Chapter Six: Conclusion and Direction for Further Research

6.1. Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the relationship between the metacognitive knowledge about reading and students' beliefs about reading and language learning and reading and the impact of these variables on the strategic reading performance of the readers. It particularly was concerned with the strategic academic reading and the factors that affected the choice of particular type of strategies and the things that contributed to the appropriate use of a particular type of text-processing or strategies in academic reading situations. Thus to conclude, first the summary of the findings is presented in this section and the value of the think-aloud protocol analysis as a suitable research tool for such studies will be discussed along with some suggestions for further research.

As mentioned earlier in the discussion section, the results of this study are suggestive and not conclusive due to the exploratory nature of the study. Hopefully, despite all the limitations of the study, it turned out to reveal valuable information about the strategic reading processes that can be used in L2/FL reading instruction. Verbal protocols along with the information obtained from the retrospective questions, interviews and questionnaires indicated that the metacognitive knowledge did not seem to be significantly related to the choice of reading processes or strategies. The beliefs of the learners, however, seemed to play a great role in the participants' use of types of text processing. Although the degree of metacognitive knowledge did not affect the choice of strategies, it did influence the comprehension processing of the subjects in the sense that HM subjects had more control over their reading and monitored their comprehension more effectively. Furthermore, the HM group was more able to vary their reading strategies to fit the purpose of the task they were engaged in. This may imply that
the HM subjects had more strategic resources available to them to apply to different reading situations.

Additionally, the interview data revealed that most of the participants had sufficient declarative knowledge about task goals for academic reading, for instance, they knew that their comprehension objectives for academic materials were different from reading newspaper articles. But they differed in terms of the degree of their procedural knowledge about the repertoire of their reading strategies and when and how to use them. Specifically, this knowledge was observed to be greater in the subjects with higher degree of metacognitive knowledge. According to Paris and contemporaries (Paris et al., 1983) this procedural knowledge is often acquired from direct instruction or deduced from repeated experiences in reading.

Another aspect which was considered important in this study was the contribution of a certain reading strategy to the comprehension level of the subjects which was found irrelevant since there was no clear evidence that a particular type of strategy or a set of strategies significantly led to better comprehension. These findings were consistent with Anderson's (1991) research which demonstrated that there was no “single set of processing strategies that significantly contributed to success” (p.468). Therefore, it can be concluded that knowledge of certain strategies and applying a variety of them does not guarantee success with adequate comprehension. Another important knowledge that contributed greatly to successful comprehension was the conditional knowledge which as the results of the study indicated was used more by the HM subjects. In fact, the HM subjects succeeded in using one particular strategy due to their ability to selectively apply a particular type of reading processing in accordance with the goals of the task as well as the complexity of the text.

In short, the metacognitive awareness of the learners helped them to identify their comprehension problems, failures and even the effectiveness of a type of strategy. This was consistent with research findings that indicated that the appropriate use of a type of strategy is determined by the ability of the learner
to think about what he/she is doing during reading, the ability which is called metacognition (Block, 1992). The results of the present study also showed that the HM subjects were more capable of monitoring their comprehension and identifying the reading problems than the LM subjects. In HM subjects, comprehension monitoring seemed to play an instrumental role in choosing the right type of strategies for better performance on the task. Therefore, it was concluded that metacognitive ability of the learners which allows them to self-monitor their comprehension was valuable both in terms of better and more efficient comprehension and for the choice of the most appropriate strategies as well.

Furthermore, the use of the think-aloud protocol analysis seemed to be specifically useful in revealing the characteristics of the participants and their impact on the reading process. No other means of data collection could have yielded the kind of findings that were obtained in this research which uncovered the invisible reading processes of the readers. It also helped enormously in revealing the individual and idiosyncratic features of the participants as they were engaged with their interaction with the text.

In conclusion, the current research study attempted to demonstrate the inter-relatedness of the factors that influence the strategic reading behaviors of learners in terms of beliefs held and the degree of metacognitive knowledge. Hopefully, the purposes for which the study was conducted were achieved in that it highlighted the importance of the beliefs and perceptions that individual learners bring with them to the learning situation and reading tasks as such and the impact these variables can have on their achievement. Furthermore, another purpose of the study centered on indicating the importance of metacognition in helping learners to “learn how to learn” which was achieved successfully. This suggests that the educators and teachers need to address the beliefs of the learners in their instructions and pay particular attention to their individualities in terms of their attitudes, cultural beliefs and metacognitive awareness. In other words, both learners and educators need to become aware of metacognitive strategies through
instruction and learners need to be helped to learn how to use their preferred learning strategies which are consistent with their beliefs as well as their objectives and needs.

6.2. Suggestions and Directions for Further Research

This study could be regarded as thought-provoking for further inquiry into the nature of the variables examined. Further research is required to examine the role of beliefs and metacognition on the reading abilities rather than the strategic reading performance tapped in this study. Further, the role of metacognition and comprehension monitoring can be investigated to compare students with varying degrees of language proficiency and L1 and L2 reading abilities.

Additionally, further research is needed in this area since although the interaction of cognitive and metacognitive strategies with reading performance are well represented in the literature, there is less representation of such an interaction in the affective domain meaning that less is known about the range of interactions found across the cognitive, metacognitive and affective domains (Zeinder, Boekaerts, & Pintrich, 2000). One important aspect of the affective domain is motivation and research has shown a close association between motivation and metacognition and self-regulation in social cognitive theory (Zimmerman, 1995). However, according to this theory, the cognitive accounts of instances in which students have failed to successfully apply their metacognitive strategies in naturalistic settings are deficient and require further inquiry.

Wolters (2003) too has offered another perspective on motivation and metacognition in his consideration of metacognitive structure applied to motivation. He argued that strategies for the regulation of motivation and cognition are closely related and may be used in conjunction with one another. This extension of the motivational knowledge to metacognitive theory as it relates to reading comprehension instruction and interactions is very thought-provoking and interesting to investigate.
In addition, although research on metacognition abounds in literature, there is still a scarcity in terms of the many unresolved questions about it. Specifically, the interplay between metacognitive activities and text comprehension is still vague and requires further clarification. The important question is whether all the theories of metacognition can be translated into practice and how it can inform reading instruction at several levels. Evidently, this needs to be translated into providing teachers with specialized knowledge which they can extend into a range of instructional techniques and curricular materials which are compatible with the beliefs of individual learners and can facilitate the development of their metacognitive knowledge and subsequently their understanding.

Metacognition is, in fact, a relatively recent addition to educational theory and practice and therefore needs to be investigated more fully as a potent concept based on which reading comprehension instruction can be modeled. However, there is a need to develop more comprehensive and valid assessments of metacognition through examining the traditional and authentic assessments of metacognition and try to create a balance between the two so that they inform one another. One suggested approach is that reading teachers turn to researchers and record their students’ reading aloud at a natural pace while they allow them to elaborate on where and why they normally pause to think during their reading. This metacognitive assessment tool can help the teacher to go back to the recordings later and through assessing the think-aloud process get to know the individual students better and help them according to their needs. Although one can criticize this process to be time-consuming and thus difficult to use on a regular basis, at least it can be tried in small sized classes or intensive courses held for EFL/ESL learners. There is another way to alleviate the prohibitively time-consuming nature of this process and that is to use the Major Point Interview with which to begin and end the academic year (see, Keene and Zimmerman, 1997).
One more concept which requires more research is self-monitoring as a comprehension monitoring process which proved to be highly valuable for text comprehension. The literature is full of studies which have examined the self-regulation of learners and self-monitoring has only been discussed in relation to general issues rather than academic performance issues. It should be very informative and at the same time very interesting to further discover the unique role that self-monitoring plays in the metacognitive processes associated with reading. This can probably be accomplished through correlation analyses exploring the relation between self-monitoring and other metacognitive variables in the area of reading comprehension. More research can be done to discover the differential effectiveness of various self-monitoring methods on metacognitive awareness, student motivation, and a variety of other variables. Additionally, this investigation can be extended to the investigation of the differences in self-monitoring between children with disabilities and normal or gifted children. It would also be interesting to explore differential effects of explicit instruction on the use of comprehension monitoring in contrast to the implicit methods.

As a summary, to many people, reading is an isolated activity that takes place in some vacuum. However, to many more it is usually undertaken for some purpose, in a social context, and that social context itself contributes to a reader's notion of what it means to read, or, as recent thinkers tend to put it, to be literate. Reading is, in effect, a broad concept to define and deal with; it is a multidimensional activity which requires interaction among several different factors most notably the reader and the text. The reader is, in fact, the most critical aspect of the reading process mainly because as an individual he/she brings different learning style, personality, and a host of other idiosyncratic characteristics to the reading task that can affect the way he/she approaches it. On the other hand, the sociolinguistic, socioeconomic and cultural aspects seem to play a significant role in terms of the effects they might have on the way reading is approached. Reading research is deficient with regard to this important aspect and needs further studies to impinge upon the impact of cultural beliefs,
sociolinguistic and socio-economic influences on the reading processes of learners. This is because performing complex cognitive tasks, such as reading, involves more than the knowledge and application of appropriate strategies. Learners’ beliefs about themselves as a learner, their beliefs about reading which has been culturally shaped and the sociolinguistic and socio-economic status can also have an influence on their performance.

Different expectations about reading and the use of texts in different social contexts may result in problems in academic reading comprehension. For instance, students from different academic contexts, such as those who are used to memorizing factual knowledge from a text and who assume printed texts to represent truth, may have difficulty if they are expected to do critical reading because they are not familiar with reading for this type of purpose. Perhaps, the culturally developed attitudes in them are among the factors that affect their purpose for reading which they will be conscious of while reading. Learners’ preferences for learning, whether due to their learning style or their beliefs about how languages are learned, will influence the kinds of strategies they choose in order to learn new materials.

In short, the personal and cultural values and beliefs that underpin learners’ actions can influence their reading and need to be studied more extensively. The present study was limited to urban students who in comparison to the rural areas seem to have different status, points of views and cultural beliefs. Thus, any further study in this area can reveal more about the nature of such impacts, if any, to clarify the nature of reading even more. As students’ language learning strategies were found to be consistent with their professed beliefs about learning, therefore a comprehensive study of such concepts would be essential to understanding learner strategies and planning appropriate instruction. Learner beliefs about language and language learning may directly influence or even determine the behavior of language learner. In other words, learners’ preconceived beliefs affect the way they use their language strategies and learn a second language. Therefore, it is felt necessary to carefully observe
and examine beliefs demonstrated by different learners in different contexts and carry out longitudinal studies of second language learners to better identify the characteristics of beliefs. Studying learner beliefs about language learning and reading in a foreign language will definitely broaden our vision in understanding the processes the learners are involved in and thus provide us with insights for classroom instructions.