EFL in the school curriculum, little is known about how EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies could affect reading comprehension. Teachers of English in such contexts have been frequently confronted with the problems of students' inabilities to handle difficulty in reading comprehension. Comprehension scores of the students are usually low. Therefore, while there may be some similarities between native speakers and foreign language learners in the arena of which skills predict reading comprehension (Carlo et al. 2005), the unique contribution of EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies to predict reading comprehension remains largely undeveloped in the literature.

Guo (2008) in her research in the field of EFL reading comprehension argues that two major factors account for differences in reading comprehension: language specific factors such as EFL vocabulary knowledge, EFL grammar (syntactic awareness). EFL students', grammar knowledge (syntactic awareness) and general reading knowledge (metacognitive awareness) usually play essential predictors for comprehending a reading content (Chen, 2009). Metacognitive awareness is considered a component of general reading knowledge that may be

transferred from L1 to ESL/EFL reading (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995). When comprehension breaks, especially in a foreign language or second language, students need to repair their comprehension. This is where the importance of metacognitive awareness reading strategies comes in, so as to facilitate the reading comprehension process and give students a clear sense of what they are reading (Sasson, 2010). In addition to EFL students' syntactic awareness, EFL students' metacognitive awareness reading strategies could be a major problem we are coping with is that EFL learners when reading certain texts. This is because it is believed that metacognition enhances the reader's own understanding, of comprehension strategies, and of monitoring, evaluating and relating comprehension during reading (Fitzgerald, 1995; Pressley, 2002).

Thus, some researchers claim that good first language or second language readers should also be good EFL readers (Schoonent, 1998). In the same vein, Bernhardt cited in Guo (2008), suggested that more research is needed to examine the interplay among syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness of reading strategies in EFL reading comprehension achievement. Therefore, in order to fill this gap, the researcher wanted to investigate the role of syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension of EFL learners in an Ethiopian context.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the problem and purpose of this study, the following research questions are addressed.

1.   What is the relationship among EFL students' syntactic awareness, metacognitive awareness and their reading comprehension achievement?
2.   Do EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies predict reading comprehension? If so, which predictor variables (i.e. syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies) strongly predict the criterion variable (reading comprehension achievement)?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this study are:

1.   Investigating the correlations among each construct with reading comprehension.
2.   Investigating the role of syntactic awareness, and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension success of EFL learners.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a correlational research design to investigate the role and relationships of syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension of EFL learners. This design was chosen to clarify our understanding of important phenomena through the identification of relationships among variables and to test the strengths of these predictor variables included in the study.

Research Setting and Participants

Debre Markos University, which is found in East Gojjam Zone, Debre Markos town in Amhara Regional State of Ethiopia was the focus of this study. This University was chosen for the study because it is the place where the researcher taught for two years (2009-2011) and access to cooperation from teachers and students would be possible for the researcher. Besides, he thought, Second year students for a semester and observed the actual phenomenon. Moreover, reading is highly emphasized in Ethiopian EFL learners' context, particularly at tertiary levels. Hence, the researcher believed that Second year English majoring students were advanced enough in comprehending the given texts better than first year students and the information that might be gained from these participants may provide adequate information to investigate the proposed research problem.

Sample Population and Sampling Techniques

The total population from which the samples were selected comprised 50 second year students of the University registered in the academic year 2018/2019. The students were grouped in five sections. From the total population of the target group, 30% of them were randomly selected using simple random sampling (lottery system), because the number of participants were not too large and this randomization technique is used to avoid researcher's bias and to have equal chance of the population being selected. In doing so, each participant has 0.3 or 30% probability to be selected rather than being selected at the discretion (personal judgment) of the researcher. Since there is high probability that all the population characteristics will be represented in the sample, it is the most desirable sampling technique for quantitative research (Yalew, 2005). Therefore, from 50 students, 30 of them were selected and responded to the questionnaire and the tests.

Variables Included in the Study

Four major sets of variables were included in the study. These were syntactic awareness, and metacognitive awareness reading strategies and reading comprehension. EFL learners' syntactic awareness and metacogntive awareness reading strategies were predictor variables included in the study whereas, EFL learners' reading comprehension score was a criterion variable in this study.

Data Gathering Instruments

To elicit the necessary data from the participants, two main data gathering instruments were used in the study: questionnaire and tests. Researchers such as Cohen and Manion (1994) and Seliger and Shohamy (1989) have proven these instruments to be more productive in generating information on the language teaching and learning process. In order to collect data on learners' metacognitive awareness reading strategies, a questionnaire was used. Each item of the questionnaire was translated into Amharic version (the mother tongue of the respondents) to avoid communication barrier. The Amharic version of the items was shown to language specialists to check its validity for ensuring the clarity, the wording, the ordering and the proper translation of the questionnaire (see appendix A). In order to evaluate the learners' syntactic awareness, their reading comprehension, tests of syntactic awareness and reading comprehension were used. The researcher prepared the tests, then his advisor and colleagues evaluated them.

Questionnaire

This study involved a metacognitive awareness reading strategies questionnaire as a means of data gathering instrument to measure EFL learners' metacognitive awareness reading strategies.

Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategies Questionnaire (MARSQ)

The researcher adapted a 20-item questionnaire of the metacognitive awareness reading strategies questionnaire (MARSQ) developed by Taraban, Kerr and Ryneason (2004), as cited in Guo (2006), to measure EFL students' awareness of the uses of reading strategies in the reading process. Participants were asked to rate how frequently they use the strategies listed on a five-point Likert scale (Never use "1" Rarely Use, "2" Sometimes Use, "3" Often Use, "4" and Always Use "5"). The MARSQ has two components: part 1 of the MARSQ (Question 1-9) the analytic-cognitive, which relates to cognition aimed at reading comprehension and part 2 (Question (10-20) the pragmatic-behavioral, which relates

to behaviors aimed at studying and academic performance.

In the implementation of the questionnaire, first, a pilot study was conducted with other 10 students who were randomly selected from second year students who did not participate in the main study. After the pilot study Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated to determine the reliability of the instrument and it was found to be reliable (i.e. Alpha=0.78). Before the pilot study, the questionnaire for metacognitive awareness reading strategies had 24 items. On the basis of the pilot study, 4 items that showed negative and low index of items correlation and thus these items were discarded. Finally, 20 items were used in the main study.

Tests

Syntactic Awareness Test (SAT)

Using the principles of Hammil, Brown & Larsen (2007), as guideline in designing syntactic awareness test to measure written language abilities (syntactic abilities) for reading comprehension, the researcher prepared the constructs of syntactic awareness test. This could help to measure EFL learners' written language performance and syntactic awareness. Constructions such as knowledge of words, sentence types, tenses, linguistic background, background knowledge and cultural content are mainly considered in the preparation of the syntactic awareness test. The test items were prepared based on the aims of current English for 2nd year students' course module and in line with the learners' background, cultural content.
Then a pilot study was conducted with 10 students who were selected randomly from 2nd year students who did not participate in the main study. After the pilot study Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated to determine the reliability of the instrument and it was found to be reliable (i.e. alpha= 0.62). Before the pilot study, the syntactic awareness test had 30 items. Some items which showed poor index of item total correlation were rejected. Finally, 24 items were used in the main study.

Reading Comprehension Test (RCT)

Since the primary purpose of the study was to see whether EFL students' reading comprehension skill can be predicted as a result of the predictor variables, comprehension tests was used. The researcher believes a test is relatively the best tool to evaluate reading comprehension achievement. Because it is through test that EFL learners' reading comprehension success (the product level) of reading comprehension could be clearly evaluated. The researcher took two reading comprehension passages directly from the students' course book and directly related to their test of the students' achievements in reading comprehension. To

measure reading comprehension, 30 items of multiple choice questions were constructed by the researcher.

The multiple choice criteria by Wolf (1993, in Brantmeier, 2003) was followed in order to address the limitations of the tool: (1) all items should be passage dependent; (2) some of the items should require the reader to make inferences; (3) correct responses could not be determined by looking at the other questions. The items target both the literal and interpretive levels of reading comprehension. There are four choices, with only one correct answer and three distracters which are also plausible answers. The creation of the comprehension test was deemed critical by the researcher for the choice of the assessment task affects a reader's performance in a reading comprehension test (Brantmeier, 2003). It is worth reminding that learners had been taught these two passages before the test was distributed. Each test consists of one passage and 15 questions. The questions were all objective types in the form of multiple choice questions. Subjective type questions were not used because they required the ability to organize and write. From the researcher's experience, it is perceived that not all students are good at writing. This might adversely affect the validity of the results. Thus, only objective type items were constructed based on the Pearson and Johnson (1978) classification of question type. In view of that, text-explicit questions answer explicitly mentioned in the text; text implicit questions-answer is inferred by integrating information presented in text; script implicit questions answer is inferred by relating text to prior knowledge concerning the topic is developed. The contents of the tests include macro and micro skills of reading. According to Hughes (1991), the distinction between these two levels of sub-skills is not made explicit, but it appears that the term 'macro skills' refers to understanding the general ideas of the text. (E.g. Information, gist, argument) while 'micro skills' refers to recognizing and interpreting the linguistic features of the text, (e.g., referents, word meanings, discourse indicators). Hence, the test consists of questions asking gist, details, word meanings and referents.

Generally, in reading comprehension test, an attempt was made to prepare the items based on the aims of students' current English course module. Originally, the passages had 33 objective items altogether. After the pilot study, items that showed negative index of item correlation were discarded. Cronbach Alpha was also calculated to estimate the reliability of the instrument and it was found to be reliable (alpha=0.60). And finally 30 test items was used in the main study.

Data Collection Procedures

The development of the tests and questionnaire underwent the following processes. First, on the basis of the objectives of the study, the existing ELT literature and instructional objectives stated in the learners' course module for second year students, the researcher constructed the items. Then drafted items were given to two prospective graduate students of TEFL and two English instructors at Debre Markos University to comment on them. Taking their comments and suggestions into accounts, the researcher reshaped the tools. Some items were modified, some were added, and some items that seemed not essential were dropped. Then, to assess the content, logical flow, clarity and reliability of the items, a pilot study was conducted.

The researcher and his two colleagues participated in administering the instruments during the main study. They were well informed about their respective roles before the instruments were administered. Specific time and place for the instrument administration was set. Since it was hot in the afternoon, the administration process was implemented in the morning. Then, they were informed that participation was voluntary and that any information about the students was considered confidential.

The instruments were administered in two sessions. During session one, the reading comprehension test, and syntactic awareness test and in session two, the metacognitive awareness reading strategies questionnaire was administered. The metacognitive awareness reading strategies questionnaire was administered after the reading comprehension test so that readers would not be prompted to use strategies during comprehension test that they might not typically use. The actual maximum time spent on each instrument was strictly controlled and kept identical on all occasions and on the average, syntactic awareness and reading comprehension sessions took 1:30 hours and 1:00 for metacognitive awareness reading strategies questionnaire in order to ensure the reliability of the results. Then all the participants handed over questionnaire and tests papers to the data collectors before they left the room.

Validity of the Instruments

A number of measures were taken to ensure instruments validity, which is defined as, "the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assess the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure" (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982, p.109). The idea of validity to questionnaire and tests design refers to the steps taken by the researcher to ensure clarity, wording and ordering of the questions. After receiving the comments and corrections, the questionnaire and tests were edited for validity. One measure of validity as described by Smith and Glass (1987) is that of face validity. In describing face validity, the researcher attempted to support the interpretation of the measurements and its connection to

the construct by seeking professional judgment that there is, for instance a plausible connection between the surface features of the measures content and the construct as theoretically defined. To ensure face validity, the researcher gave the questionnaire and tests to colleagues, English teachers. They were given the first version of the instruments to comment on the clarity of items and suggest certain changes. Some of changes were regarding to the wording of the statements, their order, clarity and content. Accordingly, all necessary changes were made to the final draft. Content validity was achieved by submitting the questionnaire to experts in the field of Ethiopian languages and literature experts and graduate students as to how the Amharic version of the questionnaire was valid in comparison with the English version. The tests were given to experts in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) and Educational Psychology experts.

Reliability of the Instruments

Reliability refers to the degree to which the instrument measures phenomena in a consistent manner. According to Oppenheim (1966, p.10), reliability refers to "consistency; obtaining the same results again". This consistency can itself be measured in the form of a statistical coefficient of reproducibility, often Cronbach alpha, which is similar to a correlation coefficient. Cronbach Alpha test was run to measure the internal consistency and the reliability of the questionnaire and tests.

Methods of Data Analysis

The data that the researcher gathered from the students through different instruments were organized, tabulated, analyzed and interpreted using quantitatively and computed using SPSS software. Pearson product - moment correlation coefficient was performed to investigate the connections among variables. Likewise, to assess the predictive power of EFL learners' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension, stepwise procedures of multiple regression analysis were used.

Analysis and Results of the Pilot Study

After the scores on the tests and questionnaire were obtained, the researcher carried out certain statistical analyses.

- Computation of means, ranges and standard deviations of the scores on the instruments to obtain information on the distribution of the scores.
- Pearson product- moment correlations among scores on the tests and questionnaire with a view to determining the intercorrelations among scores on the RC, SA and MARS and
- Computation of reliability coefficients of the instruments using Cronbach Alpha coefficient reliability formula, in order to ensure that the reliability coefficients of the instruments were all at acceptable levels.

Table 1 below presents the summarized descriptive statistics of the variables included in the pilot study (i.e., the means, ranges and standard deviations, the possible scores) of the scores on the RC, SA and MARS in the pilot study. The reason for conducting the pilot study was to ensure that the instruments to be used in the main study were acceptable levels of reliability and to find out how the intercorrelations among the scores on the RC, SA and MARS would look. However, it should be cautioned that because of the small size of available learners, the statistical results listed in Table 3 could only provide some preliminary profiles rather than serve as meaningful indicators. Multiple regression procedures were not used in the pilot study because the sample size was too small for the purpose.

Table 1: The pilot study (N=10): Learner Means, Standard Deviations, and Score Range

Instruments	Mps[a]	M	SD	Score Range
RC	30	16.80	3.360	13-21
SA	24	16.50	3.719	11-22
MARS	20	74.80	6.233	20

Mps= Maximum possible score
Note: SA= Syntactic Awareness,
MARS= Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategies
RC= Reading Comprehension

Table 2: Pilot study with EFL learners (N=10) Cronbach Alpha Coefficients Reliability for the Instruments

Instrument	Number of items	Coefficients Reliability
RC	30	0.60
SA	24	0.62
MARS	20	0.78

The reliability coefficients appearing in Table 2 were determined for the researcher's purpose. The r values of the MARS were very high i.e., 0.80 and 0.78 respectively. The r values of the RC and SA which had been expected to yield a higher value were however relatively low at alpha= 0.60 and alpha=062 respectively. These levels, however, were still at acceptable levels.

Table 3: Pilot study with EFL learners (N=10): Interrcorelations among the RC, VK, SA and MARS.

Variables	Mean	SD	SA	RC	MARS
SA	16.50	3.719	1	0.29	0.38
RC	16.80	3.360		1	-0.12
MARS	74.80	6.233			1

The intercorrelation analysis was used to know whether there was or not an association among RC, SA and MARS. The result in Table 3 indicates that there was positive correlation between SA and RC (r =0.29, P> 0.05), and SA with MARS (r =0.38, P>0.05), but the intercorrelation was not significant. While there was inverse correlation between RC and MARS (r =0.12, P> 0.05).

In summary, the results of the reliability coefficient of the pilot study were generally satisfactory. However, the values of the coefficients obtained through Pearson product-moment correlations were not revealed an acceptable level of relationship among scores on the RC, SA and MARS. However, because of the small size of available learners (i.e., to see the interrelation among variables, there is a rule of thumb that the number of learners should be ≥30), the result only provide some preliminary profiles rather than serve as meaningful indicators.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Data Presentation and Analysis

The main focus of this study was to investigate the predictive power of EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension.
Accordingly, data were gathered through questionnaire and tests in order to:

1.   investigate the correlations among EFL students' syntactic awareness, metacognitive awareness reading strategies and their reading comprehension.
2.   investigate whether each predictor variable i.e. (syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies) predicts EFL students' reading comprehension.

The first objective of the study was to see the relationship among EFL students' syntactic awareness, and metacognitive awareness reading strategies and reading comprehension. To do this, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Means, Standard Deviation and Interrelations of Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	RC	SA	MARS
RC	12.48	3.198375	1	.46(**)	0.14
SA	11.27	5.469653		1	0.090
MARS	66.99	13.38245			1

(N=100), **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2. tailed).

The mean score of 100 participants for RC, SA and MARS was revealed in Table 4 above. Hence, MARS was 66.99 and obviously the highest among the other variables and its standard deviation was 13.38. Reading comprehension and syntactic awareness (r = 0.46, P<0.05).

It can also be seen that reading comprehension score was correlated with syntactic awareness score at .46. This could be interpreted that the learners' reading comprehension score might increase if they scored higher on syntactic awareness and also the correlation between EFL students' reading comprehension and metacognitive awareness reading strategies was positive but not significant (r = 0.14, P> 0.05). Moreover, there was no significant correlation between EFL students' metacognitive awareness reading strategies with their syntactic awareness ability.

Some variables treated in the study were positively and significantly related to each other and some variables did not have significant correlation. In other words, some variables show that a change in one variable may contribute to a change in the other variables in the same direction whereas some variables do not. Evidences suggest that when two variables (or sets of data) fluctuate in the same direction, i.e., as one increases so does the other, or as one decreases so does the other, a positive relationship is said to exist. But variables metacognitive awareness reading strategies with syntactic awareness might not bring a change in one another as they might not have correlation among them.

The other major intention of this study was to investigate whether or not EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies predict reading comprehension. To do this, the stepwise procedures of multiple regression analysis were performed. The reason that the stepwise procedures were used in this study was to select roles of reading comprehension among syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies. The results of the stepwise procedures of multiple regression analysis are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of EFL Students' SA and MARS in EFL Reading Comprehension

Variables	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-Value	Un standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-test	P-value
				Beta(β)	Std Error	Beta(β)		
(Constant)				0.087	0.066	0.150	1.321	0.19
SA	0.218	0.204	15.72	0.025	0.020	0.105	1.256	0.21
MARS								

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Stepwise multiple regression analysis was run to identify variables that predict EFL learners' reading comprehension performance. The stepwise procedures of multiple regression analysis results in Table5 above indicated that predictor variables (i.e. syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies) jointly predicted 21.8. % of variance in EFL students' reading comprehension (R^2=0.218, F=15.72, P< 0.05). That means 21.8% of variations in reading comprehension can be accounted for the variation of the combined predictor variables. The remaining 78.2% the variances in reading comprehension can be attributed to other variables which were not treated in the study. Like interest level, purpose for reading, relevant background knowledge of the topic, EFL abilities, awareness of the reading process and level of willingness to take risks etc. likely happen to be other major variances in reading comprehension achievement. Hence, as the t-test values showed that from each significance Beta (β) level, EFL students' syntactic awareness has a contribution to reading comprehension achievements.

EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies was found to be not statistically significant to EFL students reading comprehension. Moreover, using stepwise procedure of multiple regression analysis, the study examined which predictor variable(s) had significant predictive power to the criterion variable (reading comprehension). The stepwise procedure was thus used to remove from the equation any predictor variable that did not qualify as predictors of the criterion variable.

Hence, results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis in Table 5, revealed that EFL students' syntactic awareness (Beta= 0.150, t-value=1.321, P>0.05) and metacognitive awareness reading strategies (Beta=0.105, t-value=1.256, P> 0.05) failed to significantly predict their reading comprehension success. As it revealed from Table 5, the p-values of these two variables namely, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies might not be predictors of reading comprehension success which was found to be (P>0.05) for both syntactic awareness and metacognitive

awareness reading strategies.

Therefore, on the basis of the results revealed under standardized coefficient Beta, (β) it is not found statistically significant i.e, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies though the number of items in each variables was not equal (i.e., RC = 30 ; SA=24; MARS=20) . Therefore, each measure has different number of items. However, after they had been changed into Beta (β), they could be compared the independent contribution of each predictor variable (i.e. SA and MARS) to the criterion variable (RC). Hence, EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies were not significant predictors of their success in reading comprehension.

In addition to this, as the stepwise procedure of multiple regression analysis results in Table 5, showed that the adjusted R^2 could not show significant difference from the R^2 (i.e. R^2= 0.218 and Adj. R^2= 0.306). This means that the sample of the target population and the number of predictor variables were at an appropriate level in that the adjusted R^2 could not show significance difference from the total of R^2 and the number of predictor variables is two and above and the number of participants becoming above 30. But if the adj. R^2 showed a real difference from R^2, it might be believed that not only due to the characteristics of the data but also the different traits of the participants portrayed in the study.

To sum up, EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies failed to qualify as predictors of their success in reading comprehension.

DISCUSSIONS

The Results and Discussions of Interrelations among Variables

An investigation of the relationship among the variables with Pearson product- moment correlation analysis (see Table 1 page 59) revealed that there was a positive reading comprehension and syntactic awareness (r = 0.46, P< 0.05) And also the correlation between reading comprehension and metacognitive awareness reading strategies was positive, but not significant (r =0.14, p> 0.05). This results also lends support to Mousefeld's (1978) notion that compared with native speakers, EFL/ESL learners have greater awareness of cognitive process (i.e., metacognitive awareness process of reading strategies). This issue is consistent with the view Vygotsky (1962) that learning a foreign language or a second language is "conscious and deliberate from the start". The fundamental difference is that EFL/ESL learners utilize additional reading strategies, such as translation, and cognate awareness, which is the ability to use cognates for understanding

foreign or second language during the reading comprehension.

As Nation (2000) noted, lack of adequate metacognitive awareness reading strategies are no more obstacles than the lack of sufficient syntactic awareness. Therefore, it can be said that students' syntactic awareness affect their reading comprehension greatly and how they are grammatically organized to make sensible sentences and paragraphs.

Moreover, Gottardo et al (1997) also pointed out the relationship between syntactic awareness and reading comprehension of EFL/ESL readers and this was determined on the basis of the judgment tasks that are given to the EFL readers. And according to the judgment tasks of syntactic awareness test given them there was a positive and significant correlation among reading comprehension and syntactic awareness (r = 0.46, P<0.05) Debre Markos University second year English majoring learners in this study.

The Results and Discussions of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis

The stepwise procedures of multiple regression analysis revealed that all the predictor variables i.e., syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies jointly predicted 21.8% of EFL students' reading comprehension score. This shows that these predictor variables affect EFL students reading comprehension, but what about the 78.2%? One factor that can possibly account for the majority of the variance is prior knowledge (Spires and Donley, 1998). Constructivists describe the reader as active, extracting information and making a representation of the text's message to comprehend (Mckeown, Sintakar and Loxterman 1990). Readers' knowledge base is regarded as a powerful, pervasive, individualistic and modifiable tool. That is advantageous when undertaking a reading task. In order to comprehend, a reader with low prior knowledge will primarily depend on the information that is explicitly written on the text (McNamara, 2001). After all, Carell (1989) found more proficient EFL/ESL readers to be global (i.e. used background knowledge, text gist, and textual organization) or top-down model. The findings in this study report the predictive power of EFL learners' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in the reading comprehension of Debre Markos second year students in a selected school. The study has probed which factor, whether syntactic awareness or metacognitive awareness reading strategies, is a better predictor of EFL learners' reading comprehension performance.

When the direct contribution of each predictor variable was computed using Beta (β), it made a positive contribution to explaining the variance of reading comprehension but not significant. This may mean that

though students are good at syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies, they may not be successful in their reading comprehension due to different factors.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study was carried out with the aim of investigating the predictive power of EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension. To accomplish this objective, the following research questions were posed:

1.   What is the relationship among EFL students' syntactic awareness, and metacognitive awareness and their reading comprehension achievement?
2.   Do EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies predict their reading comprehension? If so, which predictor variables (i.e., syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies) strongly predict the criterion variable (reading comprehension achievement)?

To answer these research questions, the syntactic awareness test of 24 items and the reading comprehension test containing 30 items and the metacognitive awareness reading strategies questionnaire of 20 items were prepared and administered to 30 2nd year English majouring students of Debre Markos University. The students were randomly selected from the aforementioned school. Before the data collection, the questionnaire and tests were piloted and some necessary improvements were made to the instruments before using them in the main study. The questionnaire was designed in 5 point Likert type, and it entails 20 items which were adapted from Guo (2008). These items explore students' metacognitive awareness reading strategies use. The tests of syntactic awareness and reading comprehension were all researcher made tests.

The raw data obtained from these instruments were organized and summarized systematically for further analysis. In doing so, Pearson product moment correlation and stepwise procedures of multiple regression analysis were performed to analyze the respondents' responses in both questionnaire and tests. After the data were collected, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and stepwise multiple regression analysis were performed.

Based on the data analysis obtained through questionnaire and tests, the following major findings were obtained:

With respect to the interrelations among variables, there was a positive contribution between reading comprehension and syntactic awareness ($r = 0.46$, $P<0.05$). This means EFL students' syntactic awareness were found to be significantly and positively correlated with their reading comprehension performance. It can be also seen that reading comprehension test score was correlated with syntactic awareness test score at .46. It could be analyzed that the learners' reading comprehension test score might increase if they scored higher on syntactic awareness tests.

With regard to the role of EFL learners' syntactic awareness and metacogntive awareness reading strategies, the results of stepwise multiple regression analysis revealed that EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies were found to be not significance independent predictors of their reading comprehension.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions could be drawn:

With regard to the interrelations among variables, EFL learners' syntactic awareness and reading comprehension showed a significant positive relationship. Therefore, the variables, like syntactic awareness should be developed and in calculated as much as possible in EFL classroom for the success of students' reading comprehension. Likewise, the findings reveal that as one variable increases, the other variable directly shows significant increase.

Furthermore, there was no significant correlation between EFL students' reading comprehension achievement and metacognitive awareness reading strategies and with syntactic awareness. This likely happens as stated by different scholars, EFL/ESL learners have greater awareness of cognitive process compared with native speakers and they are also conscious and deliberate from the start. In other words, what the correlational results showed that though different metacognitive awareness reading strategies were implicitly and explicitly stated on the learners' module, in the process of reading comprehension and could not differentiate which metacognitive awareness reading strategies are necessary according to their reading purpose. This may happen because teachers give less attention to help their learners in using different metacognitive awareness reading strategies during

reading comprehension. This might lead to say the lack of using metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension, as some scholars say, might be attributed to other factors such as parents' educational background, lack of the use of extensive reading programme, or the adequate provision of materials in the school. Concerning the relevance of the reading comprehension text in fostering EFL in using metacognitive awareness reading strategies highly depends on the teachers' perspective. In a countries like Ethiopia, which English is used as an EFL, everything is relies on the classroom teacher to show how, what, where their learners' employee the metacognitive awareness reading strategies in the reading processes because learners could not know what strategies they use while they are reading the text for different purposes. If students are aware of the array of strategies that they can use, they can learn to select the appropriate strategies that can help them in obtaining meaning from the text they are reading. One way to create awareness in using metacognitive awareness reading strategy is group work. It comprising of mixed ability students can also be organized so that poor readers may learn to use some of their existing strategies more efficiently and learn to employ new strategies from the good readers. Likewise, second year EFL learners are highly expected to use top-down (higher level thinking) reading strategies than bottom-up reading comprehension processes though they are equally needed. To bring this concept driven knowledge to their reading comprehension process, EFL learners face difficulties and to alleviate these problems EFL teachers should be committed to take risk for their learners' problems. Moreover, the amount of reading comprehension texts and activities inviting learners to use their own metacognitive awareness reading strategies in the textbook are designed to practice for limited reading comprehension strategies.

Furthermore, raising awareness on the role of metacognitive awareness reading strategies are also important. To help students become strategic readers, teachers should raise students' strategic awareness, allowing them to become more aware of reading strategy use while reading comprehension. It is essential for teachers to help EFL learners build a repertoire of reading strategies and then provide various reading materials for students to try out different reading strategies through explicit explanation and modeling. Therefore, reading strategy training is important because it enhances students' motivation to read, knowledge of strategies and aim at developing comprehension monitoring skills in EFL. Peer teaching and reading strategy training could also be carried out so that learners can become competent readers in EFL.

Though the findings revealed that EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies could not show significant predictions, the integration of syntactic awareness as well as metacognitive awareness reading strategies may be crucial for the success of EFL reading comprehension.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations may be forwarded:

1.   Since the study indicated significant relations among EFL learners' syntactic awareness with reading comprehension, teachers should consider the contribution of their students' syntactic awareness to be successful in reading comprehension performance and this helps them develop more appropriate classroom English tests that can actually assess students' reading comprehension.
2.   Given the role of EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in their reading comprehension, syntactic awareness received much more emphasis in EFL classrooms. So, teachers should use materials including the linguistic elements in their teaching.
3.   As stated in the review part, EFL teachers should consider the top-down, bottom-up and interactive models of reading as three important components of EFL syllabus to improve students' reading comprehension. These metacognitive reading strategies should get emphasis.

Finally, further research is needed to be investigated by other researchers. In the light of this study, it would be interesting to add other factors that may possibly contribute to reading comprehension. In addition to this, this paper focuses on the roles of these predicator variables (i.e., EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension achievement (i.e., on the product). In light of this study, it would be relevant to conduct further research on the roles of these predictor variables on their reading comprehension level and process.

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