

EXPLORING METACOGNITIVE READING STRATEGIES USED BY LOW AND HIGH PROFICIENCY FORM THREE ESL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: The purpose of this research is to explore the metacognitive reading strategies used by low and high proficiency Form Three ESL (English as Second Language) students and highlight suitable strategies that can be exposed to the low proficiency students.

Methodology: To serve the purpose of this research, an explanatory sequential mixed method design was used. As for the sampling, purposive sampling was employed in this study. The respondents were drawn from two Form Three classes in the selected secondary school in Pasir Gudang, Johor, Malaysia. There were twenty-four boys and thirty-six girls. They were all fifteen years old and represented three main ethnic groups which are Malays, Indians and Chinese. The number of respondents was equally the same for both groups; 30 from the low proficiency group and 30 from the high proficiency group.

Findings: The data gathered in this study revealed that the most popular metacognitive reading strategy among the respondents is self-evaluation. In addition, the most significant difference between the high and low proficiency students is that the latter employed fewer metacognitive reading strategies than the former. Furthermore, through the findings, this research also suggested the metacognitive reading strategies suitable for the low proficiency students; advanced organization, selective attention, self-management, directed attention and monitoring.

Contributions: This research aids the teachers in adapting their instructions and putting extra effort into training students, especially low proficiency students, to use suitable metacognitive reading strategies.

Keywords: Low proficiency students, high proficiency students, purposive sampling, metacognitive reading strategies, explanatory sequential mixed method design.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Form 3 Standards-Based English Language Curriculum (SBELC) incorporates a mapping of the English Language Content and Learning Standards aligned to the CEFR. The SBELC emphasises the modular approach. This approach ensures that all the four language skills; Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, and the aspects of Grammar and Literature in Action, are given due focus and attention during the teaching and learning process (Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum, 2018). In this current study, the reading skill is highlighted to be studied further. Thus, the Content Standards and Learning Standards for reading are brought to light.

There are two Content Standards and five main strands for Learning Standards. The two Content Standards focus on students' ability to understand the meaning and extend thinking through independent reading. On the other hand, the five main strands for Learning Standards are understanding main ideas, understanding details, using reading strategies, using reference resources, and reading to develop thinking. These Content and Learning Standards show that students need to practice and develop different reading skills in varied sequences in their English language lessons.

Essentially, reading is considered a skill that is closely related to students' daily life. Students in fact do reading comprehension every day, for example, when they read newspapers to know the latest updates, travel brochures to look for holiday destinations and manuals of appliances to learn how to operate them (Koleva, 2008). Students go through these reading materials at their own pace to gain essential information.

However, reading in the classroom differs from real-life reading. According to Koleva (2008), the features contributing to the differences include time limit, choice of text, and reading task. Firstly, the duration of formal learning is limited. Students need to read and comprehend text in class within the time given. The second feature is the choice of text. The text type may not be the one that students would typically choose to read outside the classroom. If the text is not of their choice, it will be more difficult for them to understand. Concerning

this, Kiew and Shah (2020) stated that the language of the text is also a factor that contributes to students' difficulty in comprehending the texts. Due to the complex nature of the language, which comprises vocabulary, grammar, and lexical form, reading comprehension is difficult to acquire, even though they have been taught reading skills since their early education stage. The third feature is the reading task. During the reading session in the classroom, the students are assigned to read the text and answer the reading comprehension questions.

As a whole, it is noticed that all these features lead to students' difficulties in deriving meanings from the text. To be more specific, it is believed that low proficiency students face more challenges in comprehending the reading texts compared to high proficiency students. Raj (2008) revealed in her study that low proficiency students are intimidated by the length of the text or passage and the need to look for the answers for reading comprehension questions. They are generally poor readers with limited language literacy. Their 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' processing skills are not utilised at the optimum level. Holding on to this finding, the researchers believe that these students are slow at decoding the text and using their prior knowledge to make meaning of the passage. In other words, they are not aware of the metacognitive reading strategies to comprehend texts.

On the other hand, previous researchers suggested that high proficiency students can monitor their comprehension better than low proficiency students. Prichard (2014) highlights that high proficiency students use a greater variety of reading strategies than low proficiency students. In addition, Mokhtari and Sheorey's (2002) research of 152 ESL students showed that more proficient students often use a variety of reading strategies. Examples of reading strategies used are 'guessing unknown words from context', 'previewing text before reading' and 'using prior knowledge'. All these show that low proficiency students are unaware of effective reading strategies, especially metacognitive reading strategies, to comprehend reading texts compared to high proficiency students.

In this current study, the researchers noticed that the low proficiency Form Three students in one of the secondary schools in Pasir Gudang, Johor, face difficulties employing the appropriate metacognitive reading strategies. Considering this issue, the researchers intended to investigate the significant differences between the metacognitive reading strategies used by low and high proficiency students and suggest appropriate metacognitive reading strategies that low proficiency students should use to enhance their reading comprehension skills. The research objectives are as below:

- a) To categorize the metacognitive reading strategies used by low and high proficiency Form Three ESL students
- b) To identify the differences that are significant in the use of metacognitive reading strategies among the low and high proficiency Form Three ESL students
- c) To determine the appropriate metacognitive reading strategies that low proficiency Form Three ESL students should employ to enhance their reading comprehension skills.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is a constructive process in which the reader constructs both the text and its meaning. Hoover and Gough (1990) state that reading is ‘a complex organization of patterns of higher mental processes that can and should embrace all types of thinking, evaluating, judging, imagining, reasoning, and problem solving’. Additionally, Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, and Hurwitz (1999) outlined that reading is not a straightforward process of lifting the words of the page. It requires the students to employ appropriate reading strategies to understand the content of the text. They also indicated that some of the characteristics of proficient readers include being mentally engaged, motivated to read, socially active around reading tasks and strategic in monitoring the interactive processes that assist comprehension. All these characteristics reflect that proficient readers are aware of the reading strategies that aid them in comprehending the reading text's content. The following sections will discuss ESL students' proficiency levels, reading comprehension in the Malaysian context and provide an overview of metacognitive reading strategies.

2.1 ESL Students

ESL (English as Second Language) student is defined as a student whose primary language is other than English and would require additional English language support to develop reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. They come from many linguistic and cultural backgrounds. They have had a wide variety of life experiences and attributes that can significantly enrich the life of the school and help enhance their learning. For this research, Form Three ESL students were selected.

2.1.1 Low proficiency students

Based on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines (2012), low proficiency students are defined as students who can recognize only a

limited number of letters, symbols or characters and are occasionally able to identify high-frequency words and phrases when strongly supported by context. These students can get a limited amount of information from highly predictable texts in which the topic or context is very familiar. Students who were classified as low proficiency in this research are those who only achieved marks ranging from 40 to 49 in their final year examination. The researchers found that these students scored low marks in the reading comprehension section based on the analysis item.

2.1.2 High proficiency students

High proficiency students are defined as readers who can understand the main ideas and supporting details in the reading texts of any length (ACTFL Proficiency Guideline, 2012). In addition, they are also able to understand parts of texts that deal with unfamiliar topics or situations. In this research, students who were classified as high proficiency are those who achieved 70 marks and above in their final year examination. Based on the analysis item, it is noticed that these students scored high marks in the reading comprehension section.

2.2 Reading Comprehension in Malaysian Context

The objectives of teaching reading skills to Malaysian ESL students are outlined by Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum (2018) in the Standards-Based English Language Curriculum. One of the main objectives is to enable students to comprehend the essential and precise points in texts with various topics. Moreover, teaching reading skills also allow the students to use contextual clues to guess the meaning of unknown words in texts with multiple topics and employ dictionary skills to check the meanings of words in the reading texts. Furthermore, it also enables students to identify the writers' message conveyed in the texts and allows them to use text structures to comprehend texts with various genres. Lastly, teaching reading skills enables students to share their points of view on multiple types of text.

All these objectives show that reading skill is inducted into the Malaysian English Language Teaching syllabus for an essential purpose. It will not only assist students in organizing thoughts and jotting down important facts while reading but also equip them to comprehend entire texts. However, if students do not employ the appropriate reading strategies, they will not be able to understand the text. As an example, Zare and Othman (2013) conducted a study to determine the rate of recurrence of reading strategy use among Malaysian ESL students and the possible relationship between reading strategy use and reading comprehension. Their findings indicated that reading strategies had a strong positive

correlation with reading comprehension achievement. This shows that reading strategies can assist ESL students in improving their reading comprehension. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to train language learners to employ appropriate reading strategies when dealing with reading tasks to boost their achievement.

Furthermore, Aziz et al. (2011) also discussed the reading strategies awareness of Malaysian ESL learners. They claimed that students' preference for a particular strategy is based on their ability to read, understand the materials, and know its purpose. Their findings implied that a lower level of awareness and strategy use was related to the low-ability readers. On the contrary, the high-ability readers employed a variety of reading strategies. With these findings, it can be inferred that the awareness of reading strategies should be instilled in low proficiency students. They should be exposed to different types of reading strategies and allowed to practice these strategies.

In relation to all these previous findings, the researchers also noticed that the low proficiency Form Three students in one of the secondary schools in Pasir Gudang, Johor, face difficulties in employing the appropriate reading strategies, particularly metacognitive reading strategies. This is reflected in their scores in the final year examination. The analysis item revealed that the students scored low marks in the reading comprehension section. On the other hand, the high proficiency students scored high marks in the reading comprehension section. In short, the low proficiency students are not aware of the appropriate reading strategies and get low marks in the reading comprehension section compared to high proficiency students.

2.3 Metacognitive Reading Strategies

Among the learning strategies cited in the literature, the cognitive and metacognitive strategies are most relevant to reading (Karami, 2008). Previous researchers, Wang, Spencer, Minjie, and Xing (2009), stated that metacognitive reading strategies have various benefits on students' reading comprehension and fostering their learning activities. Moreover, metacognitive reading strategies help students focus their attention to understand the content, connect prior knowledge with new information, and code them in their minds (Paris & Jacobs, 1984). By considering all these findings, this research focuses on the usage of metacognitive reading strategies among low and high proficiency students.

Metacognitive reading strategies include the sub-strategies of planning, monitoring and evaluating (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). Planning strategies aids students in planning and arranging their learning process, monitoring strategies require the students to check their level of comprehension and evaluating strategies offer students the judgement of learning tasks. All

these sub-strategies are applied during the three stages of the reading process; pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. In the pre-reading stage, planning strategy is used. This is to tap students' background knowledge and prepare them to comprehend the text. Besides that, the planning strategy also allows students to preview the text's general information and structure (Almasi, 2003). Next, in the while-reading stage, monitoring strategy is used. It allows students to comprehend the vocabulary, make reflections based on the reading texts, summarise and infer the essential idea according to the paragraphs (Israel, 2007). Finally, in the post-reading stage, evaluating strategy is used. For example, after reading a text, learners may think about how to apply what they have read to other situations.

The following figure presents a theoretical framework that includes all these sub-strategies and gives an overview of the theory underpinning this research:

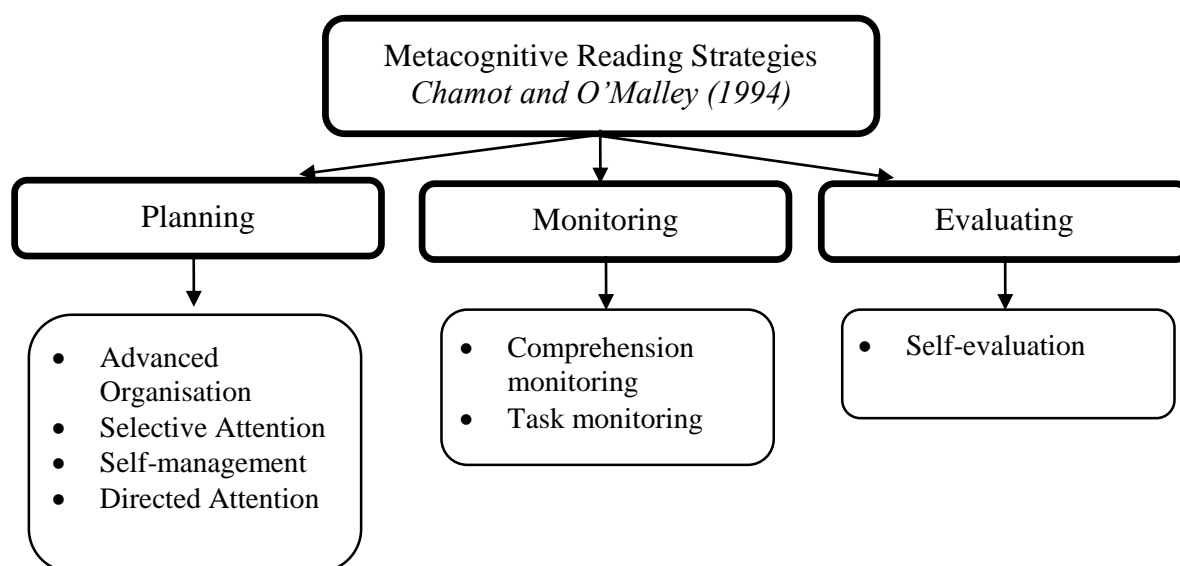


Figure 2.1: Theoretical framework

2.4 Importance of Teaching Metacognitive Reading Strategies

The researchers believe that teachers should expose metacognitive reading strategies not only to high proficiency students but also to low proficiency students. This is because low proficiency students seemed to have low metacognitive awareness, which indirectly leads them to difficulties comprehending texts (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002). Therefore, if both low and high proficiency students are exposed to metacognitive reading strategies, they will be able to choose and adopt appropriate strategies. According to Tandean (2020), it might be quite difficult for the teachers to expose metacognitive reading strategies to the students as it needs extra effort. However, she further highlighted that it would be an advantage for the teachers in

the long run. This is because, with the aid of metacognitive reading strategies, self-regulated students can be created. This ensures them to self-monitor their level of comprehension.

However, it is not enough for the teachers to just give students examples of suitable metacognitive reading strategies. Teachers should guide the students to regulate or monitor the employment of such strategies to ensure success in reading comprehension (Ciesielka, Bostrom, & Ohlander, 2018). Therefore, explicit teaching of metacognitive reading strategies and teacher modelling is required to let the students employ these strategies appropriately. Oxford (2011) points out that teachers should provide explicit explanations, modelling strategy use, and provide necessary opportunities for practice. In addition, Cakici (2017) also suggested that reading comprehension can be enhanced through systematic instruction.

In relation to all these, the researchers believe that teachers should adapt their instruction by making changes designed to meet the needs of students from different levels of proficiency. Explicit and systematic guidance on utilizing the metacognitive reading strategies should be provided to students. In addition, teachers should provide opportunities for the students, especially the low proficiency students, to employ the suggested reading strategies. To be competent readers, students need to utilize the metacognitive reading strategies that are appropriate to the reading tasks and use these reading strategies flexibly and interactively.

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

The researchers selected the mixed method design, more specifically the explanatory sequential design, to conduct this research. This design is a procedure to obtain quantitative results from respondents in the first phase and then elaborate these findings through an in-depth qualitative exploration in the second phase. The rationale for choosing this design is that the researchers are interested to first identify a general picture of the research problem through quantitative data and follow up through qualitative data to have a better understanding of the research problem. In short, this research aims to capture the best of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The diagram below gives an overall view of the design of this research:

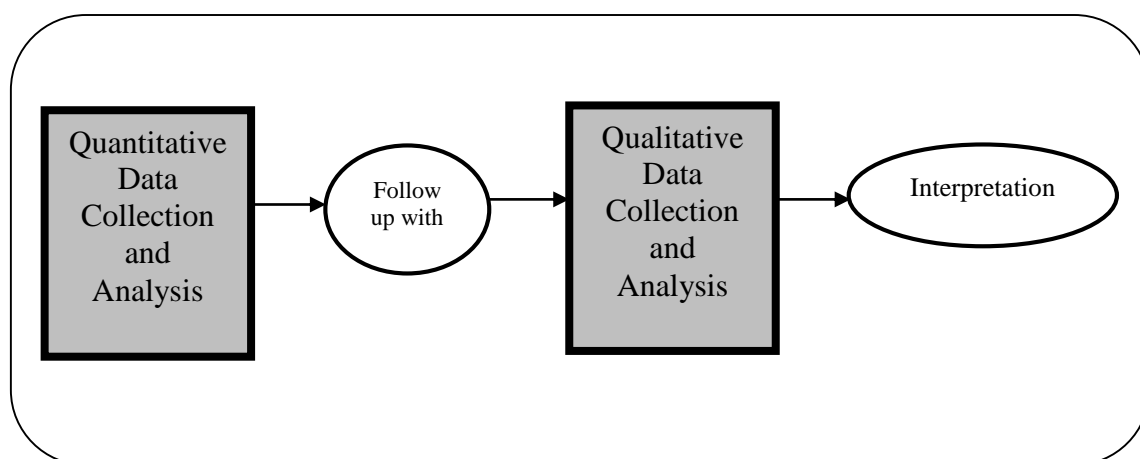


Figure 3.1: Research design

As for the sampling, the researchers employed the most common sampling approach, which is purposive sampling. This is because the researchers intentionally wanted to select respondents from two proficiency groups; low and high proficiency. Level of proficiency is considered as the criterion that is important to this research. By taking this criterion into considerations, the respondents were drawn from Form Three classes in the selected secondary school in Pasir Gudang, Johor. There are 13 Form Three classes but the respondents were selected from only two classes to gain data from two distinct proficiency groups. There were a total of 24 boys and 36 girls aged fifteen years old. Their ethnic groups were 52 (87%) Malays, 3(5%) Chinese and 5 (10%) Indians. 30 of them were low proficiency respondents whereas 30 of them were high proficiency respondents. Students who were classified as low proficiency in this research are those who only achieved marks ranging from 40 to 49 in their final year examination. In contrast, students who were classified as high proficiency are those who achieved 70 marks and above.

3.1 Research Instruments

To meet the research objectives, three instruments were used to gather data - questionnaire, observation and interview. The first research instrument used was questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from a previous study by Semtin and Maniam (2015). Their focus of study was on reading strategies. Therefore, with this in mind, the researchers adapted the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 10 items that reflect the types of metacognitive reading strategies; advanced organisation, selective attention, self-management, directed attention, comprehension monitoring, task monitoring and self-evaluation. It has a 5-point Likert scale that measures agreement which allows the respondents to express their agreement

on each item: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). This questionnaire was distributed to 30 low proficiency and 30 high proficiency respondents. These respondents were required to read the items and choose the most appropriate scale. The data generated from this questionnaire comprised the types of metacognitive reading comprehension strategies that the respondents employed. The internal consistency reliability coefficients as determined by Cronbach's Alpha was reported as 0.92. This value indicates the reliability of using this questionnaire as the measurement of identifying metacognitive reading strategies.

The second research instrument used was observation checklist. This checklist comprises 10 items that were adapted from the questionnaire. A section for remarks accompanied each item to enable the researchers to jot down notes during observation. The observation was conducted separately for the low and high proficiency groups of respondents (30 in each group) by ensuring that the setting was similar for both groups. The researchers adopted the observational role as a participant observer. A participant observer is an observational role adopted by researchers when they take part in activities in the setting they observe (Creswell, 2014). The researchers used an observation checklist while observing the reading task assigned to the students in the classroom. Through the observation, the reading strategies used by the respondents were highlighted.

The third research instrument used was semi-structured interview. It allowed the researchers flexibility in asking questions during the interview session to elicit information. Furthermore, the type of questions asked during the interview is open-ended questions. These questions were adapted from the questionnaire items. In addition, all these questions encouraged the respondents to express their thoughts freely. Probes were used to obtain additional information. Moreover, during the interview, the researchers had control over the interview and kept all the interviewees focused and on track to completion. Using the purposive sampling approach, six respondents were selected to be interviewed; three low proficiency and three high proficiency. The researchers analysed the data from the questionnaire and observation before selecting these respondents in order to gain in-depth and detailed information about the usage of metacognitive reading strategies. The interviewees' responses were recorded from only one participant in the study at a time.

Moreover, the researchers believe it is essential to conduct observation and interviews based on criteria corresponding to the research problem. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) propose a selection of criteria concerning the dimensions of time, people, and context. Thus, for this research, the criteria that are selected are also based on these three dimensions;

Table 3.1: Criteria in observation and interview

Dimensions	Observation	Interview
People	Low and high proficiency respondents	Low and high proficiency respondents
Context	During the in-class reading session	After analysing questionnaire and observation data
Time	The respondents were observed separately by ensuring that the setting was similar for both groups	One-on-one interview was conducted for the selected respondents

As a whole, the data for this research was gathered by keeping in mind the ethical issues. All the respondents were not given any pressure. First, the researchers explained to them about their participation in this research and obtained consent from them. Second, the identities of these respondents were protected. Since these ethical issues were considered, the researchers believe that the data was collected ethically.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

The researchers collected data by adopting the explanatory mixed methods design developed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011). Quantitative and qualitative data were collected sequentially in two phases. First, the low proficiency respondents were labelled as X1 until X30 respectively whereas the high proficiency respondents were labelled as Y1 until Y30. The main purpose of labelling was to easily select the respondents and analyse their responses. Then, the researchers distributed the questionnaire to elicit the low and high proficiency respondents' feedback on the usage of metacognitive reading strategies.

Followed by that, the researchers selected a reading text from the Form Three English Language textbook, which is the main resource in Malaysian ESL classrooms. This textbook complies with the Dokumen Standard Kurikulum dan Pentaksiran (DSKP) produced by the Ministry of Education to ensure learners acquire the necessary knowledge and skills and help teachers towards effective teaching. The texts in this textbook are CEFR-aligned at level B1. In addition, these texts are based on four themes; i) People and Culture, ii) Health and Environment, iii) Science and Technology, and iv) Consumerism and Financial Awareness. For this study, the selected text is entitled 'An Oil for Life' based on the theme of People and Culture.

The in-class reading session was conducted separately for the low and high proficiency group of respondents (30 in each group) by ensuring that the setting was similar for both groups. During the in-class reading session, first, the teacher wrote the learning objectives on the board and provided explanations to the respondents. Next, the teacher displayed a picture of a bottle of oil and asked them to guess the name of the oil. Then, the teacher distributed a text entitled 'Oil for Life' and asked them what they could infer from the text's title. Then, the teacher provided instructions to the respondents to read the text and answer the questions given individually. To ensure the respondents attempted the same type of text, the reading text used was similar for both groups of respondents. The teacher reminded the respondents that the time given to complete the reading task was 20 minutes.

The researchers observed the low and high proficiency respondents during the in-class reading sessions and recorded fieldnotes distinctly. It was observed that both high and low proficiency respondents consulted the teacher when they were unable to answer the reading comprehension questions. The high proficiency respondents took about 20 minutes to read the text and answer the questions whereas the low proficiency respondents took about 30 minutes. The low proficiency respondents took longer time to read because it was noticed that the low proficiency respondents consulted the teacher from time to time to know the meaning of unfamiliar words and the requirement of the reading comprehension questions.

Subsequently, the researchers selected six respondents (three low proficiency and three high proficiency) based on the questionnaire and observation data analysis. One-on-one interview was conducted for these respondents. The high proficiency respondents responded in English language whereas the low proficiency respondents responded in Malay language for certain questions. In addition, the researchers rephrased the questions to ensure the low proficiency respondents understood the questions. The average time for every respondent for this interview was about 10 minutes for high proficiency respondents and 15 minutes for low proficiency respondents. The total time for all the interview sessions with high proficiency respondents was about 25 to 30 minutes whereas with low proficiency respondents was about 45 to 50 minutes. The data gathered from these interview sessions were used to triangulate the questionnaire and observation data.

The following flow chart sums the data collection procedures in this research. It draws attention to the key points in the procedures:

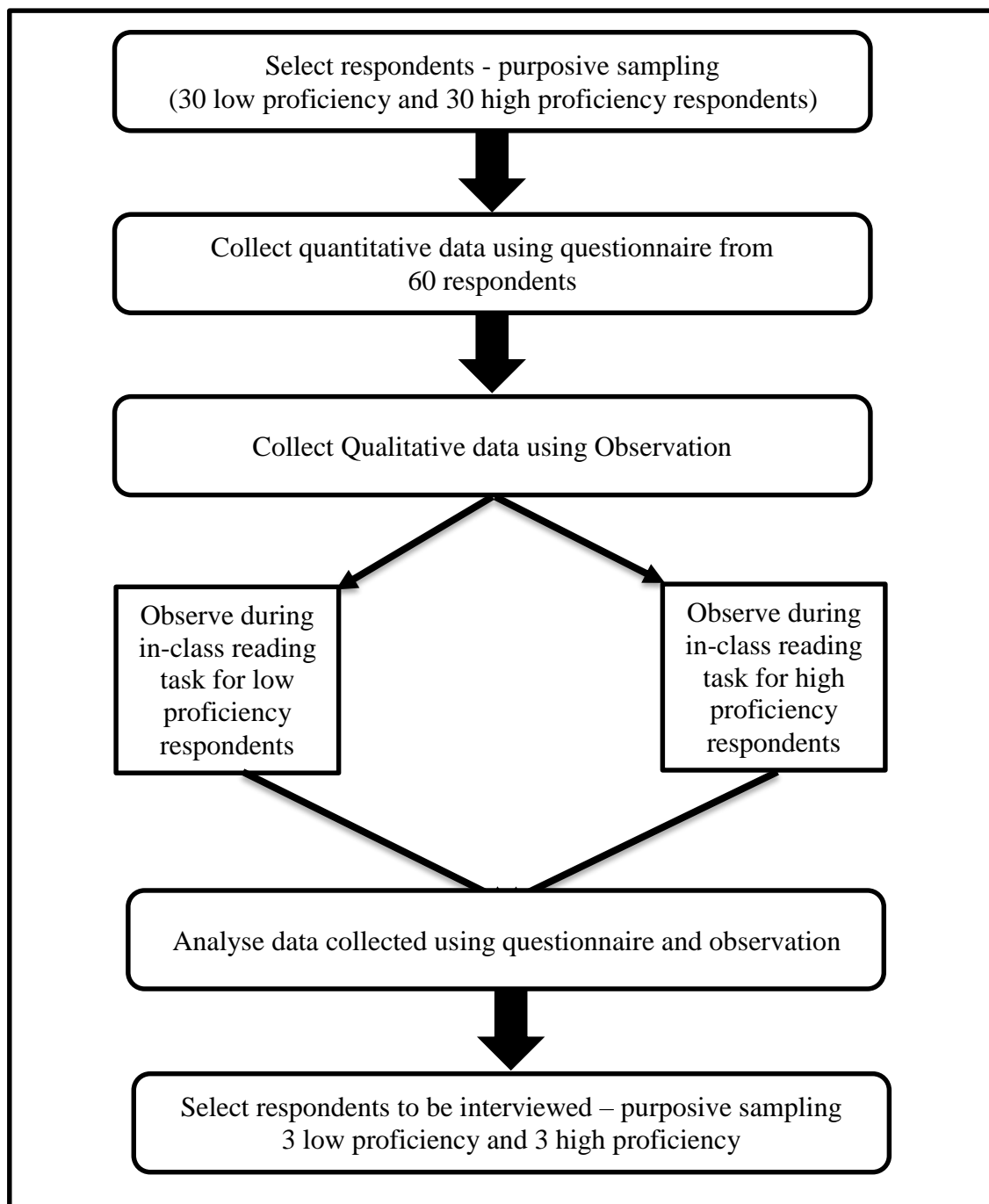


Figure 3.2: Summary of data collection procedures

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The methods of data analysis are highlighted according to three categories of data collection; questionnaire, observation and interview. Table 3.2 provides a summary of the methods of data analysis in this research:

Table 3.2: Methods of data analysis

CATEGORIES OF DATA COLLECTION	METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS
Questionnaire	The data from the questionnaire was analysed based on descriptive analysis using percentages.
Observation	The data from the observation was analysed based on content analysis.
Interview	Similar to observation data, the data from the interview was also analysed based on content analysis.

The data from the questionnaire was tabulated according to the items and inserted in a table. The total number of respondents that responded for each item was converted to percentages. Additionally, the percentages of respondents on scales 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree) were combined to identify the high usage of the particular strategy. Observation and interview data, on the other hand, were analysed based on content analysis. As for the first step, the observation and interview data were prepared. The field notes from the observation were prepared separately according to respondents' proficiency levels and the interview sessions were entirely transcribed by including all the interviewer's questions. Next, the researchers defined the coding unit according to the types of metacognitive reading strategies; set plan, aware of objectives, focus on question, read quickly, adjust speed, aware of what to read, monitor understanding, aware of ongoing tasks, identify weaknesses and evaluate effectiveness. Followed by that, themes were developed to categorise the coding unit; advanced organisation (set plan and aware of objectives), selective attention (focus on question and read quickly), self-management (adjust speed), directed attention (aware of what to read), monitoring (monitor understanding and aware of ongoing tasks) and self-evaluation (identify weaknesses and evaluate effectiveness). After that, all these codings were assigned to the data gained from observation and interview. The researchers checked and rechecked the coding consistency to ensure that the data was coded consistently and reliably. Finally, the researchers drew conclusions from the coded data and reported the findings.

Moreover, internal consistency reliability was tested using coefficient alpha to examine the questionnaire's reliability in this research. The questionnaire data gained from the respondents was computed using PSPP, which is a program for statistical analysis of sampled data. The reliability statistics generated a value of 0.92. This Cronbach Alpha value reflects that the scores from the questionnaire are reliable and accurate.

Besides that, to ensure validity, a member checking strategy was employed. The observation data was reviewed by the teacher that carried out the in-class reading task whereas the Head of English Language Panel was asked to cross-check the audio recordings and the transcription of the interview sessions. Both the teacher and Head of the English Language Panel validated the observation and interview findings from the respondents.

All these verify the reliability and validity of using questionnaire, observation and interview as the research instruments to identify the metacognitive reading strategies employed by the respondents. These multiple methods of data collection and analysis from these three research instruments strengthened reliability as well as validity of this study.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Types of Metacognitive Reading Strategies

There are three sub-categories of metacognitive reading strategies; planning, monitoring and evaluating. The types of metacognitive reading strategies categorised under planning strategy are advanced organisation, directed attention, selective attention and self-management. Next, the types of metacognitive reading strategies categorised under monitoring strategy are comprehension monitoring and task monitoring. Thirdly, self-evaluation is categorised under evaluating strategy. The data collected from low and high proficiency respondents using questionnaire, observation and interview had been analysed based on these types of metacognitive reading strategies. Following are the elaborations according to the types of metacognitive reading strategies.

4.1.1 Advanced organisation

The first type of metacognitive reading strategy is advanced organization. Findings from the questionnaire showed that all the respondents from the high proficiency group claimed that they set plans and were alert of the objectives of the reading tasks. Contrastingly, 60% of the respondents from the low proficiency group strongly disagreed whereas 40% disagreed that they coordinate on how to finish the reading tasks. They were also not conscious of the objectives of the reading tasks. Thus, this finding pointed out that low proficiency respondents do not use this strategy.

Moreover, findings from the interview also revealed the high proficiency respondents' plan in completing reading tasks. Responses extracted from the interviewees are as follows:

Low proficiency learners

“... I am not sure of the objectives of the reading tasks...” (Respondent X1)

“...I don't set plans on how to finish reading tasks...” (Respondent X2)

“...Saya tak set plan untuk lengkapkan aktitivi yang diberi...(I do not set plans to complete the task given)” (Respondent X3)

High proficiency learners

“...Before completing the task, I will decide which questions to complete first...” (Respondent Y1)

“...I prefer to answer to easy questions first before answering the difficult ones...” (Respondent Y2)

“...I like to answer easy questions first before answering difficult questions...” (Respondent Y3)

“...I'm certainly alert of the objectives of the reading tasks...” (Respondent Y1)

“...I know the objectives of the reading tasks because when the teacher writes the objectives of the lesson on the board, they will make sure that all the objectives are achieved...” (Respondent Y2)

“...I know the objective of the reading tasks because the teacher writes the objectives of the lesson on the board...” (Respondent Y3)

All excerpts show that the respondents from the low proficiency group do not use the advanced organization strategy. In contrast, the respondents from the high proficiency group set plans in completing reading tasks and are aware of the objectives of the reading tasks. The high proficiency respondents preferred to answer the lower order thinking questions before attempting the higher-order questions. Furthermore, based on the field notes from the observation of the in-class reading task of low proficiency respondents, it was noticed that all 30 low proficiency respondents started answering the questions right after reading the text. Contrastingly, the high proficiency respondents spent a few minutes to read all the questions and choose which question to answer first. This revealed that high proficiency students were well prepared in attempting reading tasks.

The researchers believe that this strategy is closely related to setting a purpose for reading the given texts. In other words, it means formulating and articulating the reason for reading. In the Malaysian ESL classroom setting, students' main purpose of reading a text is to

answer the reading comprehension questions. Therefore, teachers should play a vital role in helping the students, especially the low proficiency students, comprehend the text given and answer the questions that come along with the text.

4.1.2 Selective attention

Findings for the second type of metacognitive reading strategy, which is selective attention, showed that 36.7% of the respondents from the high proficiency group agreed and 23.3% strongly agreed that they studied the questions first before reading the text. In addition, 40% of them agreed and 13.3% strongly agreed that they read the text quickly. All these show that majority of the high proficiency respondents employed the selective attention strategy. Moreover, during the interview, high proficiency respondents stated how they identified the essential information in a reading text.

In contrast, 80% of the respondents from the low proficiency group disagreed and 16.7% strongly disagreed that they focused on the questions and memorised them before they read the text. Moreover, 73.3% of them strongly disagreed and 23.3% disagreed that they read the text speedily to identify the essential details in the reading text. Both findings addressed that low proficiency students do not employ selective attention strategy. The responses elicited from the interviewees are as follows:

Low proficiency learners

“...I don’t read the questions first before reading the text...” (*Respondent X1*)

“...I prefer to read the text slowly and answer the questions given...” (*Respondent X2*)

“...*Saya baca petikan* slow slow (I read the text slowly)...” (*Respondent X3*)

High proficiency learners

“...*I study the questions first before reading the text...*” (*Respondent Y1*)

“...*I read the text quickly to identify the specific details...*” (*Respondent Y2*)

“...*I read quickly the text to identify the specific details...*” (*Respondent Y3*)

All these were also noticed by the researchers while observing. The researchers found that the high proficiency respondents preferred to skim and scan the text quickly and highlighted the main ideas whereas the low proficiency respondents read the text slowly and faced difficulties in determining the main ideas. In a study conducted by Wittrock and Alesandrini (1990), teaching students how to use selective attention strategy is considered to have significant

impact on their comprehension. It is certainly an effective metacognitive strategy that can help students to construct and retain a concise summary of important details from the text.

4.1.3 Self-management

Findings for the third type of metacognitive reading strategy, which is self-management, revealed that all the high proficiency respondents agreed that they utilized this strategy. In contrast, only 10% of the respondents from the low proficiency group agreed and 16.7% strongly agreed that they adjust the reading speed according to the reading purposes. This shows that this strategy is remarkably employed by the students who are high proficient compared to the low proficiency students.

These findings were also in line with the interview findings. Only one out of three respondents from the low proficiency group stated that they employed self-management strategy whereas all the respondents from the high proficiency group claimed that they employed this strategy. The findings below were drawn from the interviewees' responses:

Low proficiency learners

"...I always read the text slowly only..." (Respondent X1)

"...I read the text slowly and sometimes very fast..." (Respondent X2)

"...Saya baca petikan slow slow je (I read the text slowly)..." (Respondent X3)

High proficiency learners

"...I read the text slowly to understand the important ideas..." (Respondent Y1)

"...I read the easy part text quickly and the difficult parts slowly to understand the text better..." (Respondent Y2)

"...I adjust my reading speed based on the text..." (Respondent Y3)

Additionally, in the observation session, it was noticed that all the high proficiency respondents adjusted their reading speed by going faster through the easy parts and more slowly through the harder parts. Robb (2000) suggested that teachers need to assist students understand when to change their reading speed. In order to read for understanding the content, students should read slowly to grasp the message in the text and focus on text structures. This allows students to engage with essential details and process it as they read.

4.1.4 Directed attention

The questionnaire findings for this fourth type of metacognitive reading strategy, which is directed attention, revealed that all the high proficiency students agreed that they were aware of the essential information in the text that needs further attention. This is totally contrasting with the low proficiency respondents. 63.3% of the respondents from the low proficiency group strongly disagreed and 33.3% disagreed that they were conscious on which part of the text that should be given more attention and which part that can be ignored. This implied that high proficiency respondents employed the directed attention strategy whereas large number of the low proficiency respondents did not utilise this strategy.

In addition, the findings from the interview also showed that all the high proficiency respondents employed this strategy while low proficiency respondents did not employ it. The interview findings are as below:

Low proficiency learners

“...I don't know which part of the text to read more...” (Respondent X1)

“...I'm not sure what is important and not so important in a text...” (Respondent X2)

“...I just read all the parts in a text...” (Respondent X3)

High proficiency learners

“...I'm aware of the important points in a text...” (Respondent Y1)

*“...When I read a text, I can identify the main ideas by looking at the key words...”
(Respondent Y2)*

“...I can differentiate between main and supporting details...” (Respondent Y3)

Both questionnaire and interview findings showed that high proficiency respondents were able to identify the main ideas in the text unlike the low proficiency respondents. The high proficiency respondents were able to identify and organize important ideas in a reading comprehension text with the intention to grasp the content of the text. Thus, teachers are responsible to teach the low proficiency students on how to differentiate between essential and non-essential information in a text in order to ensure they are also able to comprehend the text.

4.1.5 Comprehension and task monitoring

The questionnaire findings for the fifth type of metacognitive reading strategy, which is monitoring, showed that 73.3% of the respondents from the high proficiency group agreed and

23.3% strongly agreed that they employed this strategy. On the contrary, 53.3% of the respondents from the low proficiency group disagreed and 43.3% strongly disagreed that they monitor their understanding of the reading texts and activities. This indicated that most of them do not employ the monitoring strategy. However, all the respondents from the low and high proficiency groups agreed that they were aware of their ongoing reading tasks. This is a strategy that is also categorized as monitoring strategy. This indicated that even though the low proficiency students do not monitor their understanding in comprehending a reading text, they were still alert of the requirements of the reading tasks.

Besides that, the interview findings also revealed responses on monitoring strategy from both groups of respondents. The responses extracted from the interview are as below:

Low proficiency learners

"...When teacher gives me reading comprehension questions, I know that I must read the text first. It will help me to answer the questions given..." (Respondent X1)

"...I read the question carefully before I answer..." (Respondent X2)

"...I read the questions many times to understand how to answer..." (Respondent X3)

High proficiency learners

"...I'm aware of the requirements of the reading tasks..." (Respondent Y1)

"...I know the requirements of the reading tasks..." (Respondent Y2)

"...I am conscious of the reading tasks. I realise that I must read the text first before answering the questions..." (Respondent Y3)

All these indicated that these respondents self-monitored themselves in order to understand the text. According to Harris and Hodges (1995), self-monitoring is closely related to metacognitive awareness. In short, it specifies that students monitor themselves as they read the texts to ensure that they can improve their reading comprehension skills.

4.1.6 Self-evaluation

The final type of metacognitive reading strategy is self-evaluation. The questionnaire findings showed that 96.7% of the high proficiency respondents agreed and 3.3% of them strongly agreed that they employed this strategy. Contrastingly, 83.3% of the respondents from the low proficiency group disagreed that they tried to identify their weaknesses while completing the reading tasks and reflect on how to improve their reading competence. However, 90% of them

agreed that they self-evaluated the strategies they used to complete the tasks in order to identify their effectiveness. This shows that even though most of them were not able to identify their weaknesses, they still find ways to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies they use.

During the interview session, all the interviewees revealed how they evaluated the strategies they used while doing the reading tasks. Following were the responses from the interview sessions:

Low proficiency learners

“...If I use a strategy that is not ok, I will ask my teacher for advice...” (Respondent X1)

“...If I use a strategy that is not ok, I will ask my teacher...” (Respondent X2)

“...If I use a strategy that is not ok, I tanya cikgu saya...(If I use a strategy that is not ok, I will ask my teacher” (Respondent X3)

High proficiency learners

“...I discuss with my friends and ask their opinion about the strategy that I use...” (Respondent Y1)

“...I consult the teacher in order to know what are the strategies available...” (Respondent Y2)

“...I ask the teacher what are the strategies available...” (Respondent Y3)

All these show that both low and high proficiency respondents were keen to evaluate the strategies that they employed while completing the reading tasks. Additionally, the researchers also noticed during observation that these respondents did not give up easily if they were unable to answer the reading comprehension questions, especially higher order thinking skills (HOTS) questions. They took the effort to discuss with their friends and consulted the teacher. In short, the researchers believe that self-evaluation strategy is the most important strategy. This is because this strategy allows both low and high proficiency students to construct meaning of the text according to their level of understanding.

4.2 Comparison in the Use of Metacognitive Reading Strategies

The following table shows the comparison of metacognitive reading strategies employed by the respondents:

Table 4.1: Comparison of metacognitive reading strategies employed by the respondents

Item	Low proficiency respondents = 30						High proficiency respondents = 30					
	Number of respondents & Percentage						Number of respondents & Percentage					
	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree	Total Scale 4 & 5	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree	Total Scale 4 & 5
Set plan on how to finish reading tasks (Advanced Organisation)	18 60 %	12 40%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13 43.3 %	17 56.7 %	100%
Aware of the objective of the reading tasks (Advanced Organisation)	18 60 %	12 40%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13 43.3 %	17 56.7 %	100%
Focus on the questions and memorise them before reading the text (Selective attention)	5 16.7 %	24 80%	0	1 3.3%	0	3.3%	6 20%	6 20%	0	11 36.7 %	7 23.3 %	60%
Read the text quickly (Selective attention)	22 73.3 %	7 23.3 %	0	1 3.4%	0	3.4%	8 26.7 %	6 20%	0	12 40%	4 13.3 %	53.3%
Adjust reading speed (Self-management)	0	22 73,3 %	0	3 10%	5 16.7 %	26.7 %	0	0	0	13 43.3 %	17 56.7 %	100%
Aware on what to read closely and what to ignore (Directed attention)	19 63.3 %	10 33.3 %	0	0	1 3.4%	3.4%	0	0	0	16 53.3 %	14 46.7 %	100%

Monitor the understanding of the reading texts and activities (Monitoring)	13 43.3 %	16 53.3 %	0	0	1 3.4%	3.4%	0	1 3.4%	0	22 73.3 %	7 23.3 %	96.6 %
Aware of ongoing reading tasks (Monitoring)	0	0	0	11 37%	19 63%	100%	0	0	0	29 96.7 %	1 3.3%	100%
Identify weakness in reading activity and think how to improve reading efficiency (Self-evaluation)	0	25 83.3 %	0	5 16.7 %	0	16.7 %	0	0	0	29 96.7 %	1 3.3%	100%
Evaluate the effectiveness of strategies used while doing the reading tasks (Self-evaluation)	3 10 %	0	0	27 90%	0	90%	0	0	0	29 96.7 %	1 3.3%	100%

Based on the data gathered in the table, scale 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree) were combined to identify the high usage of the particular strategy. The findings revealed that majority of the low proficiency respondents (90%) employed self-evaluation strategy and none of them (0%) employed advanced organization strategy. On the other hand, the findings revealed that majority of the high proficiency respondents employed all the metacognitive reading strategies. Therefore, it can be inferred that both low and high proficiency respondents' metacognitive awareness levels differ.

The metacognitive awareness of high proficiency respondents is higher compared to low proficiency respondents. The high proficiency respondents used metacognitive reading

strategies to improve their reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, the high proficiency respondents also used more metacognitive reading strategies to facilitate their reading comprehension skills compared to low proficiency respondents. This shows that they were aware of the use of these strategies. This is in line with the study of Zhang and Seepho (2013) which stated that high proficiency students were alert with the benefits of employing metacognitive strategies.

As a whole, it can be concluded that from the comparison between the low and high proficiency respondents on the metacognitive reading strategy usage, it is noticed that the type and number of reading strategies utilized by these two proficiency groups differ. This is consistent with Steinagel (2005), who indicated in his study that the low proficiency respondents used lesser monitoring strategies than high proficiency respondents. Evidences were also seen from the observation in the current research that during reading activity, low proficiency respondents were inclined to employ fewer metacognitive reading strategies.

5.0 DISCUSSION

This section provides an in-depth discussion on the predominant metacognitive reading strategies among low and high proficiency respondents. In addition, the researchers also suggested metacognitive reading strategies for low proficiency students in this section. These recommended strategies are based on the findings from the usage of reading strategies among high proficiency students.

5.1 Predominant metacognitive reading strategies among low and high proficiency students

In this research, there were six metacognitive reading strategies highlighted but there was only one predominant metacognitive strategy among low and high proficiency students, the self-evaluation strategy. This implies that both low and high proficiency students were concerned about their reading comprehension weaknesses and found ways to be proficient readers. In short, they were conscious of the reading strategies that they employed.

It is believed that self-evaluation strategy is critically important to maintain students' self-efficacy for learning and create positive progress in students' level of understanding reading comprehension texts. Furthermore, through this self-evaluation strategy, students' level of motivation increases. They are confident that they are learning and able to progress further (Schunk, 1990). These students will work harder, seek help from their friends and consult their teacher.

However, previous researchers claimed that an issue for teachers regarding the self-evaluation strategy is that many students do not self-evaluate their progress spontaneously. Therefore, teachers need to encourage students to periodically self-evaluate their capabilities in comprehending the reading texts. When students can comprehend the texts better, they will be more motivated to learn and this indirectly will increase their reading efficiency.

Briefly, the findings from this research proved that self-evaluation strategy assists not only the high proficiency students but also the low proficiency students. Both groups of students found out their weaknesses, identified how to improve their reading competence and evaluated the benefits of the strategies they used while completing the reading activities.

5.2 Significant differences in the use of metacognitive reading strategies

Several salient points emerged from the data to show the significant differences in metacognitive reading strategy used. First, data from the three research instruments which are questionnaire, observation and interview, indicated low proficiency respondents avoided six types of metacognitive reading strategies from two sub-categories; planning and monitoring. These six metacognitive reading strategies include advanced organization, selective attention, self-management, directed attention, comprehension monitoring and task monitoring.

In relation to the first sub-category, which is planning, the findings showed that the low proficiency respondents do not regularly identify the essence of the reading activity and coordinate reading target. This might be related to the level of familiarity of the strategies among the low proficiency students. This is in line with the findings from a study conducted by Aebersold and Mary (2006). They highlighted that the students were inclined to rely on the strategies that were familiar to them.

For the second sub-category, which is monitoring, data from both questionnaire and the interview showed that the number of low proficiency respondents that employed this strategy was lesser than the high proficiency respondents. This echoed the previous research conducted by Anderson (2002). His study highlighted that the differences between the two proficiency groups in the use of strategies occurred because low proficiency students had weak monitoring skills. They had poor linguistic knowledge and low level of understanding on how to use the strategies. He further stated that monitoring skills are vital for students' reading achievement.

As a whole, it is explicit that respondents from both groups showed different levels of understanding of metacognitive reading strategies. The low proficiency respondents employed lesser metacognitive reading strategies compared to high proficiency respondents. This indicates that the latter had a better level of understanding. They were able to choose and utilise

metacognitive reading strategies that can improve their reading skills. They were alert on the type of strategies that should be employed according to reading texts and activities.

5.3 Suggested metacognitive reading strategies for low proficiency students

From the findings, the researchers suggest five metacognitive strategies for low proficiency students. These five strategies are advanced organization, selective attention, self-management, directed attention and monitoring. The researchers categorized these five strategies according to Chamot and O'Malley's (1994) classification of metacognitive strategy. The following table is prepared to give an overview of how these strategies are categorized:

Table 5.1: Metacognitive reading strategies classification

CATEGORIES	STRATEGIES
Planning	<p>Advanced Organization – determining the reading task objective and creating a plan on how to complete it</p> <p>Directed Attention – focusing on the main points and ignoring irrelevant information in a reading task to get an overall understanding</p> <p>Selective Attention – focussing on specific details which are related to the reading comprehension tasks</p> <p>Self-management – understanding the conditions for reading and managing their own level of motivation in completing tasks and adjusting reading rate.</p>
Monitoring	<p>Comprehension monitoring – monitoring and verifying understanding of the reading materials</p> <p>Task monitoring – monitoring to ensure reading comprehension tasks are completed</p>

The first skill in metacognitive strategy is planning. Planning is an essential element of intellectual behaviour. It is crucial to the formation and modification of reading coordination. Moreover, planning includes choosing strategies that are appropriate to improve reading comprehension skills (Zare-ee, 2008). For instance, planning on how to finish reading task, identify relevant information and adjust reading speed. In addition, planning, also called forethought, is the thinking process on how to sort out the tasks required to accomplish goals. Moreover, planning can be related to skimming and scanning. Skimming and scanning are a part of the reading skill (Harmer, 2007). Skimming requires students to go through the reading

text at a surface level to get a general idea whereas scanning enables the students to identify specific information. By looking closely, it can be perceived that skimming aids the students to employ advanced organization strategy which is categorised under planning. Students skim the text to get a gist of it and this allows the students to use advanced organization strategy in order to determine the reading task objective and create a plan on how to complete it. Scanning, on the other hand, can be perceived that it aids students to employ the directed attention and selective attention strategy. Students scan the text to look for specific details. This indirectly leads to employ both directed and selective attention strategy efficiently by focussing on essential details in the reading texts. All these show that skimming and scanning skills are interrelated to metacognitive reading strategies under the planning category as they assist the students to employ these strategies more effectively. Students will be able to organize the information from the text more systematically and grasp the content of the texts.

Furthermore, according to Harvey and Goudvis (2000), this strategy allows low proficiency students to make sense of reading and move toward insight. They also added that students need to recognize the text structures in a text to distinguish the main and supporting ideas. There are two types of text structures; external and internal. The first type of text structure is external text structures which include headings, charts and guide questions. These structures provide structural aids that facilitate reading. Therefore, students should study the steps to use these structures to identify the significant details in the texts. On the other hand, the second type of text structure is internal text structures which include information in various levels; top, second and bottom. At the top level, which is the first level, the main ideas are highlighted. Followed by that, at the second level, which is the next level, consist of ideas that aid the first level. Finally, at the bottom level, supporting details that assist the main ideas are present. Low proficiency students need to be alert of these three levels to detect how text structures will aid them to identify the essential details in the texts. Teachers need to assist them in using internal text structures to understand and retain the part they are expected to.

The second metacognitive strategy is monitoring. The aim of monitoring is to enhance the effectiveness and competence of students' level of comprehension. The researchers believe that if low proficiency students use this strategy, it is an invaluable tool to aid them in improving their level of understanding. This is evident in previous research conducted by Athami (2019), which brought to light that monitoring strategy could significantly improve students' reading comprehension of texts, especially recount texts. Athami (2019) further pointed out that this strategy helps students to understand the information in the text. This indirectly allows the students to easily identify the main ideas in the text. Besides that, Buehl

(2009) also highlighted that monitoring strategies offer many advantages such as help students to retain their thinking, create a personal understanding of an author's message and summarise the texts in their own words. All these advantages indicate that monitoring helps them to remember as well as understand. However, Blaxter, Huges, and Tight (2010) argued that this strategy comes with certain cautions such as it takes more energy to ask questions and develop summaries than it does to let the students passively read printed pages. Thus, this shows that teachers should play an important role to guide the low proficiency students to employ the monitoring strategy step by step. When students are able to employ this strategy, they will be able to have control over their reading. Indirectly, they can monitor their level of comprehension by adjusting their reading speed to suit the difficulty of the text or employ suitable strategies to re-read, read ahead, or detect the area of confusion.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study fulfilled the purpose of this research. It is clear that the most popular metacognitive reading strategy among the low and high proficiency students is self-evaluation strategy. In addition, the most significant difference between these groups of students is that the high proficiency students employed more metacognitive reading strategies than low proficiency students. In relation to this, this research brings to light the recommended metacognitive reading strategies for the low proficiency students.

The low proficiency students can adopt the strategies used by the high proficiency students and become effective readers. If students are able to use metacognitive reading strategies effectively to grasp the message of the text, they will be able to answer reading comprehension questions and score high marks. The researchers believe that not only students' comprehension improve but their confidence level also simultaneously increases when they employ metacognitive reading strategies to construct meaning. This is because when they utilize these strategies, they will monitor their reading and self-correct themselves. In other words, with the help of these metacognitive reading strategies, they will gain confidence and become more independent as readers.

Furthermore, it is believed that the findings from this research also aid the teachers to put extra effort to train the students to use suitable metacognitive reading strategies. The researchers believe that teachers should adapt their instruction by making changes designed to meet the needs of students from different levels of proficiency. Explicit and systematic guidance on utilizing the metacognitive reading strategies should be provided to students. In addition, teachers should provide opportunities for the students, especially the low proficiency

students, to employ the suggested strategies. To be competent readers, students need to utilize the metacognitive reading strategies that are appropriate to the reading tasks and use these strategies flexibly and interactively.

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