

Metacognitive Awareness of Strategy Use and EFL Reading Comprehension at Higher Secondary Level in Bangladesh

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It is argued that learners' metacognitive awareness of strategy use is significantly associated with their achievement in reading comprehension. In order to ascertain this association, the present researchers carry out the investigation to substantiate the existing findings. This study is a partial replication of Carrell (1989) and Vogely (1995) with regard to their methods and objectives. The objective of this research is to explore the higher secondary-level EFL learners' metacognitive awareness of strategy use in EFL reading comprehension, and its relationship with their reading comprehension, if any. For this investigation, quantitative data collected from 148 higher secondary-level EFL learners via a modified Metacognitive Awareness Strategy Questionnaire (MASQ; Carrell, 1989) and a reading comprehension test were analyzed through statistical tools available in SPSS. The results reveal that learners possess moderate awareness of reading strategies, and their perceptions of effective strategies and of difficulty of strategy use are significantly and positively related to their reading comprehension. Based on the findings, pedagogical implications are discussed and scope for future studies is recommended.

Key words: metacognitive awareness, learner perceptions, strategy use, EFL reading comprehension

Dikatakan bahwa kesadaran metakognitif peserta didik tentang penggunaan strategi secara signifikan terkait dengan pencapaian mereka dalam pemahaman bacaan. Untuk memastikan asosiasi ini, para peneliti saat ini melakukan penyelidikan untuk membuktikan temuan yang ada. Penelitian ini merupakan replikasi parsial Carrell (1989) dan Vogely (1995) berkenaan dengan metode dan tujuan mereka. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi kesadaran metakognitif siswa EFL tingkat menengah yang lebih tinggi tentang penggunaan strategi dalam pemahaman

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membaca EFL, dan hubungannya dengan pemahaman bacaan mereka, jika ada. Untuk penyelidikan ini, data kuantitatif yang dikumpulkan dari 148 pelajar EFL tingkat menengah yang lebih tinggi melalui Metacognitive Awareness Strategy Questionnaire (MASQ; Carrell, 1989) yang dimodifikasi dan tes pemahaman membaca dianalisis melalui alat statistik yang tersedia di SPSS. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa peserta didik memiliki kesadaran moderat tentang strategi membaca, dan persepsi mereka tentang strategi efektif dan kesulitan penggunaan strategi secara signifikan dan positif terkait dengan pemahaman bacaan mereka. Berdasarkan temuan, implikasi pedagogi dibahas dan ruang lingkup untuk studi masa depan direkomendasikan.

INTRODUCTION

Earlier studies on metacognitive awareness of strategy use investigated good language learners (GLLs) by exploring their perceptions of effective strategies e.g. Naiman, Frolich, Stern, & Todesco (1978), Rubin (1975). On the other hand, studies e.g., Wenden (1991, 1998), Goh (1997) investigated metacognitive awareness of L2 learning following Flavell's (1979) concept of metacognition consisted of person knowledge, task knowledge, and strategy knowledge. Studies which concentrated on strategy knowledge of a particular language skill were Carrell (1989), Vogely (1995), Zhang (2002). Whilst Carrell (1989) and Zhang (2002) were on metacognitive awareness of reading, Vogely (1995) was on listening. Most of these studies showed a link between metacognitive awareness of strategy use and language performance. However, studies on learners' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies are still scant (Zhang, 2002). Moreover, the aforementioned studies explored tertiary level EFL learners in different ESL/EFL contexts. Exploration of higher secondary school (HSC) level EFL learners in Bangladesh, a monolingual country with potential different socio-cultural environment, is sparse.

Studies of Carrell (1989), Vogely (1995), and Zhang (2002) explored metacognitive awareness using Metacognitive Awareness Strategy Questionnaire (MASQ) which was developed by Carrell (1989) herself. Carrell (1989) tried to fill the gap in the existing literature by carrying out an empirical study, and hereby developed the MASQ of 36 strategy items comprising four categories- of confidence, difficulty, repair, and effectiveness of strategies use, based on strategies suggested in literature. Her study revealed that learners' metacognitive awareness was linked to their reading proficiency. Specifically, metacognitive awareness of difficulty and effectiveness were predictors of reading performance. Higher proficiency readers tended to be more global, top-down in their metacognitive awareness of L2 reading. Zhang's (2002) findings generally corroborated Carrell's (1989). Vogely (1995), on the other hand, exploited Carrell's (1989) MASQ to tap into L2 listeners' metacognitive awareness. Vogely (1995) addressed four RQs to their perceptions of strategies in terms of effectiveness, confidence, difficulty and comprehension and repair strategies using Carrell's (1989) MASQ with slight changes in using the terms e.g., good listeners' strategies instead of effective strategies. This current study aims to exploit Carrell's (1989) MASQ, however, with objectives largely following Vogely (1995) with some changes (e.g., perceptions of effective strategies in place of Vogely's (1995) perceptions of a 'good' listener), in the skill area of reading.

All these three studies generally explored tertiary level learners in different ESL/EFL contexts. Among them, Zhang (2002) investigated Chinese EFL context in Asia; however, the Bangladeshi EFL context is potentially different from that of China in terms of its socio-

psychological and cultural as well as economic reasons. Bangladesh being a predominantly monolingual country with strong sentiment for mother tongue, Bangla, and being a less developed country, offers limited scope for English to be practiced in public domain (unlike China with a booming economy, with more attraction of foreign trade partners and visitors). Hence, EFL context of Bangladesh, a much 'input poor' context, is potentially different and hence merits further investigation.

With the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 (the seed of which was sown in 1952 when the Bangladeshis laid their lives for their mother tongue, Bangla, also called Bengali), Bangla was declared as a sole language to be used in every sphere of life in the country and thus Bangla became the functional language in all the significant domains of the society including government, education, law, administration, everyday communication, the media, as well as entertainment (Imam, 2005). This inevitably affected and limited the use of English in the socio-cultural domain and the linguistic reality impacted on the important socio-psychological factors of the learners in this country, and ultimately shaped their perceptions about learning 'English' (Rahman, 2005). In the minds of most people, national identity and learning English were positioned as antagonistic, not complementary (Imam, 2005). As such, for a long time English was being neglected to be taught to preserve national sentiment of the country. However, in the 21st century, a utilitarian value of English is realised and English is deemed important for higher education (Sultana, 2014). Now, English is taught as a compulsory subject from grade 1 to grade 12 i.e., up to Higher Secondary Level (HSC) in Bangladesh, although Bangla is the medium of instruction in the primary (Grade 1-5), secondary (Grade 6-10) and higher secondary (Grade 11-12) education of the Bangla-medium schools (Sultana, 2014). Starting from earlier grade possible, reading is being taught along with writing; among the 4 basic language skills, teaching and learning of reading has an important place in Bangladesh (Haque, 2006). However, even after introduction of communicative language teaching (CLT), which focuses on communicative use of all four language skills including reading, HSC level learners' EFL reading comprehension is not deemed satisfactory as Khatun & Begum (2000) revealed that the HSC level students scored only 40% in reading comprehension.

After 10 years of formal education of EFL, English learners still face challenges to master EFL reading at the HSC level; their proficiency in almost all sub-skills of reading is below average (Haque, 2006; Tasmin, 2001). Similar finding is revealed by Rahman (2007) who investigated students' problems in reading skills at the HSC levels in Bangladesh. The results from questionnaire survey, interview, classroom observation, and reading tests suggested that students had problems in most of the sub-skills of reading and found that approaches to teaching and learning reading skills were backdated. The study found that students were weak in reading. Their reading speed and efficiency was very poor. Instead of student-oriented techniques, the teachers used traditional teacher-oriented methods. Among many-faceted reading problems, were insufficient vocabulary, depending on dictionary meaning more than contextual meaning of words, being unable to understand and analyse long sentences in a text, understanding syntax and text organisation. The observation showed that syllabus, materials and testing system emphasised only on the lower order skills; the higher skills were totally neglected. This situation called for more research on EFL reading in the EFL context of Bangladesh, and in this situation, students' metacognitive awareness of strategy use could help for better reading comprehension. Baker & Brown (1984) maintain that declarative knowledge (knowing what) and procedural knowledge (knowing how) differ; knowing what is not always sufficient rather knowing how is necessary for effective use of strategies.

To address the EFL reading problems or inefficiency among the HSC level learners in Bangladesh, effective reading strategy use in comprehending a reading text can help. Studies

on learning strategies in reading comprehension suggest that there is a link between strategy use and reading comprehension and that reading strategies may have the potential to enhance learners' reading comprehension (e.g., Carrell, 1989; Zhang, 2002). In order to acquire better reading comprehension, learners generally use various reading strategies to compensate their reading incomprehension and use different repair strategies. However, in many cases learners are not aware of what and how they are using strategies to comprehend a reading text. So, learners' perceptions on their use of reading strategies are deemed important; awareness of strategies might ensure use of them (Zhang, 2002). Therefore, if a HSC level learner wants to be successful in reading comprehension, he or she needs to be aware of different effective reading strategies in order to use these. As such, insights into students' perceptions of reading difficulties and strategy use and into its relationship with reading performance may inform the teaching and learning of reading.

Although there exist a number of studies on language learning strategy use in general in an EFL context of Bangladesh (e.g., Maniruzzaman (2012), Islam & Aktar (2011), only a few explored strategy use in the skill areas (e.g., Quadir (2008) on speaking strategy use, Hayet, Nabi, & Ahmed (2016) on reading). Moreover, they studied tertiary level learners in Bangladesh. Hayet et al. (2016) studied EFL reading strategy use at the tertiary level in a public university in Bangladesh. Questionnaire data were collected from 60 first & second-year undergraduate students and 10 EFL teachers teaching reading and writing skills. The students' questionnaire comprised 29 strategy items and teachers' questionnaire comprised of 10 items; all strategies representing cognitive, metacognitive, and memory strategy categories. The study revealed students' 'avoidance' and 'ignorance' of many of the effective strategies in literature, particularly metacognitive strategies. The teachers also acknowledged lack of self-motivation among the learners in knowing and using strategies in EFL reading. Although this was a study on tertiary level EFL readers, it is possible to gauge these EFL readers' attitude to and use of reading strategies in their HSC level they just completed. However, there are validity and reliability issues as to the development of both of the questionnaires; how they were prepared and validated and checked on reliability. Hence, more research is called for on EFL readers' perceptions on reading strategy use. HSC level learners' perceptions of strategy use and its relation to EFL reading comprehension need to be explored to gain an insight into this group of learners. It is important to look into this level since these students reach a certain level which is the end of compulsory education and at this level they have to learn and be assessed on reading skills rigorously along with writing skills. Moreover, on completion of their HSC they will be entering into higher education level which requires them extensive as well as intensive English reading. But as literature revealed, they lack expected level of reading proficiency.

To investigate the above discussed research problem at hand, this current study is a partial replication of Carrell (1989) and Vogely (1995) with regard to its methods and objectives. The study attempted to answer five research questions (RQs) concerning learners' perceptions of reading. To be specific, the researchers formulated the following five RQs to be answered:

1. How do the higher secondary level (HSC) EFL learners in Bangladesh evaluate themselves as readers?
2. How do they evaluate a reading task in terms of difficulty?
3. What comprehension and repair strategies do they report using?
4. Which reading strategies do they perceive effective?
5. Is there any relationship between their perceptions of reading strategies and their performance in EFL reading comprehension?

METHODS

Participants

The current study was conducted among 148 twelfth grade (or second year HSC level) EFL learners who had just passed their 1st year final examination of English First Paper. The participants were chosen from three random state-run colleges of urban, suburban and rural areas from three districts including and around the capital Dhaka of Bangladesh. The subjects had several characteristics in common – possessing the same mother tongue, belonging to the same age group of 17 and 18, studying throughout in the Bengali medium, and already having ten years of formal education in EFL. Among the subjects, 67 were from Dhaka, 40 from Manikganj, and 41 from Tangail.

Instrument

The investigation of the current study was carried out via two data collection tools. One was an adapted version of Metacognitive Awareness Strategy Questionnaire (MASQ) (Carrell, 1989) to assess learners' perceptions of strategy use in EFL reading, and another was an EFL reading comprehension test.

The reading comprehension test was based on a reading comprehension passage taken from an English Second Paper book for class 11 and 12, popularly used in Bangladesh. The reading comprehension test was provided in order to assess the students' performances with the purpose of seeing a relationship between learners' perceptions of strategy use in reading and their reading scores in the reading test. The test includes 10 questions- five multiple choice questions (MCQ) and five filling the gaps. They were given 20 minutes for taking the test.

The model for the MASQ was originally designed by Carrell to record learners' metacognitive conceptualisations or “awareness” judgments about EFL reading strategies. This is a valid and reliable instrument to elicit learners' perceptions on reading strategies, which is exploited by a number of researchers (e.g. Vogely, 1995, Zhang, 2002). For the present study partial modifications were made in order to address the RQs of this study and to adapt it to the context of Bangladeshi EFL learners. From the original MASQ, 23 items were chosen out of 36 items to address the RQs formulated for the current study to fit them for HSC level EFL context in Bangladesh. In some cases, changes in wording occurred (e.g. to simplify, ‘understand’ substituted ‘anticipate’) for better elicitation from the respondents. After data collection, the reliability of the MASQ was checked, and Cronbach $\alpha = .80$ indicated a good reliability scale. The adapted questionnaire addressed four areas, addressing first four RQs, given below:

- Self-evaluation (the learners' ability to understand the EFL reading) covering the first six (1-6) statements of the questionnaire (see Appendix A)
- Difficulty (what elements the learners felt made the reading task difficult) covering five (7-11) statements
- Compensation and Repair (the learners' reported use of compensation and repair strategies when compensation failed) covering four (12-15) statements
- Effectiveness (how the learners evaluated themselves as effective readers, that is, what they focused on in order to read more effectively) covering eight (16-23) statements

Access to the colleges was sought from the Heads of the Department and then informed consent was taken from participants who wanted to participate voluntarily. The participants were ensured of anonymity and confidentiality. During administering the questionnaire and the reading test, the participants were clearly instructed, both verbally and in written. First, they were provided with reading comprehension question and answer paper for the reading comprehension test. The questionnaire was administered within 20 minutes in both Bengali (orally) and English (written) so that they could understand all. Data collected through the

reading comprehension test were scored by one of the researchers and checked by another to minimise any anomaly. The raw data collected through MASQ and Reading Comprehension test were then entered into the SPSS. The data were then analysed by using the SPSS (Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences) programme module. To address RQs 1, 2, 3, and 4, participants' perceptions of reading strategies were calculated via mean and frequency computation. The frequency counts of MASQ was also done by tallying the subjects' responses (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree) to each question. After that, the responses were classified as either a strong response (61%-100% agree/disagree or strongly agree/disagree), a moderate response (31%- 60% agree/disagree or strongly agree/disagree), or a weak response (1%-30% agree/ disagree or strongly agree/disagree). The neutral responses were also tallied. To address RQ 5, Pearson Correlation was computed between their perceptions and their performance in reading comprehension.

Results and Findings

Results of addressing the five RQs for this current study had been presented sequentially below.

RQ1: How do the higher secondary level EFL learners in Bangladesh evaluate themselves as readers?

Students perceived that they had moderate ability to read English text (M=1.86, SD=.56). That is, students' reading ability is reported in moderate level, including ability to understand what will come next in the text (M=2.09, SD=1.01), ability to understand the difference between main points and supporting details (M=1.82, SD=.82), ability to relate information which comes next in the text to previous information in the text (M=2.16, SD=.93), ability to question the significance or truthfulness of what the author says (M=2.18, SD=.96), ability to use prior knowledge and experience to understand the content of the text (M=1.49, SD=.75), having good sense of when they understand something and when they do not (M=1.60, SD=.83). Among them, the students seem to be less able to use prior knowledge and experience to understand the content of the text, and having less good sense of when they understand something and when they do not. Therefore, they need to raise more awareness so as to using these two strategies.

The frequency counts of strong, moderate and weak responses also indicate moderate awareness of self-evaluation among the learners. Table 1 (Self-evaluation area) below shows students' moderate ability to predict text narrative (36.1%), ability to differentiate between main ideas and supporting details (44.9%), ability to link among parts of text (36.5%), ability to use background knowledge to understand text (46.3%) and attitude towards text (44.6%). Among them, ability to predict text narrative (36.1%) and ability to link among parts of text (36.5%) were reported by comparatively fewer students.

Table 1: Students' perceived evaluation and selection on reading comprehension strategies

Area	Strong response 61-100%	Moderate response 31-60%	Weak response 0-30%
		Ability to predict text narrative (36.1%)	
		Ability to differentiate between main ideas and supporting details (44.9%)	

Ability to link among parts of text
(36.5%)
 Ability to use background
 knowledge to understand text
(46.3%)
 Self-evaluation (45.3%)

Figure 1 of total self-evaluation below shows the students do not exhibit excellent understanding of reading comprehension (only 23.65% of the students strongly agree); they find themselves moderately able to comprehend a reading text (as revealed in 66.89% students' agreement).

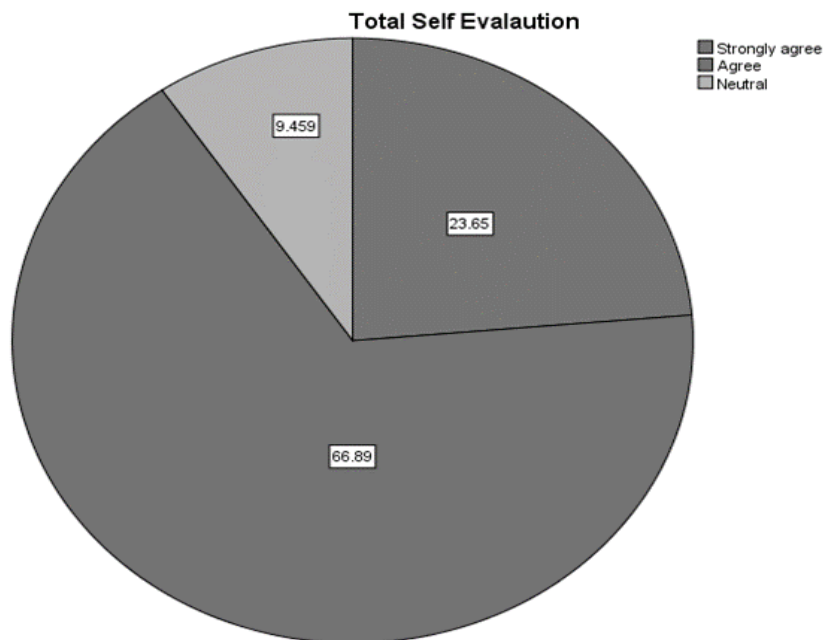


Figure 1: Pie chart for self-evaluation

RQ 2: How do learners evaluate a reading task in terms of difficulty?

Students found that two aspects of reading remained difficult such as aspect related to word meaning (M=2.45, SD=1.33) and the grammatical structures (M=2.36, SD=1.16). Students perceived other reading aspects like background knowledge (M=2.84, SD=1.21), overall information of the text (M=2.56, SD=1.27), organisation of the text (M=2.55, SD=1.14) were less difficult.

Table 2 below (difficulties in reading area) displays students' moderate response to word meaning (31.4%) and to grammatical structures (31.4%). This signifies that students need to be aware of achieving knowledge of vocabulary as well as the grammatical rules and structures of the target language. It, however, shows students' comparatively weak response to background knowledge (21.3%), to overall meaning of text (28%), and to text organisation (26.4%). This suggests students' less difficulty with background knowledge, overall meaning, and text organisation. However, their perceived less difficulty with prior knowledge and overall meaning of the text is explained in discussion section.

Table 2: Students' reported evaluation of an EFL reading task in terms of difficulty

Area	Strong response 61-100%	Moderate response 31-60%	Weak response 0-30%
Reading difficulty (28.4%)		Word meaning (31.4%) Grammatical structures (31.4%)	Background knowledge (21.3%) Overall information of text (28%) Text organisation (26.4%)

Pie chart of total reading difficulties in Figure 2 below shows that 16.22% students strongly agree that they face difficulties in EFL reading, 40.54% students agree that they have difficulties in EFL reading, 14.19% students keeps neutral position, and 29.05% students disagree that they face any difficulty in EFL reading. So, it can be said that a major portion of students more or less face difficulties while evaluating a reading task. On the other hand, 29.05% students' disagreement with any difficulty seems to be over stated.

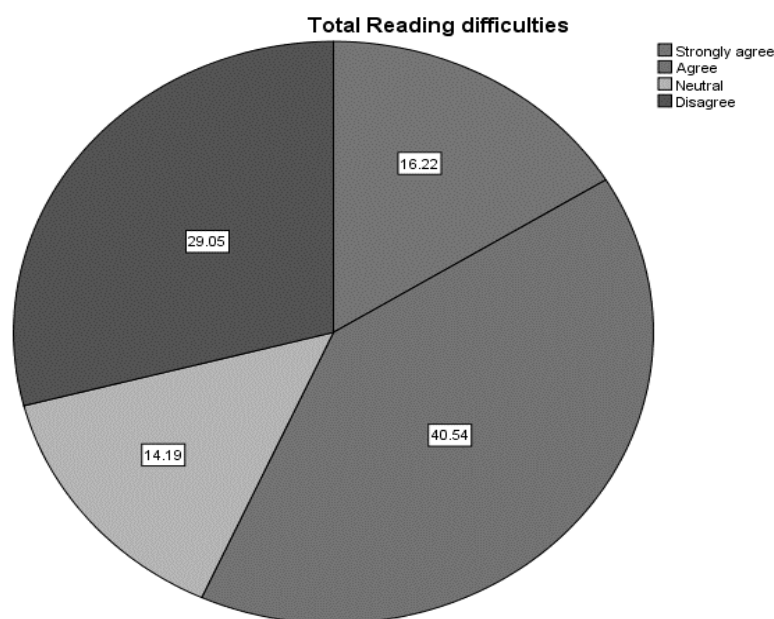


Figure 2: Pie chart of reading difficulties

RQ3: What comprehension and repair strategies do learners report themselves using?

Students reported that they used all the comprehension strategies such as asking for clarification, keeping the focus on the problem to gain better understanding, looking at the overall information, and finding other references. These strategies were applied in a moderate level (M=1.67, SD=.66). This signifies that students moderately use these kinds of comprehension and repair strategies for the better understanding of EFL reading.

Table 3 (comprehension and repair strategies area) below shows EFL learners' moderate ability to asking for clarification (42.6%), keeping the focus on the problem to gain better understanding (45.3%), looking at the overall information in the text to understand problem (42.2%), and finding other references (44.9%).

Table 3: Students’ reported uses of comprehension and repair strategies

Area	Strong response 61-100%	Moderate response 31-60%	Weak response 0-30%
Comprehension and repair strategies (45.3%)		Asking for clarification (42.6%)	
		Keeping the focus on the problem to gain better understanding (45.3%)	
		Looking at the overall information in the text to understand the problem (42.2%)	
		Finding other references (44.9%)	

Figure 3 of pie chart of overall comprehension and repair strategies displays 43.24% students strongly agree, 47.30% students agree, 8.784% students remain neutral, and 0.68% students disagree that they use comprehension and repair strategies for achieving EFL successfully. This argues that students are fairly good in using comprehension and repair strategies in EFL reading.

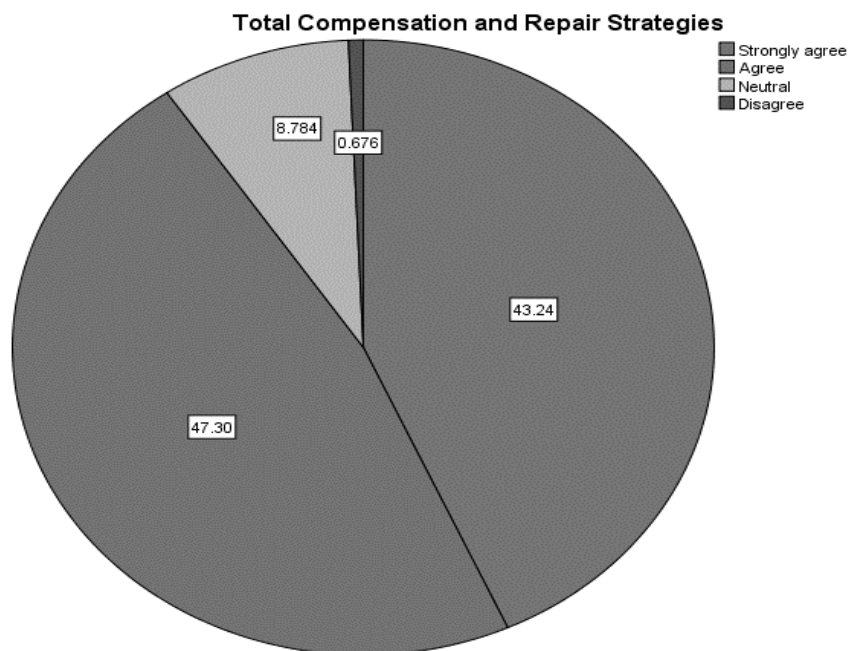


Figure 3: Pie chart of comprehension and repair strategies

RQ 4: What perceptions do the learners have about effective reading strategies?

Students in the study perceived that learning strategies such as word meaning (M=1.64, SD=.86), overall meaning from text (M=1.84, SD=.85), the grammatical structures (M=2.22, SD=1.07), background knowledge (M=2.00, SD=.93), dictionary/word references (M=1.65, SD=.82), detailed information (M=1.99, SD=1.05), text organisation (M=2.35, SD=1.10), and

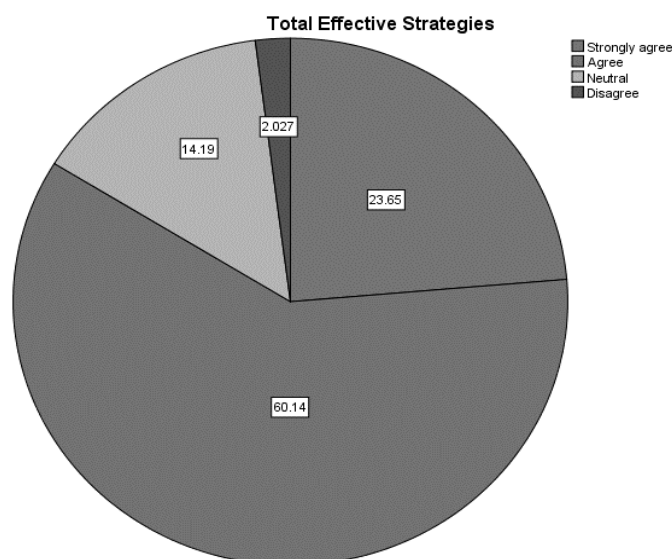
guessing meaning (M=2.13, SD=1.06) were fairly effective to promote reading comprehension. Among them, grammatical structures, background knowledge, text organisation were more effective strategies as perceived by them.

Table 4 (effective reading strategies area) below shows EFL learners' moderate ability on word meaning (44.6%), on overall meaning from text (44.3%), on the grammatical structures (34.8%), on background knowledge (38.2%), on dictionary/word references (44.9%), on detailed information (39.2%), on text organisation (32.4%), and on guessing meaning (36.1%) while achieving EFL reading. Among them, they perceive word meaning, overall meaning of the text, and dictionary/word reference as more effective strategies than the others. These results suggest that these students need be more aware of other effective strategies as well to be benefitted for better reading comprehension.

Table 4: EFL learners' reported perceptions about effective reading strategies

Area	Strong response 61-100%	Moderate response 31-60%	Weak response 0-30%
Effective reading strategy (41.9%)		Word meaning (44.6%)	
		Overall meaning from text (44.3%)	
		The grammatical structures (34.8%)	
		Background knowledge (38.2%)	
		Dictionary/ word references (44.9%)	
		Detailed information (39.2)	
		Text organisation (32.4%)	
		Guessing meaning (36.1%)	

The pie chart of overall effective strategies in Figure 4 shows that 23.65% students strongly agree, 60.14% students moderately agree, 14.19% students become neutral, and 2.03% students disagree that they are using effective reading strategies to do better in reading. They need to increase the uses of effective reading strategies from moderate level to strong level.



RQ5: What is the relationship between learners’ perceptions of strategy use and their reading comprehension?

To see the relationship between learners’ perceptions of strategy use and their reading comprehension, Pearson correlations were computed between them. First Pearson correlation is computed between learners’ reading comprehension scores and each of the four categories of learners’ perceptions, of themselves as readers, difficulties in reading, their use of compensation and repair strategies, and effective reading strategies. After that, Pearson correlations were computed between their reading comprehension scores and individual items of each of the categories of learners’ perceptions.

Table 5 below shows learners’ perceptions of effective reading strategies are significantly and positively related to their reading comprehension, although the relationship is weak ($r=.178$, $p<.05$). This means, learners who have better perception of effective reading strategies are the learners who achieve higher scores in reading comprehension. It further shows that learners’ perceptions of difficulties in reading are moderately related ($r=.316$, $p<.01$) to their reading comprehension, and this relationship is positive. The latter surprisingly indicates that learners who find reading more difficult tend to be doing better in reading comprehension. To put in different way, learners with less difficulty do worse in reading comprehension. One possible explanation is learners who perceive reading less difficult, put less effort on learning to read and this eventually lead them to less comprehension of the reading text. It can also be interpreted as more awareness is, in fact, linked to better performance.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation computed between students’ reading comprehension and each of the categories of the students’ perceptions

		Reading Comprehension
Self-evaluation	Pearson Correlator	-.100
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.225
Compensation and Repair Strategies	Pearson Correlator	.002
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.980
Effective Reading Strategies	Pearson Correlator	.178*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.030
Difficulties in Reading	Pearson Correlator	.316**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

*Correlation is significant at .05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Listwise, N=148

Pearson correlations (see Table 6 below) computed between learners’ reading comprehension and their perception of individual items from each category exhibit that many of them are correlated with reading comprehension. There is a moderate and positive correlation between reading comprehension and the details of the content, and the organisation of the text (effective strategies), and relating the text to prior knowledge and experiences, and the overall meaning of the text (difficulties in reading). And, there are positive but weak correlations between learners’ reading comprehension and ability to understand what will come next in the text (self-evaluation), the grammatical structures (effective strategies), the organisation of the text (difficulties in reading). Conversely, being able to differentiate between main points and supporting details, using prior knowledge and experience, good sense of if comprehension happening (self-evaluation) is negatively, although weakly, correlated

with their reading comprehension. This suggests that learners who have shown better performance in reading comprehension perceived themselves as comparatively poor readers or vice versa; another surprising finding in an EFL context of Bangladesh.

Table 6: Correlation computed between learners' reading comprehension and their perception of individual strategy items

		Reading Comprehension
Self-Evaluation Question 1	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.224** .006
Self-Evaluation Question 2	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	-.265** .001
Self-Evaluation Question 5	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	-.162* .049
Self-Evaluation Question 6	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	-.261** .001
Reading Difficulties Question 9	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.398** .000
Reading Difficulties Question 10	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.337** .000
Reading Difficulties Question 11	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.271** .001
Effective Strategies Question 18	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.262** .001
Effective Strategies Question 20	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	-.187** .023
Effective Strategies Question 21	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.315** .000
Effective Strategies Question 22	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.336** .000

*Correlation is significant at .05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is significant at .01 level (2-tailed)

Listwise, N= 148

Discussion

The present study reveals that HSC level learners possess metacognitive awareness of reading strategy use only moderately, and that there is a relationship between learners' reading comprehension and their perceptions of the effectiveness and difficulty of strategy use in EFL

reading. However, unlike Carrell (1989), the present study is not able to make a comparison between L1 and L2 reading, which is out of the scope of the present study. In order to understand students' metacognitive awareness of strategy use, interpretations of the results of the strategy use are presented in terms of global, top-down strategies and local, bottom-up strategies.

The Bangladesh EFL students' moderate ability to comprehend the reading text as revealed in their self-evaluation is also supported by Khatun & Begum (2000), and Rahman (2007). The students seem to be less able to use global, top-down strategies e.g., prior knowledge and experience, and to monitor their comprehension whether it is happening. This indicates that this group of learners needs to raise their use of global strategies; Rahman (2007) also advocated the need for more higher-order skills among HSC learners. On the other hand, these students find vocabulary and grammatical structures, bottom up processes, more difficult than others. However, their perceptions of comparatively less difficulty with using background knowledge and understanding overall information of the text seem to contradict their self-evaluation. That is, they perceive these strategies as less difficult but cannot use them frequently. There is a possibility that these students are not used to use these strategies, therefore more awareness and practice of using these strategies can help. Moreover, 29.04% students' no difficulty while reading made it dubious and unrealistic in an EFL context of Bangladesh. One possible reason can be these students are not much aware of different kinds of difficulties; also explained below when discussing correlation with awareness of difficulty.

The students seem to be fairly good at using comprehension and repair strategies, as reflected in their overall moderate ability to use these strategies and sometimes strong agreement with using these. On the other hand, they also reported the effective strategies as fairly effective. They perceived grammar knowledge, background knowledge, and text organisation as more effective strategies than the others; this shows their perceptions of effectiveness give more or less balanced weight to both strategies global and local in nature. Having said that, preference to both top-down and bottom-up strategies is not reflected in their use of strategies; rather a less preference to global strategies is revealed. On the other hand, use of grammatical structures is perceived as an effective strategy but seems to be an area of difficult for these learners. Therefore, these learners need to acquire and use better grammar knowledge as well, a local strategy. If corroborated, the findings in RQs1 & 4 show a close proximity between their self-evaluation and their perceptions of effectiveness of reading strategies in terms of reported percentages. However, there is a gap between their self-evaluation and perceptions of effectiveness and their use of comprehension and repair strategies. This indicates that what they perceive of themselves and of effective strategies is not reflected in their performance of strategy use.

There is, therefore, an anomaly when the students perceive some strategies less difficult for them as well as effective strategies (e.g., background knowledge and text organisation) but they are not much able to use them frequently. That is, these learners need to know how to use them. Therefore, knowing the effective strategies always does not guarantee use of them. Being strategic is not simply a matter of knowing what strategy to use but also how to use it successfully. This is what Baker and Brown (1984) called the separation between "knowing what" and "knowing how". However, a gap between what these students believed they should do and what they perceived themselves doing does also not indicate that all the students were not strategic.

The study further reveals a relationship between learners' reading comprehension and their perceptions of the categories of effectiveness and difficulty of strategy use in EFL reading, a number of the individual strategies of effectiveness, difficulties, and self-evaluation. That means, if the students are more aware of the effective strategies and of the difficulties of strategy use they also do better in reading comprehension. A link between metacognitive

awareness and reading comprehension is also revealed by Carrell (1989) and Zhang (2002). The finding of a significant and positive relationship with effective strategies and difficulty in strategy use corroborates Zhnag's (2002); however, the finding of positive correlation with difficulties contradicts Carrell's (1989) negative correlation with difficulties. In line with Zhang (2002) and Baker and Brown (1984), it can be interpreted that the more the learners are reflective, the better they can read i.e., the better performers are more aware of the difficulties of strategy use. On the other hand, unlike Carrell (1989), the present study does not show any significant relationship between reading comprehension and their use of comprehension and repair strategies. Overall, the finding indicates that learners' awareness of effectiveness and difficulty of strategy use can be predictive to their reading comprehension.

A positive relation of the local strategies in the area of effectiveness (of the effectiveness of grammatical structures and details of content) and reading performance means that the more subjects agreed that these local strategies are effective for their EFL reading, the better their reading comprehension. Similar finding of positive relationship between local strategies e.g., sentence syntax and word meaning and reading comprehension was also seen in Carrell (1989). The global, effective strategy of understanding the organisation the text is also positively correlated with their reading comprehension. This shows an interactive top-down and bottom up approach to the text can be effective for better reading comprehension.

There is a significant and positive correlation between reading comprehension and individual items of difficulty area of using strategies, such as relating the text to prior knowledge and experiences, and the overall meaning of the text, the organisation of the text. This also supports Zhang's (2002) finding of the more the students agreed with the statements that the difficulty of EFL reading was due to such global strategies, the more successful they were as EFL readers. This shows the more the students are aware of the difficulty of such global, top down strategies, there is a possibility for them to be aware of using such strategies and perform better in reading.

There is a significant and positive correlation between reading comprehension and ability to understand what will come next in the text i.e, guessing in self-evaluation area. This finding also corroborates Zhang's (1989); the good readers show more awareness of global strategies. However, negative correlations, although weakly, of some of the items of self-evaluation, such as being able to differentiate between main points and supporting details, using prior knowledge and experience, good sense of if comprehension happening shows these learners' better reading is related to their low self-confidence. This suggests that this finding fails to support the idea that more confident readers may not perform better in EFL reading; a surprising finding. Negative relationship between some of the items in self-evaluation (confidence) and reading performance contradicts Carrell's (1989) and Zhang's (2002) findings. This finding indicates that the better performers self-evaluate themselves comparatively poorly or vice versa. However, they are the readers who also show more awareness of the difficulty of some of the top-down strategies. This shows that the better readers have less self-boasting, more awareness of the difficulties, and more awareness of effective strategies. This can be a true reflection of the EFL learners in Bangladesh. That is, Bangladeshi EFL learners possess less self-confidence in general. It is possible that 'being able to differentiate between main points and supporting details', 'using prior knowledge and experience', 'good sense of if comprehension happening' may not be easily available to Bangladeshi EFL learners.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The present study has got its importance in its exploration and exposition of Bangladeshi EFL learners' metacognitive awareness of strategy use in EFL reading, and their relationship with

the students' reading comprehension. The study is original in its kind of dealing with HSC level in an EFL context of Bangladesh. The study also calls for more research, on large scale as well as in-depth exploration of metacognitive awareness of strategy use as well as actual use of strategies and strategy intervention for better understanding of the problem at hand in the EFL context of Bangladesh. This section sums up key findings and ends with pedagogical implications of the study followed by limitations of the study and suggestions for future study.

The present study revealed that HSC level learners possess metacognitive awareness of reading strategy use only moderately. There is a relationship between learners' reading comprehension and their perceptions of the effectiveness and difficulty of strategy use in EFL reading. More global, top-down strategies are generally associated with better reading comprehension, conversely, more local, bottom up strategies are associated with lower reading performance. This result is, to a great extent, in line with Carrell (1989), and Zhang (2002), with few important exceptions.

Based on the findings, some suggestions for pedagogical implications are recommended. Since HSC level EFL learners possess moderate metacognitive awareness of reading strategy use, there is a room for their metacognitive awareness to be raised from moderate to high level. A positive link between EFL readers' metacognitive awareness and reading performance imply that one has the potential to enhance other. Therefore, raising awareness might have influence better reading. As such, EFL teachers are suggested to incorporate explicit as well as implicit instruction of metacognitive awareness. This can serve in making students aware of different types of and effective strategies for reading comprehension as well as of the difficulties and problems they face while reading and using strategies. Diagnosis of the difficulties and problems is a prerequisite for reading instruction for acquiring automaticity skills and reading speed (Zhang, 2002); therefore, teachers need to take into consideration learners' specific needs and problems first in order to help them out. The students' awareness of their difficulties with and importance of vocabulary and grammar knowledge as indicator of their reading also has the implications that these learners need basic linguistic efficiency as well. Therefore, instruction in linguistic base is necessary for these learners in order to be benefitted from using higher order skills or strategies. EFL students also need to raise their self-efficacy belief which will in turn boost their confidence. It is argued in existing literature that metacognitive instruction has the potential to enhance metacognitive awareness, strategy use, self-confidence and self-efficacy, motivation, and (in turn) language performance among the learners. Therefore, metacognitive instruction of EFL reading is recommended for better reading, and to this end, curriculum and materials for reading instruction should incorporate metacognitive awareness raising activities.

The present study has, however, some limitations. We acknowledge that a questionnaire has an inherent drawback in tapping into perceptions of strategy use. The present study is a small scale study investigating 148 participants and it was not possible to go for colleges from diverse geographical areas in Bangladesh. As such, the results might not be generalized for all the population of HSC EFL learners from the whole country as the participants came from only central Bangladesh. The instrument was not piloted; however, the researchers consulted with two EFL teachers (one university and one college teachers) to ensure the validity and reliability so far of the instrument before running main study. Moreover, the reading test seems to be very easy, not challenging, for this level of learners which might have a consequence on the findings.

Addressing these limitations, the present study calls for more research on this area. The future studies can be in-depth explorations using different data collection tools for a better understanding of their awareness of strategy use. More studies are needed on a large scale recruiting more colleges from different geographical areas and urban and rural areas including a good balance of male and female students, and with a view to make distinction between

areas, gender, and even on differentiated reading ability. More research is needed on the link between reading comprehension and actual, task based strategy use. Finally, intervention studies are called for to see if metacognitive instruction and strategy instruction really raise their metacognitive awareness and affect their reading comprehension. Therefore, future research can address these issues.

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Appendix A

Student Questionnaire

General Instructions

This questionnaire is a part of a research work. For the results of this survey to be meaningful it is important that you be as accurate and as honest as possible in your answers. There is no right or wrong answers. Remember that this questionnaire will not be seen by any of your teachers. So, please answer all the questions as freely and as sincerely as possible.

Name of College:

Class Roll no:

The following statements are about reading in 'English as a Foreign Language'. Please indicate the level of your agreement or disagreement with each statement by circling/ticking the appropriate one.

No	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
While reading in English, I am able to (1-6)						
01	Understand what will come next in the text.	1	2	3	4	5
02	Understand the difference between main points and supporting details.	1	2	3	4	5
03	Relate information which comes next in the text to previous information in the text	1	2	3	4	5
04	Question the significance or truthfulness of what the author says.	1	2	3	4	5
05	Use my prior knowledge and experience to understand the content of the text I am reading.	1	2	3	4	5
06	Have a good sense of when I understand something and when I do not.	1	2	3	4	5
While reading in English, things that make the reading difficult are(7-11),						
7	Meaning of the words.	1	2	3	4	5
8	The grammatical structures.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Relating the text to what I already know about the topic.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Getting the overall meaning of the text.	1	2	3	4	5
11	The organisation of the text.	1	2	3	4	5
While reading in English, if I do not understand something(12-15),						
12	I keep on reading and hope for clarification further on.	1	2	3	4	5

13	I reread the problematic part.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I go back to a point before the problematic part and reread from there.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I look up unknown words in a dictionary.	1	2	3	4	5

While reading in English, the things I do to read effectively are to focus on(16-23),						
16	Understanding the meaning of each word.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Getting overall meaning of the text	1	2	3	4	5
18	The grammatical structures.	1	2	3	4	5
19	Relating the text to what I already know about the topic.	1	2	3	4	5
20	Looking up words in the dictionary.	1	2	3	4	5
21	The details of the content.	1	2	3	4	5
22	The organisation of the text.	1	2	3	4	5

