# Addressing Obstacles to Poor English Reading Comprehension in Fifth-Graders: Employing Metacognitive Strategies for Improvement

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## Abstract
This study uncovers the underlying factors contributing to subpar English reading comprehension among primary students. Its objective is to propose recommendations for enhancing students' proficiency in English reading comprehension. Employing action research, a group of 30 fifth-grade students, aged ten to eleven, was selected for examination. Data collection involved interviews, documentation, and observation, with content analysis and reflection employed for data analysis. Various factors, such as insufficient vocabulary knowledge, a tendency to cram, and a lack of interest in developing creative reading skills beyond test performance, were identified as reasons for low English reading comprehension. To improve students' reading comprehension skills, fostering motivation for learning to read is crucial. As a result, it is imperative for educational authorities to conduct periodic training and seminars for teachers, increasing their awareness of factors contributing to poor reading comprehension and instructing them on how to address these issues through the application of metacognitive strategies in the classroom. Additionally, it is recommended that future researches may focus on strategies, beyond metacognitive ones, that contribute to the development of strong comprehension abilities.
Keywords: Reading comprehension, Obstacles, Metacognitive strategies, Action research

## Introduction
Although metacognition can aid in learning across a range of subjects, we shall concentrate on its function in English language acquisition. Learning English, which is acknowledged as a global and universal language of communication, improves students' comprehension (Harmer, 2001). It takes reading, speaking, and listening skills to learn and study a language effectively (Ayazet al., 2023). According to Snow (2003), reading is an essential ability that helps pupils develop their talents and bridges the gaps between various domains of knowledge. In the field of literacy teaching, the idea that "reading is thinking" is

common (Cunningham & Allington, 2006; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Proficiency in reading is a crucial ability. It serves as a stepping stone towards knowledge. The language policy in Pakistan places a high value on reading comprehension in English because it is the language of research and education.

Reading is an activity that requires understanding and interpreting concepts represented by written or printed text. It is obvious that in the absence of this capability, readers would be presented with peculiar and bizarre symbols that would be incomprehensible to them. A very low reading level enables a reader to distinguish between non-linguistic markings and letters from a specific language. In order to develop a workable solution to enhance this crucial talent, an attempt will be made in this study to identify the challenges and issues that are impeding English reading comprehension. The old ways of teaching reading have become antiquated due to the quick changes in the world of education. There have been new strategies established for teaching reading comprehension and reading skills in English in particular.

It is recommended that certain strategies referred to as metacognitive strategies should be applied for enhancing reading comprehension of students. Metacognitive reading strategies are those that work to increase readers' awareness of, control of, and assessment of their comprehension attempts. Metacognitive strategies are used to tackle all reading-related problems. It helps pupils to acquire comprehension-enhancing strategies and effectively apply them (Baker, 2002; Baker, 2008). Those who are lacking in Metacognitive abilities are going in the wrong way. They lack a well-defined strategy for evaluating their accomplishments, goals, and next steps (Government of Pakistan, 2006).

The language of higher education, the armed forces, and the government in Pakistan is English. English is the language of the elite class and is linked to power (Coleman, 2012). It takes more skill to read a text in English, your second language, than it does in your first tongue. Numerous factors influence second language reading, including age, background, motivation for education, socioeconomic status, and personality differences (Carrell&Grabe, 2010). Numerous other abilities are required for the complex process of reading comprehension (Cain et al., 2004). The text, context, work, and reader are some of the many variables that influence the reading comprehension process (Snow, 2003).

Among the eight disciplines taught at the primary level is English. English is a second language in Pakistan. The majority of students find it difficult to acquire the English language, and the approaches taken to teach it are insufficient. Numerous issues have been connected to inadequate conditions for teaching English as a second language (Manan et al., 2015). Metacognition begins to emerge spontaneously between the ages of 7 and 8 years in middle infancy, and its development could lead to better learning outcomes (Ayaz et al., 2023; Ayaz et al., 2020; Shamir et al., 2008; Whitebread et al., 2007; Whitebread et al., 2009;Veenman et al., 2006). As a result, we carried out an action research to elucidate factors responsible for poor English reading comprehension at the primary level by using Metacognitive strategies.It goes on to suggest remedies and improvements in reading comprehension through application of metacognitive strategies.

**Research Question**

How implementation of Metacognitive strategies could overcome the obstacles that impede English reading comprehension among fifth-graders?

## Research Methodology
To conduct this investigation, Classroom Action Research was employed. This research approach, initially utilized by a separate research group, aimed to improve the learning abilities of both teachers and students(Fisher & Phelps, 2006; Kemmis&Mctaggart, 1988). Four cycles of action research were carried out; each cycle included the following four steps: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Every cycle and its steps were conducted using the action research approach developed by Kemmis and Mctaggart (1988).

## Data collecting tools and Analysis
Interview and documentation were used as data collecting tools. A group interview was conducted at the end of each cycle.Questions about the hindrances were utilized to acquire an in-depth insight of problems they faced during reading comprehension of text. A set of five students was chosen at random for an interview. The interviewer group was different after each cycle because the same questions were utilized in all cycles. Thus, twenty of the thirty students participated in group interviews. Reflections on each cycle were also used as data collection tool.Data was analyzed through content analysis and reflections. Furthermore, the interview questions were analyzed based on the answers given to each question.

## Subject of the Study
Researchers have demonstrated that children as young as 7-8 years old can develop metacognition (Shamir et al., 2008; Whitebread et al., 2007; Whitebread et al., 2009; Veenman et al., 2006). Hence, during the academic year 2022, the study focused on 30 fifth-graders (aged nine to eleven), selected within the suitable age range for metacognitive development. The researcher, who taught fifth-grade English at a government girls' primary school Mardan Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan, chose this cohort. Various research findings have consistently highlighted the significance and effectiveness of Metacognitive strategies in English language learning (Benito, 2000; Ceylan & Harputlu, 2015; Karbalaei, 2011; Schoenfeld, 2009). Thus, the research was conducted teaching the lessonsin English textbook.

## Implementation of the action
Our four-week action research cycle began with the first cycle in the classroom. The first three lessons were taught in first cycle of action research. Five-student groups were formed once the attendance of the students was recorded. Strategies for lesson planning were used prior to the instruction. Pupils were asked to consider the images that were referenced in the book and make predictions about what they would learn. Following that, instruction on the subject was begun using monitoring strategies for interpreting the text. Opportunities to use Metacognitivestrategies to comprehend the instruction were provided. Students were given the chance to link the lesson to their personal experiences. Students

recommended revisions to emphasize class participation, prioritize comprehension over memorization by rote, expand students' vocabulary, boost students' confidence, and reduce number of lessons in the upcoming cycle. Students' reflections were noted for potential change in the following cycle.

Cycle two began with a change in approach, reducing the amount of lessons to be taught in favor of putting more emphasis on practicing Metacognitive strategies, in a nurturing learning environment. In an effort to improve student activities, vocabulary was the main focus and teacher involvement in the classroom was minimized. As the students analyzed the problem, they were given extra task to perform, such underlining each clue they found and using colored pencils to note them on separate task sheets. A source of motivation can be found in combining students with varying abilities, using Metacognitive strategies with cooperation, providing opportunities, and rewarding students.

In third cycle, more chances for individual application of metacognitive strategies were given. Confidence and accountability among the students was encouraged. Remembering the answers was less emphasized than understanding it. Students were instructed to inferences through connecting the text to personal experiences for better understanding.It was the task of teacher to help them to be focused on actual text and avoid divertion of their attension.Textrereading was also practiced in this cycle for understanding the text.

Inquiry was used in forth cycle to help students feel better about themselves and to get them to use metacognitive strategies to comprehend less by rote and to promote student proficiency by understanding. Students were asked about concepts they did not grasp, particularly how to locate an idea in a text. Then a chance of asking questions was given to them. They also shared their opinions during this implementation. Students were motivated to ask questions from themselves before starting lesson, during monitoring process and about what they had learned from the lessons. At the end of each cycle interview was taken and student's responses were noted.

**Result of Student Interview Responses after each Cycle**

The purpose of the interview questions was to elicit information on the teacher's past and present teaching strategies, obstacles to students' learning, and the dynamics between students and peers. Students found it challenging to complete their reading comprehension assignments due to a few obstacles. They were demotivated and their understanding process lagged because they could not comprehend the meaning of words when reading aloud in a lesson. They responded as:

> *I have trouble understanding certain words since I do not know what they imply (Students 1, 2, 3, 4: Group-1). I spent a lot of time looking up definitions for words in the dictionary and writing them down because I was unfamiliar with them (Student5: Group-1). When I try to understand the text, I get discouraged (Students 2, and 5: Group-1).*

Because they had never been given the chance to use Metacognitive strategiesbefore, students recognized that it was difficult for them to comprehend and use these strategies in groups:

> *In the past, we were not offered the chance to apply*

*Metacognitivestrategies for group reading comprehension. We only knew how to translate texts, write down responses in a notebook, and commit exercise answers to memory (Students 1 and 2: Group-1).*

Students advise cutting back on the amount of lessons offered in the next session since they are finding it more difficult to use Metacognitive strategies to a larger material. It will be simpler for them to learn, use Metacognitivestrategies, and appreciate comprehension of the text if the material provided each day is not more (Student 1, Student 2, Group 1).

*Since it took a lot of our time to employ planning, monitoring, and evaluation strategies in order to understand the text, it would be ideal if we were given additional time to practiceMetacognitive skills (Students 3, 4, 5: Group-1).*

Students said in the interview after Cycle two:

*The content was easier for us to understand if certain improvements were made in Cycle II. We want to learn English since we love studying it in such an enjoyable setting.) Additionally, they stated that (Students 1, 2 and 3: Group-2).Learning English today was intriguing because it will help us learn more later on.I knew that students now place a high value on English. It will ensure that we are valuable in the future (Students 4 and 5: Group-2).*

Students mentioned that they really enjoyed doing a few of the comprehension tasks that the teacher had suggested. Students also mentioned that learning activities helped to stay goal-focused. They enjoyed the exercises that the instructors provided:

*I would like to continue learning in this manner in the future because it seemed like the students were enjoying themselves (Students 3, and 4: Group-2). I was enjoying learning with these strategies at the moment. Students find it to be very beneficial, and I was not concerned about the difficult or tedious reading (Student 4: Group-2).*

According to their responses, students felt more confident than ever in their capacity to understand literature by using Metacognitive Strategies:

*Since we have more time than before, we use Metacognitive strategies to help with text comprehension (Students 2 and 3: Group-2). In the past, reading was mostly memorized by rote, with little opportunity for students to use strategies of any type for understanding. Because of this, when we initially gave presentations in front of the students, we were apprehensive and uneasy, but today things are better (Students 1and 5: Group-2).*

One of the key things that stand in the way of students' ability to understand the material is their shyness and nervousness. Thus, Metacognitivestrategies assisted pupils in overcoming their shyness and nervousness and developing strong teamwork abilities:

*It benefits us as students to work together with other pupils. Working in groups, it helped us get over our fears (Students 3 and 5: Group-2).*

When in class or at home, the studentsfavored to comprehend the text on their own. Students were encouraged to practice the target work with one another if they were interested in improving their ability to collaborate. They enjoyed working alone since it let them become more autonomous learners:

> *We are not allowed to continue with reading comprehension after the reading comprehension lesson. Furthermore, I am unable to practice at home with my parents or other teachers (Students 3, 4, and 5: Group-2).* They also made remarks about how little time I gave them to use Metacognitivestrategies during the reading and presentation. Most of them were nervous as they performed their act.

> *Occasionally, teachers gave us very little time to practice the Metacognitive skills, so we were not prepared for our presentations to the class and were not competent (Students 1, 2 and 3: Group-2). We (Students 3, 4, and Group 2) felt pressured to complete our assignment before the allocated time ran out.*

After cycle three everyone answered carefully, expressing their opinions about the new strategies, obstacle in reading comprehension and the classroom setting. They replied that they enjoyed applying Metacognitivestrategies and did not feel bored, in contrast to the previous learning environment.

When I asked the students to share their thoughts on the application of Metacognitivestrategies and the problems they faced during reading comprehension in this cycle, they replied as follows. Several group members claimed that they were unable to analyses the content, make predictions about it before the lesson started, track their reading for improved comprehension, or summarizes it at home or at school. Metacognitivestrategies offer a framework for thinking or a direct route to thinking from start to finish. Whatever they had attempted to learn and practice at home immediately went out the window because, at that point, they had no chance to practice it again after class every day until the next period.

> *I did notpractice following class. In the past, I was more concerned with memorization, so I quickly forgot about it (Students 1, 2 and 3: Group-3). It is useless for us to practice without having the opportunity to do it every day because no one practices it with me at home (Students 1, 2 and 3: Group-3).*

A major factor in the students' discouragement was the fact that their parents were illiterate and unprepared to care for them. One factor influencing students' decision to change their course of study is their background.Students responded by saying that they sometimes felt under pressure from the teacher to finish the reading material fast, which made it harder for them to turn in their assignment on time or produced shoddy work.

> *Because some texts were difficult and required more time to study, we occasionally felt under pressure to do our assignments by a given time (Students 1, and 3:Group-3).Due to time constraints, I completed assignments with super quality (Student 4: Group-3). It is not acceptable that students were required to do assignments quickly (Student 2 and 4: Group-3).*

I intended to prepare them by demonstrating to them how to complete assignments in the allotted time, as I had previously informed them that each assignment had a deadline. Using strategies more effectively can aid in all aspects of reading comprehension.

> *Sometimes I would like to understand what I'm reading with workbooks, charts, and pictures. The environment for learning will be better (Students 1, 4 and, 5: Group-3). I enjoy having enjoyable discussions with friends about how to enhance reading comprehension (Student 2 and 3: Group-3).*

The majority of pupils' parents, as was previously indicated, was employed as farmers and had limited ability to spend time at home with their daughters. Their daily activities influenced the courses they took in school. The pupil never responded to me the way I had wanted, no matter how hard I tried to get them to practice.

> *We did not have time at home to practice these strategies and cannot complete our task at home because we work with our parents in farms (Students2, 3 and 4:Group-4).*

According to the students' responses after Cycle Four, the teacher should go into greater detail to explain each stage of these strategies, since they are necessary for us to understand the text, since it will be easier for them to develop their understanding of the learning issue. Explanation and practice need to be blended to produce a favorable learning environment.

> *We have to lead by example because most monitoring and assessment processes were too complicated for us to comprehend. After the explanation, we can understand the concepts more easily. Sometimes, even after doing the task, we are unsure of what we have achieved (Students 1, 2 and 5:Group-4).*

What the teacher had stated had escaped their comprehension. The pupils shot back, claiming that they occasionally had trouble understanding what they were reading since they were unfamiliar with the English language. Based on the students' remarks, I realized that some of the pupils were unable to understand even basic concepts, therefore going forward, I will need to exercise more caution in my instruction. Pupils need a lot more practice time to get better at both the English language and their skills.

> *Because we got to practice with each other in class, the current learning activities gave me the courage to work (Student 1, 5:Group-4).*

The pupils expressed their desire to learn with the teacher because they believed that she would inspire them to apply Metacognitivestrategies to enhance their reading comprehension. I informed the students that I would organize similar activities in the future after taking their comments into consideration.

**Result of Reflective Data following each Research Cycle**
The pupils found it difficult to transition from the traditional method of text comprehension to using Metacognitivestrategies. The text's translation was taught to the students to learn by heart. Without understanding the translation that was printed on them, they just repeated the sentences. I did everything I could to encourage the students to engage with and enhance their cognitive

processes, but to no avail. The problem of students using metacognition for memorizing rather than comprehension is also covered by other researchers (Ayaz et al., 2020). Interaction and Understanding Issues were discovered. Poor communication was one of the key reasons why the majority of students remained silent when the teacher spoke to them. It will be necessary for the pupils to use Metacognitivestrategies to help them comprehend the text. The pupils were not able to work on their own. They were unable to read the book on their own, but they also had trouble understanding how to use the planning, monitoring, and assessment strategies.

Cultural barriers were discovered in the classroom as well. The fear of making a mistake, shyness, instructor disdain, and other such fears prevented even the bravest students from speaking up to the teacher, asking questions, or answering when they were asked. They were ashamed of their blunders or made fun of other pupils when they made mistakes on their work. This had an impact on how students approached their studies. As a result, the students were quiet. They did not approach the teacher when they were asked questions or instructed to discuss ideas with their buddies because they were afraid of researcher. The same thing happened to researcher as a student because traditional teaching strategies were in use at researcher time. Researcher tried best to reassure the students that did not worry if they made mistakes in order to change their habits during the project's implementation. Researcher also told them that we make mistakes because we are fallible human beings. My first concern as a teacher was always the students' achievement. This led to people's negative perceptions of the content. The fact that they felt the material was too difficult to understand made the students detest studying and comprehension.

A portion of the pupils in my class struggled academically and were sluggish learners. The text's translation was taught to the students to learn by heart. Without understanding the translation that was printed on them, they only repeated the sentences. I did everything I could to encourage the students to engage with and enhance their cognitive processes, but to no avail. The problem of students using metacognition for memorizing rather than comprehension is also covered by other researchers (Ayaz et al., 2020).

Low-literate students seemed to be having trouble with reading comprehension as well as the handout-based homework tasks. Some of them came from low-literate families; therefore they were unable to complete the assignment.

Students were not previously permitted to practice planning, monitoring, and evaluation strategies by their teachers. Students were consequently unable to practicethese strategies in class or outside of it. Students' goal-work practices are not supported or encouraged in their homes. In order to improve their effectiveness in the field, each session reviewed the prior learning themes.

Motivation is an essential skill for learning. Students' learning and practice are supported and encouraged by it. Reading motivation has a big impact on reading comprehension. One thing that pushes a student to read more is motivation (Hairul et al., 2012). The instructor used to focus solely on the conversational method. Teachers like to lecture and had a tendency to be authoritarian. At the time, the learning atmosphere was stagnant. Rui (2004) asserts that students' learning outcomes are negatively impacted by passive instruction. Another thing that keeps people from understanding texts is a lack of motivation.

## Discussion

In order to enhance the reading process and accelerate understanding, it is crucial to apply Metacognitivestrategies during the learning process. The goal of Metacognitive reading strategies is to help readers become more conscious of and in charge of their reading comprehension as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts. Learning how to use and comprehend metacognition strategies can help someone learn. Effective use of Metacognitivestrategiesby English subject teachers and their students may have a substantial impact on the reading comprehension of the students.

This study broadens our understanding of the issues preventing primary school students from understanding what they are reading in English. Our research revealed that the primary barriers stopping pupils from comprehending the text are rote memorization and translation processes. Other studies that have been undertaken have had similar results (Coleman, 2010; Warsi, 2004). Additionally, factors that were identified as impeding pupils' reading comprehension included their dependence, cultural barriers, poor communication skills, low motivation, and low literacy rates. These parameters were also discovered by other researchers (Farooq et al., 2011; Shamir et al., 2008). Another important component that influences reading comprehension is student's empty pockets of vocabulary. Poor or limited vocabulary is a common trait among students who struggle with reading comprehension. This factor was also highlighted by other researchers (Bauman, 2009;Biemiller&Boote, 2006;Rupley& Nichols, 2005). In order to improve reading comprehension, the aforementioned impediments should be reduced to a minimum.

## Recommendations

1. The education department must set up in-service training for educators to keep them informed about the factors and issues responsible for low reading comprehension and to improve these factors through appropriate application of Metacognitive strategies. Learning will become simple and pupils' enthusiasm will develop if they can apply Metacognitive strategies appropriately at the primary school level. Their firm foundation will enable them to become intelligent learners.

2. The school also has to regularly hold targeted seminars for teachers and students to support their practice with text comprehension, competitiveness and ought to make an effort to help students acquire good reading habits.

3. To improve students' reading comprehension, teachers need to be knowledgeable of the advantages of the Metacognitive approach and able to implement it. By using a Metacognitive approach, educators can help their students think more critically, understand texts at a deeper level, avoid rote learning and cramming in order to foster creativity in the students. Rather than having pupils cram, teachers should encourage them to understand the content. They will become ready for adulthood by assisting them in applying the knowledge and skills they acquire in the classroom to their own lives as they get older.

4. Teachers ought to receive training on how to apply Metacognitive Strategies along with other strategies to comprehend the content. It is important to teach students about various reading strategies. This is a result of the traditional

teacher's failure to assist them in improving their comprehension of what they read.

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