

The Application of Metacognitive Strategy in English Reading Comprehension in Junior Middle School

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Abstract

The recent years have witnessed a shift from focusing on the teacher to the learner; from concentrating on the improvement of the teachers' teaching to the cultivating of learners' self-learning ability. Ellis (1994) thinks that Metacognitive strategies use knowledge about cognitive process and try to regulate language learning by means of planning, monitoring and evaluating. Metacognitive strategies are closely related to reading process so it is of great importance for language learners to grasp some metacognitive strategies. Since it has been proved that successful language learners are apt to use various metacognitive strategies to improve their reading proficiency and self-learning so teachers should encourage students to use metacognitive strategies as many as possible.

Key words: Metacognitive strategies; reading comprehension

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

As is known to all that reading is one of the four basic language skills in English learning, so the importance of reading cannot be neglected. Reading comprehension is extremely important for junior and senior school students, because both in Middle School Entrance Examination and in College Entrance Examination, reading comprehensions' score accounts for the largest proportion of the test. However, in current junior middle school reading class, students are reluctant to learn reading comprehension, for teachers always teach reading comprehension through translating the reading materials sentence by sentence. Besides, both teachers and students pay much attention to the master of sentence structure and vocabulary, giving priority to the learning

of grammar even in a reading class. Consequently, the achievement is far from satisfied, and it is a headache problem for teachers to improve students' reading comprehension. In recent years, much attention has been focused on the training of learners' autonomous learning, researchers and teachers try to improve students' reading comprehension through metacognitive strategies training. Therefore, it is necessary to combine the metacognitive strategies with reading process to improve learner's reading comprehension.

1.2 The Significance of the Study

There is an increasing emphasis on students' English reading comprehension with the demand of comprehensively developed talents. According to the new National English Curriculum, which not only requires students to become independent and effective learners but also needs students to master some learning strategy in order to analyze and synthesize the reading material better. Metacognitive strategy are one of the learning strategies and it has an executive function. It emphasizes autonomous learning, which matches the concept perfectly. A good mastery of metacognitive strategy is highly advocated, because efficient readers not only depend on word coding but also depend on monitoring their reading activities. The significance of this paper covers two aspects: theoretical and practical. The theoretical significance is to supply the shortage of the predecessors. In most cases, researchers select college students as the experimental targets on metacognitive strategies training of reading comprehension, so the researches of reading comprehension in junior middle school students have long been neglected. The practical significance is to find out some suitable reading strategies for junior middle school students and train them to learn how to use these strategies to improve their reading competence.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 The introduction of language learning strategies

Learning strategies are the methods or techniques that language learners use for effective learning. Generally speaking, learning strategies are problem-oriented. That is to say when learner meet some problem they tend to use learning strategy to solve them. For example, different learners may use different learning strategies to remember new words or sentence structures. Learning strategies are techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning, recalling of both linguistic and content area information (Chamot,1987). Learning strategies are specific action or techniques taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed and more transferable to new situation (Oxford,1990).

From the above definition, it is not difficult to draw a conclusion that learning strategies include mental and physical activities and they are approaches, methods that language learners use when they meet learning problem. According to the information processing theory, O'Malley and Chamot (1990:44) developed a classification of three kinds of learning strategies: metacognitive strategy, cognitive strategy and social/affective strategy. Metacognitive strategy is the most executive strategy of the three strategies. It is for planning, monitoring and evaluating a learning activity to promote a better learning. It plays an important role in second language learning.

2.2 Metacognitive Strategies

2.2.1 Definition of Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognition was proposed by Flavell in the 1979, and he regarded metacognition as knowledge about cognition and controlling of cognition. O'Malley & Chamot (1990) regard metacognitive strategies as thinking about and planning for the learning process, monitoring of comprehension production as it is taking place, and evaluating or examining of learning process after the language activity is finished. Oxford (1990) claims that metacognitive strategies are strategies that provide ways for learners to organize their own learning process. The listed above definitions of metacognitive strategies indicate that metacognitive strategies are the strategies that learners consciously use to supervise their learning, which allow learners to control their cognition by planning what they will do and checking how it is going and evaluating the results. After meticulous comparison, the author thinks that the definition of O'Malley & Chamot (2001) is more clear and acceptable and it is widely accepted by most of the researchers of this field so in the following study the author will adopt their definition.

2.2.2 Classification of Metacognitive Strategies

Based on O'Malley & Chamot's classification the author divided metacognitive strategies into the following five categories.

Planning lets the learner set their reading goals and adjust their reading speed according to the time and reading materials; self-management asks the learner to draw on key words and main ideas for summary; selective attention encourages the learner to underline and mark the main points of the text; monitoring allows students to reread the passage when they have trouble in understanding the text and change their reading styles when it is used inappropriately and evaluation encourages the learners to evaluate their performance by themselves and evaluate whether the reading strategies used are helpful.

Chapter 3 The Application of Metacognitive Strategy in English Reading Comprehension

Since it has been proved that there is a close connection between metacognitive strategy and reading comprehension and successful learner incline to use various metacognitive strategies to guide their study so if students could consciously apply some metacognitive strategies in reading, for example monitoring their reading activity while reading, they will comprehend the reading material better. Suppose that teachers could train the learner to use metacognitive strategy, for instance encourage the targets to use metacognitive strategies in the reading comprehension then their reading comprehension ability will be improved sooner or later. To achieve this goal, teachers and students should do the following things.

First, teachers should encourage their students to make reading plan according to their reading proficiency. They shall think about the selection of reading material, the distribution of reading time and the controlling of time carefully. Besides, the selection of the reading material should be moderately difficult. At the very beginning, teachers should choose some simple ones for the subjects then increase the degree of difficulty gradually. For example, teachers provide students with various reading materials from political articles to economic topics.

Second, ask students to monitor their reading process. In the reading process the use of monitoring strategies will increase metacognitive experience and enrich metacognitive knowledge, so encourage students to use monitoring strategy so as to increase their metacognitive experience. First, students should make clear the purpose of reading and way of reading. Second, students shall guess the meaning of the new words from the context and correct their performance by themselves while they are reading. Finally, they shall good at self-questioning to check whether they are right or wrong. They shall analyze their answers from different angle. Furthermore, they shall capable of using effective strategies to deal with complex issues.

Third, students' self-evaluation is an essential part of metacognitive strategy. After reading, students should evaluate the characteristic of the reading material and make a evaluation on their reading comprehensive ability (Wang Qiang, 2006). Check if they can finish reading in a limited time and use reading strategy effectively. Evaluation can be carried out under the guidance of teachers. To make it objective, students shall combine self-evaluation and other's evaluation together. Teachers could cultivate students' reading habit and let them grasp the key information. To improve the speed and accuracy of reading, sense-group reading is highly advocated; Let students evaluate their performance hence they would know which part needs to be improved.

Finally, based on the evaluation results students can adjust their own reading process to improve their reading. For instance, students can increase the difficulty of reading material gradually and read extensively. They can also adjust their reading method in time. All in all, students can improve their reading ability by all kinds of metacognitive strategy.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

With the help of metacognitive strategy, learners' reading comprehension can be improved greatly. So, it is necessary for teachers to conduct students to use metacognitive strategy. Teachers should combine metacognitive strategy training with reading instruction to improve students' reading competence.

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