METHODOLOGICAL IMPROVEMENT OF DEVELOPING STUDENTS' ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS ON THE BASIS OF A METACOGNITIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

Developing English reading comprehension skills remains a central challenge in foreign language education. Traditional approaches often focus on mechanical decoding of words and answering comprehension questions, neglecting learners' strategic thinking, self-regulation, and reflective skills. This article investigates methodological improvements in teaching English reading through a metacognitive approach, which emphasizes learners' awareness, control, and regulation of cognitive processes. Key components include goal setting, active monitoring, strategic evaluation, and reflective practice. The study highlights how these components can be systematically integrated into classroom instruction, demonstrating that metacognitive strategies enhance comprehension, foster learner autonomy, and strengthen higher-order thinking skills. Practical implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and classroom practice are discussed, emphasizing students' ability to approach complex texts strategically and independently.

Keywords: Cognitive strategies, reading proficiency, academic literacy, self-regulated learning, reflective reading, instructional design

Introduction

Reading comprehension is a cornerstone of language acquisition, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where learners must not only understand texts but also analyze, synthesize, and apply the information. Proficiency in reading is critical for academic success, professional development, and lifelong learning. Despite its importance, many learners encounter challenges, including limited vocabulary, insufficient background knowledge, and passive reading habits.

Traditional reading instruction often emphasizes **bottom-up processing**, focusing on word recognition, grammar analysis, and comprehension questions. While foundational, these methods are insufficient for cultivating higher-order comprehension, inferencing, critical evaluation, and independent learning. As a result, learners may understand surface-level content but struggle with complex, unfamiliar texts.

A metacognitive approach addresses these limitations by promoting **learner awareness and self-regulation**. Metacognition refers to an individual's ability to monitor, evaluate, and control cognitive processes during learning. In reading, this involves actively planning how to approach a text, monitoring comprehension during reading, and reflecting on the effectiveness of strategies afterward.

By adopting a metacognitive framework, educators transform reading instruction into a **student-centered, strategy-oriented process**, encouraging learners to become reflective, strategic, and independent readers. This article explores the theoretical foundations of

metacognition, outlines practical classroom strategies, and examines methodological improvements for teaching English reading comprehension effectively.

Theoretical Foundations of Metacognitive Reading Instruction

John Flavell defined metacognition as **knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognitive processes**. In reading, metacognition involves understanding how one reads, why certain strategies are used, and how to modify approaches to improve comprehension. Modern research expands this definition to include **goal setting, active monitoring, and reflective evaluation**, highlighting the importance of metacognition for academic achievement and learner autonomy.

Research shows that learners with strong metacognitive skills demonstrate **higher comprehension**, anticipate difficulties, detect inconsistencies, and adjust strategies appropriately. Conversely, students with low metacognitive awareness often read mechanically, fail to integrate information, and struggle with complex texts. Therefore, integrating metacognitive strategies in reading instruction **bridges the gap between basic literacy and higher-order comprehension**.

Body Part

Metacognition and Reading Comprehension

Metacognition enables learners to approach texts strategically rather than passively. A metacognitive reader not only decodes words but also **plans how to read, monitors understanding during reading, and evaluates the effectiveness of strategies afterward**.

Research in cognitive psychology emphasizes that metacognitive awareness is strongly correlated with higher reading comprehension and academic performance. Learners with high metacognitive awareness can anticipate difficulties, detect inconsistencies, and adjust strategies in real time. By contrast, students with low awareness often read mechanically and fail to integrate information effectively. Fostering metacognitive skills is essential for developing **independent, strategic, and critically thinking readers**.

Key Metacognitive Reading Strategies

1. Planning

Planning occurs **before reading** and includes:

- **Setting Reading Goals:** Define the purpose (general understanding, analysis, critical evaluation).
- **Activating Prior Knowledge:** Connect new information with existing mental schemas.
- **Previewing the Text:** Scan headings, subheadings, keywords, and graphics to anticipate content.
- **Formulating Pre-Reading Questions:** Predict content or create guiding questions.

Classroom Example: Before reading an article on artificial intelligence, students brainstorm prior knowledge, predict possible topics, and create questions such as "What challenges does AI present in education?" This encourages **active engagement** with the text.

2. Monitoring

Monitoring occurs **during reading**, requiring ongoing assessment and adjustment.

- **Self-Questioning:** "Do I understand this paragraph?"
- **Re-reading Difficult Passages:** Slow down for complex sentences.
- **Making Inferences:** Draw logical conclusions from textual clues.
- **Using Contextual Clues:** Infer meaning of unfamiliar terms.

Classroom Example: While reading a scientific report on climate change, students highlight terms, pause to define them, summarize paragraphs, and discuss confusing points. Teachers demonstrate think-aloud strategies to show real-time adjustment.

Research Insight: Students who actively monitor comprehension show **higher recall, better integration of information, and improved analytical skills**.

3. Evaluation

Evaluation occurs **after reading**, focusing on reflection and consolidation:

- **Summarizing:** Write or verbally summarize main ideas.
- **Reflecting on Strategy Use:** Identify effective and ineffective strategies.
- **Peer Discussion:** Compare interpretations collaboratively.
- **Self-Assessment:** Journals or questionnaires track progress and strategy application.

Classroom Example: After reading a newspaper article on renewable energy, students summarize arguments, discuss perspectives, reflect on strategies, and note areas for improvement. This consolidates **metacognitive skill development**.

Integration into Pedagogy

Metacognitive strategy integration requires **systematic instructional design**:

1.Teacher Modeling: Think-aloud demonstrations of strategies.

2.Guided Practice: Initial support, gradually moving to independent practice.

3.Collaborative Learning: Peer discussions, group analysis, strategy-sharing.

4.Digital Tools: E-readers, annotation software, interactive platforms provide immediate feedback.

5.Continuous Assessment: Formative assessment, reflective journals, portfolios.

This transforms reading from **teacher-centered to learner-centered**, empowering students to become autonomous, reflective, and proficient readers.

Benefits of a Metacognitive Approach

- **Enhanced Reading Comprehension:** Effective processing of complex academic texts.
- **Learner Autonomy:** Responsibility for personal learning and strategies.
- **Higher-Order Thinking:** Critical analysis, synthesis, problem-solving.
- **Transferable Skills:** Skills applied across disciplines, supporting academic and professional growth.

Example: A university EFL student reading a research paper on sustainable agriculture uses metacognitive strategies to identify research questions, evaluate methodology, summarize findings, and reflect on strategies. This improves comprehension and **academic literacy**.

Research Evidence

- Students trained in metacognitive strategies show **significant gains in comprehension and retention**.
- Metacognitive instruction enhances **confidence and motivation**.
- Reflective practice promotes **transfer of skills**, supporting lifelong learning.

Pedagogical Implications

Educators should:

- Model planning, monitoring, and evaluation strategies.
- Provide guided and collaborative practice.
- Incorporate digital tools and interactive platforms.
- Integrate metacognitive instruction into curricula progressively.

Curriculum designers should embed diverse text types and **incrementally complex reading tasks** to develop adaptive metacognitive skills.

Conclusion

Methodological improvement of English reading comprehension instruction through a metacognitive approach enhances **linguistic skills, cognitive independence, and critical thinking**. Goal setting, monitoring, and reflective evaluation enable learners to become self-directed, strategic, and autonomous readers.

Metacognitive strategies improve **comprehension, retention, learner autonomy, and higher-order thinking**, with benefits extending across disciplines. Educators adopting this approach transform instruction into **active, reflective, and learner-centered practice**, while curriculum designers ensure structured, strategy-rich reading experiences.

Ultimately, the metacognitive methodology equips learners with **transferable skills** to navigate complex texts in academic and professional contexts, promoting both language development and holistic cognitive growth. Future research should explore **digital learning tools, adaptive technologies, and interdisciplinary applications** to maximize the benefits of metacognitive instruction

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