

## **CREATING METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS AND STRATEGIC READING COMPETENCE AMONG ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS AT THE UNIVERSITY**

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Although extensive reading is crucial for successful academic performance at the university, many learners are reluctant to peruse complex academic texts. While limited background knowledge and linguistic skills are accountable for the situation, poor metacognitive skills or a lack of strategies may aggravate the issue. The main objective of this research was to identify the existing strategic reading competency of undergraduates of the Wayamba University of Sri Lanka. A survey was conducted among a stratified sample of 300 first-year undergraduates representing six different faculties and three proficiency levels by using a modified version of the Survey of Reading Strategies Questionnaire (SORS) by Mokhtari and Shoeroy (2002), which included 30 statements with a Likert 5-point scale on reading strategies: 13 global, eight problem-solving, and nine questions on support reading strategies. It was further modified by adding one statement as to what level their strategic reading competence grew by responding to the questionnaire as per their perception and two open-ended questions which explore the extent to which they benefited through it. Statements 1-30 were analysed statistically using the rubric designed for the MARS Inventory. It revealed that the general strategic reading proficiency of 57% of the population at Wayamba University of Sri Lanka is at a 'High' level, 42% at a 'Medium' level, and only 0.66% at a 'Low' level. Moreover, the undergraduates used global reading strategies more frequently than the support reading and problem-solving strategies. The majority in both homogeneous high and medium proficiency groups belonged to the high level of strategic reading competency with a certain intuitive awareness of interpreting meaning. In contrast, those of the homogeneous low proficiency group belonged to the medium level, evidently because these skills are not explicitly taught to them during traditional reading sessions. The feedback from one open-ended question on the individual general strategic competence of the learners prior to the questionnaire was categorised into five codes: not satisfied, somewhat satisfied, satisfied, strategic in certain ways, and noted the gaps, and revealed that many participants regarded their strategies to be inadequate. Further, the majority remained neutral to the statement that they became adequately aware of the strategies by responding to the questionnaire. As the findings show, the mere administering of the questionnaire is insufficient to raise the learners' strategic reading competence. Planned instruction that provides sufficient exposure to strategies and exercises to practise and apply those skills are recommended to uplift the academic reading skills of the undergraduates.

**Keywords:** Global reading skills, Metacognitive awareness, Problem-solving skills, Strategic reading competence, Support reading skills