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Metacognitive Strategies that Enhance Reading Comprehension in the Foreign Language University Classroom

Abstract: Developing reading skills through the use of different metacognitive strategies leads to the development of reading comprehension, which brings us to the ultimate aim of this paper, which is to reveal the importance of a metacognitive strategic approach in developing reading skills which may, in turn, positively influence reading comprehension. The research question was aimed at finding out whether the metacognitive strategy input realised within the *Textual Analysis* course yielded better results in the reading proficiency of those groups which had metacognitive strategy-based input. The analysis of the research questions was based on the corpus collected by way of a students' reading comprehension test, the students' writing of journals, their assessment by rubrics and a metacognitive strategy questionnaire. 40 university students of English as a foreign language belonging to the C2 reference level, were classified into experimental and control groups, according to the reading comprehension pre-test results. The results show that reading comprehension was significantly improved in the experimental groups as a direct result of the use of a metacognitive strategic approach in teaching reading skills.

Keywords: metacognitive strategies, reading comprehension, learning autonomy, assessment.

Introduction

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the teaching of reading skills – in possible approaches to the task and in developing the level of effective read-

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ing comprehension at the university level of teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Montenegro. This area of teaching belongs to the field of Foreign Language Teaching and may be related to a number of factors such as procedures in the teaching of the Methodology of English Language Teaching within the University of Montenegro teaching setting, procedures in the teaching of Textual Analysis within the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Montenegro and the high level of exposure to English students have, both inside and outside the classroom. This last factor is due to the fact that both language and literature lectures are held in the English language – which means that students have a significant level of exposure to reading different genres of text, due to the study exchange projects and stays in other countries, and due to the availability of radio and TV in the English language where they are able to read and comprehend different reading contexts, etc.

> In recent years the term 'interactive' has been used to describe the second language reading process… it describes a dynamic relationship with a text as the reader 'struggles' to make sense of it… In trying to create meaning from the text, you were undoubtedly involved in an active process, a process which Goodman (1967) called a 'psycholinguistic guessing game'. (Hedge, 2005, p. 188)

The ways in which students become able to 'make sense of a text' is a process that should be developed and assessed within the foreign language classroom. In this sense, the recent growing interest in teaching reading skills also corresponds with the increasing academic demands made on students in the assessment of reading skills in the English language as part of the university's assessment policy conducted in English Language Teaching methodology lectures and practical lessons at the Department of English Language and Literature in Nikšić relating to the C1 and C2 levels of English, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) (Bogojević, 2003, pp. 33-37).

Studies on reading skills and special ways to develop and assess them within the foreign language classroom have been carried out worldwide both in native settings (where English is learnt as a mother tongue) (Naiman & Rubin, 1983; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990) and in foreign language settings (Arabsolghar & Elkins, 2001; Sheorey & Mokhtan, 2001; Mehrpour et al. 2012; Masum & Marof, 2012; Zhang, 2013; Seepho, 2013). In particular, attention is being paid to a strategic approach to teaching reading skills, in particular by using metacognitive strategies as a way of actively approaching reading and thus comprehending the text in a more efficient way.

This growing interest in the teaching of reading skills needs to be accompanied by a deeper knowledge of the use of metacognitive reading strategies in the teaching and academic context, such as in Textual Analysis lessons. Also, it needs to be included in the syllabus teaching programme as part of Methodology lectures and lessons at the university, as necessary preparation of future teachers for the strategic teaching of all language skills. Hence we thought it necessary to carry out research into the current reading comprehension of students of English as a foreign language at the university level as well as analyse the impact of metacognitive strategy use on the students' level of reading comprehension through the use of instruments such as a reading comprehension test, rubrics and a metacognitive strategy questionnaire, and derive pedagogical implications based on the results of the answers to the research questions.

Review of the literature

The 21st century foreign language classroom is characterised by a tendency towards autonomy in learning – that students should be guided towards planning their learning, self-monitoring what they do during the performance of tasks and evaluating either the way they approach their own learning process or the their level of their progression in it. This tendency is in line with the most recent directions (Jeftić, 2008; Brajković, 2011; Vučeljić, 2011; Jimenez et al., 2009; Zhang & Seepho, 2013;) in the field of teaching and learning English as a foreign language both worldwide and in Montenegro. This approach is strategy-oriented, where the main aim is to use language learning strategies in order to prepare learners to become autonomous and use the language actively in all its aspects both in the development of language skills (such as listening, speaking, reading and writing) and of the language system, including grammar and vocabulary.

Thus the focus of this paper is on emphasising the importance of a unique strategy-based approach that helps foreign language learners to become proficient readers. To be more precise, metacognitive strategies, embodied in the strategic approach, emerge as those which might help a foreign language reader gain reading competence to the level of autonomy. In general, language learning strategies help in improving communicative competence. When it comes to foreign language competence, the use of language learning strategies could be applied to development of competence in all language skills. The communicative approach implicitly encourages learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning and to use a wide range of language learning strategies (Oxford, 1989, p. 29).

Therefore, metacognitive reading strategies help learners to take *greater responsibility* for their own reading. The learner has the opportunity to use a wide

range of metacognitive strategies in order to read in a more comprehensive way. This is the reason for considering metacognitive strategies, as unique methods which students use to accomplish language tasks efficiently. These strategies allow for active learning. According to the taxonomy of Rebecca Oxford (1990), metacognitive strategies belong to the indirect type of strategy. Rebecca Oxford claims that the aim of learning strategies is developing communicative competence. In her taxonomy, metacognitive strategies help learners to regulate their own learning, to focus, organise, plan and evaluate their learning (Ignjačević, 2009, p. 67).

Additionally, one of the most important features of metacognitive strategies is that they are highly applicable to all four language skills, especially to reading, where there are a number of studies which have a particular bearing on this research paper. Metacognitive strategies are thus regarded as special features or skills of the 21st-century learner:

> Metacognitive strategies […] will train learners to be able to plan their studies, decide on the purpose of an activity or task, learn to prioritize, organize an activity so as to link it with a previously mastered piece of knowledge or skill, and be able to monitor themselves in oral and written production and self-evaluation. (Jeftić, 2007, p. 203)

When it comes to the field of research on metacognitive strategies, practitioners who have carried out different research work on this type of strategy when used in relation to developing reading skills, and who have examined the concrete use of metacognitive strategies in increasing reading proficiency (Oxford, 1990; Sheorey & Mokhtan, 2001; Zhang & Seepho, 2013) as well as teachers' opinions and attitudes towards the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies for improving reading proficiency (Arabsolghar & Elkins, 2001), claim that these strategies allow learners to coordinate the learning process. These strategies are classified into three main categories: 1) centering your learning, 2) arranging and planning your learning and 3) evaluating your learning, where the first group could be classified into further sub-categories such as a) overviewing and linking with already known material, b) paying attention, c) delaying speech production to focus on listening. Within the second category there are six strategies: a) finding out about language learning, b) organising, c) setting goals and objectives, d) purposeful listening, reading, speaking, writing, e) planning for a language task and f) seeking practice opportunities.

The third category contains two strategies: a) self-monitoring and b) self-evaluating.

Strategic reading is a feature of proficient readers. In other words, strategic reading improves reading comprehension and actually helps readers to construct the meaning of the text. In this way metacognitive strategies help readers think about what they are reading, plan their reading, monitor their comprehension and evaluate the level of their reading comprehension. In order to become a proficient reader, it is necessary to use metacognitive strategies which allow the reader to be actively involved in reading.

Recent research into metacognitive reading strategies includes the studies carried out by Sheorey & Mokhtan (2001) and by Zhang & Seepho (2013), in which they place an emphasis on examining the effect of the use of these strategies in developing reading skills and improving reading proficiency within the setting of English as a foreign language. The general approach and final conclusion, judging by the research results, imply that the use of metacognitive strategies has a positive impact in terms of improving students' reading proficiency. Moreover, the researchers claim that this approach – the use of metacognitive strategies – could be applied to the acquisition of other language skills, such as listening, speaking and writing as well as the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar.

The study carried out by Arabsolghar and Elkins (2001) was also significant in terms of examining teachers' opinions on and attitudes towards the use of metacognitive reading strategies. The way teachers approach the teaching of reading skills while using these types of strategy as well as their background knowledge about them and their skills at transferring them to students, is also very important and deserves special attention in foreign language teaching and learning. Teachers need to work on their methodology of teaching, consulting literature and participating in different seminars or training events so that they are able to transfer their knowledge and skills to their students. The conclusions Arabsolghar and Elkins (2001) came to have produced positive results and opened up the possibility for further research into other language skills.

An overview of the studies mentioned here is highly relevant and closely related to the research on metacognitive reading strategies, and is presented briefly in order to give the reader an understanding of the current knowledge base of the research discussed here. To summarise, both studies constitute a solid and significant basis for the research in this paper, whereby the results of these studies have led the researchers to examine the applicability of these strategies to reading tasks and, more importantly, present the current situation in the EFL reading setting in Montenegro, to highlight the importance of the introduction of metacognitive reading strategies into the EFL university classroom in Montenegro and the methods of assessing reading comprehension.

The level of reading proficiency was examined through the use of instruments such as a reading comprehension test, rubrics and a metacognitive strategy questionnaire.

On the other hand, the context of the research into the use of metacognitive strategies (both in a general sense and, more specifically, in relation to reading tasks) within Montenegro's EFL setting, does not provide as abundant information and as significant research results as it does in the EFL setting in other countries. The reason for this lies in the fact that research into a strategic approach to teaching reading belongs to a broader area, such as the educational system in Montenegro in general, than just the EFL context.

The educational system in Montenegro, increasingly so at the beginning of the 21st century, is displaying a drive for change in terms of educational aims, principles, content, teaching approaches and methods in general. However, the reform changes are not oriented towards change in the foreign language classroom. Even though leading authors (Lalović 2009; Goranović, 2011; Perić, 2011; Pešić, 2011) in the area of education in Montenegro have mentioned the necessity of orientating teaching towards autonomous learning, there are very few who have emphasised the fact that metacognitive strategies are most useful in helping students gain autonomy in learning. These strategies are universal and can be applied in a setting wider than just foreign language learning. They can also be used in a general sense and need to be introduced into the educational system as a whole, since the emphasis of 21st-century reforms is on autonomous learning.

The principles of the new educational reforms in Montenegro are defined in the *Book of Changes* (2001), published by the Montenegro Ministry of Education and Science. The educational system as a whole, including the context of foreign language teaching and learning, is described in the *Book of Changes* (2001). However, the reforms are explained only in a general sense, with active learning recognised as being of vital importance, but without deeper analysis in relation to foreign language teaching and with no mention of metacognitive strategies as methods of active learning. On the other hand, one of the authors who has mentioned metacognitive strategies for the first time, Zoran Lalović (2008), suggests that "the question as to what pupils should learn" should be changed into "how pupils should learn" (p. 57) (own translation). Still, the author does not cover the significance of these strategies in the foreign language learning setting.

Also, within the context of educational reforms, the term autonomy is mentioned as being of importance where it is linked with the concept of lifelong learning especially with the competence of learning how to learn (Goranović, 2001). The author mentions that metacognitive strategies are ways that help learners to approach learning actively and find out how to learn. Autonomous

learners are those who understand the aim of learning certain subjects, accept their responsibility to learn, and take the initiative in planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning process (Perić, 2011).

In terms of the overall situation in the educational system of Montenegro, it can be seen that autonomy refers to the foreign language teaching and learning context. However, there is a lack of data on the use of metacognitive strategies in teaching and their applicability to all or one of the language skills. It is evident that there is an interest in educational changes and practical use of rules and regulations in the classroom, in general. When it comes to actual interest in a strategic approach to teaching and learning a foreign language we came across two studies that best illustrate the situation in the foreign language classroom.

According to the available work of practioners in the field of foreign language teaching in Montenegro, it is evident that there is an interest in raising metacognitive awareness in relation to language skills.

As far as broader research work is concerned, the work of Natalija Brajković (2011) is interesting in that the author has recognised the importance of the metacognitive strategies included in Russian language textbooks. The author claims that pupils are becoming more and more aware of their own cognitive activities, where they use their own knowledge in order to monitor and evaluate, and metacognition is therefore an important aspect of their development (Brajković, 2011, p. 163). The author also identifies certain metacognitive reading strategies and signifies that they need to be included in FL primary school textbooks in Montenegro so that pupils can use them in order to link and integrate information with the background knowledge (p. 165) and to read actively.

Another study is based on research on metacognitive speaking strategies within the setting of French as a foreign language at university. The researchers (Nikčević & Bogojević, 2008) examined the positive effects on speaking proficiency of using this strategy.

When it comes to other language skills, there has been no significant research work done in the Montenegro EFL setting. It is evident that there is room for research work in the field of metacognitive strategies. They are recognized as important and oriented towards active learning and especially applicable to university-level students who are able to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning process fully.

Since the necessity of a strategy-based approach use is being recognised in the Montenegrin foreign language classroom, the aim of this research was to enrich the field of the EFL setting in Montenegro with its results and humbly blaze a trail for further and similar research work in terms of other language skills, such as listening, speaking and writing. All these skills are equally important. They

are developed within the Montenegrin university setting as part of both the *Textual Analysis* course and the subject *Methodology of Teaching English as a Foreign Language* where the English language is taught and learnt at the Department of English Language and Literature in Nikšić as a foreign language.

This research will in particular contribute to English as a Foreign Language in Montenegro in light of the fact that educational reforms in Montenegro are oriented towards active and autonomous learning. Since there is a dearth of research work on these issues in the EFL Montenegrin context, this research could make a modest contribution and initiate further and possibly deeper studies.

Within the Department of English Language and Literature in Nikšić, reading skills are developed and improved as part of the *Textual Analysis* course. The methodology of this course will be explained in the *Methods* section of this paper. Before that it is important to explain the nature of the reading process and list some metacognitive strategies that could be used within the three phases of the reading process.

Strategic reading

The mere act of reading contains three phases: pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading. Within all the phases, different metacognitive strategies can be used. For example, in the pre-reading phase *asking questions, activating background knowledge, setting goals* and *guessing* are metacognitive strategies that could be used for preparing students for the content of the text, activating their background knowledge while asking questions about the text or a topic of the text, etc., introducing students to the theme of the text where they can link their background knowledge with what they are going to read, and guess or expect from a text they are reading.

In the during-reading phase where most of the strategic reading occurs, the reader uses the strategies of scanning, skimming, etc., where they are required to pay attention to specific sections of the text in order to grasp either the main idea of the text or to look for a specific idea that they are asked for by the teacher.

In the final phase of reading, learners can use the strategies of summarising and paraphrasing. In the case of summarising, the reader summarises a text using the words from a text, while in paraphrasing the learner is able to use his or her own words. Both strategies help the reader to be actively involved in the reading of a text and evaluate their level of reading comprehension and the ways they have used strategies to comprehend the text.

To sum it all up, the basic component of strategic reading is metacognition. Actually, it is an elementary feature of successful reading where the reading process

is regarded as successful only when it results in reading comprehension. "Reading strategies could not be used effectively without the inclusion of a metacognitive component – background knowledge about the reading process and reading strategies, active monitoring, comprehension…" (Presley & Gilles, in Vehovec & Muranović, 2004, p. 96)

Reading comprehension is an active process of interaction between the reader and a text where the reading process is meaningful and can be realised by the use of metacognitive strategies. More importantly, reading comprehension can be continuously assessed in the foreign language classroom by students writing reflections on how they have comprehended the text and what the methods (strategies) are that have helped them best to comprehend it. The methods of reading comprehension assessment will be analysed in the next section of this paper.

Methods

Research design

Before focusing on the results obtained from the reading comprehension post-test, the journals assessed by rubrics and a metacognitive strategy questionnaire, we will first briefly describe the research design and participants who took part in this study.

We carried out the research with the collaboration of two teachers of Textual Analysis and 40 students of English as a foreign language at the Department of English Language and Literature (University of Montenegro). Since the research was conducted over a period of two semesters (one academic year), this research can be considered as being of the longitudinal type.

The students who participated in the research were at the C2 reference level, according to the CEFR. They were students of the second and third year of English as a foreign language attending the *Textual Analysis* Course as a core part of the main subject Modern English V and VI. They attended the course for a duration of two semesters.

According to the results of the reading comprehension pre-test, students were divided into two experimental and two control groups. There was one experimental group (10 students) and one control group (10 students) in their second year of studies and also one experimental group (10 students) and one control group (10 students) in their third year of studies. In terms of the gender structure of the students involved in the study, all were female.

The students in their second year of studies used the *Ready for CAE*[3] text-book while the third-year students used the *Proficiency Masterclass*[4] textbook. After evaluation of the textbooks at the beginning of the study, the research improved and enriched the syllabus of the textbooks with metacognitive strategies.

In the research, the students went through a three-phase procedure.

The first phase of the study

In the first phase of this research, the textbooks used on the Textual Analysis course were analysed with the aim of examining the structure of the reading skills tasks – whether metacognitive strategies were implemented in the reading instructions – as well as enriching the Textual Analysis syllabus with all the metacognitive strategies to be applied to the reading tasks.

Two teachers of Textual Analysis, on the second and third years of studies, implemented the syllabus with the help of the authors of the research, preparing the lesson plan and procedure for each lesson and consulting regarding the reading lessons. Additionally, before the study began, the authors gave basic and important information about metacognitive strategies – the definition, classification and significance of their use in the foreign language classroom. The teachers and the authors had a meeting before each Textual Analysis lesson, at which they consulted on and analysed the lesson plan and procedure. Also, during the course, the authors observed the lessons, made notes aimed at pointing out to the teachers what to add or change in order to implement the plan as effectively as possible.

The next step in the first phase of the study was reading comprehension pre-testing. It was carried out at the beginning of the study in order to examine the homogeneity in reading comprehension skills, to even up the groups in terms of their knowledge so that they could be divided into experimental and control groups equal in knowledge before implementation of metacognitive strategies with experimental groups only.

After evening out the groups on the basis of the results of the reading comprehension pre-test, both the experimental and control groups started with the Textual Analysis course. All groups attended the Textual Analysis course; however, they went through different procedures within the three phases of the study.

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[3] Roy Norris with Amanda French (2008). Oxford: Macmillan

[4] Gude, K. and M. Duckworth (2002). Oxford: Oxford University Press

Procedure within experimental groups

During the first phase of the study, the experimental groups attended a course where the teachers incorporated metacognitive strategies into reading tasks in order to enable students to comprehend the text as well as possible. Only students in the experimental groups used metacognitive reading strategies. According to the researchers' plan, textbooks were enriched with a repertoire of metacognitive reading strategies, so that the experimental groups used more reading strategies than the textbooks actually contained.

Procedure within control groups

Within the first phase of the study, control groups also attended the course. However, the procedure in these groups was different from the procedure in the experimental groups. The control groups did not have enriched reading tasks with metacognitive strategies as the experimental groups did. They only used the strategies they already had in the textbooks.

To conclude, both groups attended the Textual Analysis course but only the experimental groups used additional metacognitive reading strategies as a part of the research plan. The researchers thus aimed to investigate whether there was any difference in reading comprehension between these groups or, more precisely, whether this enriched lesson plan and procedure helped those students who used metacognitive reading strategies to comprehend the text better.

Second phase of the study

In the second phase of the study, apart from the teachers' incorporation of metacognitive strategies into reading tasks only in the experimental groups and the usual course procedure without the instruction in the control groups, students also wrote journals about how well they comprehended the texts they had read in class. Additionally during this phase, the teachers assessed the journals using rubrics.

Procedure within experimental and control groups

At this stage, the teachers assessed students' reading comprehension by asking the students to write reflective journals about the text they had read in class. The teachers marked the journals using rubrics based on five criteria: clarity, relevance, analysis, interconnection, and self-criticism. In addition, both the experimental and control groups wrote reflective journals in order to examine whether

the experimental groups were more successful due to their implementation of metacognitive reading strategies in the classroom. This means that during the second phase of reading the two groups had only one thing in common: the writing of reflective journals and their assessment by rubrics. The main difference between the procedures followed by the groups was that the experimental groups had enriched reading tasks with metacognitive strategies. The aim of having both groups write reflective journals was to examine whether there was any difference in the results in favour of the experimental groups who had had instruction in metacognitive reading strategies.

The following tables, Table 1 and Table 2, represent the ways in which the teacher applied metacognitive strategies within the *Textual Analysis* course.

Table 1 provides data on the text (the title, the genre of the text, the reading context, the type of reading analysis, the aim of the task, metacognitive strategies applied in the textual analysis and reading phases, such as pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading).

Table 1: data on the text

The title of the text	Motherhood's best-kept secret
The genre of the text	Newspaper article
Context	The nature of the mother-and-son relationship in the past and present.
The type of reading analysis	Gapped text
The aim of the task	To use metacognitive reading strategies in order to comprehend the text better and more efficiently
Metacognitive strategies applied in the textual analysis	Activate background knowledge; set goals-identify the purpose of the task; personalising; directed attention; asking questions; scanning; self-talk; answering questions; evaluate yourself; evaluate your strategies
Reading phases	Pre-reading; during-reading; post-reading

Table 2 provides the reader with detailed information about which metacognitive strategies are used in all three phases of reading.

Table 2: Strategic reading procedure

The phases of reading	Description of the reading procedure
Pre-reading phase	The teacher asks the following questions: *When you are upset or have a problem, who do you turn to first for help and advice? Why? Has this always been the case?* applying the metacognitive strategy of *activating background knowledge* about the subject of the questions. After that, the students need to link their responses with the title of the text and predict the content of the text they read in class. In this case, the teacher uses the metacognitive strategy of *predicting* as well as the metacognitive strategy of *directed attention*. The teacher directs attention to the title of the text and to students' responses to the questions in order to help the students to focus on the reading task. The teacher also directs students' attention to the text explaining to them that they should complete the text by organising the paragraphs into the right order.
During-reading phase	Students scan the text in order to link the paragraphs of the two texts into one main text. Teacher suggests to the students that they underline all the words and phrases which show a connection between the paragraphs. In this way students monitor their reading comprehension. After the first reading, students read the text again, checking the logical connection between paragraphs using the metacognitive strategy of *monitoring* and *evaluating*.
Post-reading phase	In the final phase of reading, the metacognitive strategy of evaluation is used. The teacher asks questions in order to check reading comprehension. The questions are: *To what extent have parent-children relationships changed in recent decades in your own country? Is the relationship very different for sons and daughters?* Also, the metacognitive strategy of *personalising* is used since the main idea of the text is linked with the personal experience of the students. Also, the metacognitive strategy of *summarising* and *paraphrasing* (*evaluating your learning strategies*) are used within this phase to check reading comprehension.

Thus in the second phase of the study, apart from conducting textual analysis, students wrote journals about the text they had read in class. In order to help them write their diary the students were given a set of questions. The authors of this study formulated the questions using the following website www.workshop. on.co [5] and modified them in terms of the aim of writing the journals, i.e. to assess the students' reading comprehension. Specifically there were six prompts or questions that helped students to analyse the method and level of their reading comprehension.

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[5] Retrieved August 3 2010

For the first question, students needed to notice whether they were reading the title of the text first or the picture accompanying it. With this question we can identify metacognitive strategies such as: *activating background knowledge* and *guessing*. These strategies belong to the pre-reading phase.

For the second question, the reader needs to write how long it took him or her to comprehend the text. Here, the metacognitive strategies of self-evaluation can be identified. This is used in the third phase of reading – post-reading.

The metacognitive strategy of *self-evaluation* is also used for the third question, where students identify their reading difficulties and provide examples of difficult reading parts in the text.

In order to respond to the fourth and fifth questions, students used the metacognitive strategies of *monitoring* and *guessing*. The answers to the fourth question referred to students' identification of whether there were any unknown words in the text, where they were required to use the dictionary. The responses to the fifth question responses were intended to show that the readers had identified whether they were able to guess the meanings of those unknown words.

The answer to the sixth question required the readers to link the content of the text with their personal experience – whether they had read anything similar in their mother tongue. Here, the readers were using the metacognitive strategy of personalising. This was used in the pre-reading and post-reading phase too.

The teachers assessed the students' diaries using rubrics. The rubrics were based on five criteria – clarity, relevance, analysis, interconnections and self-criticism. The teachers used this method of assessment for purposes of objectivity.

The abovementioned criteria are closely connected to the questions in the journal. The students' responses themselves reflected the level of fulfilment of the criteria where the criteria were marked on a scale of 1–5. Table 3 shows the structure of the rubrics.

Table 3: Rubrics

Criteria	Mark
Clarity: The language is clear and expressive. The reader can create a mental picture of the situation being described. Abstract concepts are explained accurately. Explanation of concepts makes sense to an uninformed reader. **Relevance:** The learning experience being reflected upon is relevant and meaningful to the student and the course learning goals. **Analysis:** The reflection moves beyond simple description of the experience to an analysis of how the experience contributed to student understanding of self, others, and/or course concepts. **Interconnections:** The reflection demonstrates connections between the experience and material from other courses, past experience and/or personal goals. **Self-criticism:** The reflection demonstrates the ability of the student to question his/her own biases, stereotypes and preconceptions, and/or assumptions and define new modes of thinking as a result.	5
Clarity: Minor, infrequent lapses in clarity and accuracy. **Relevance:** The learning experience being reflected upon is relevant and meaningful to the student and the course learning goals. **Analysis:** The reflection demonstrates the student's attempts to analyse the experience but the analysis lacks depth. **Interconnections:** There has been reduced effort to demonstrate connections between the learning experience and previous other personal and/or learning experiences. **Self-criticism:** The reflection demonstrates the ability of the student to question his/her own biases, stereotypes and preconceptions.	4
Clarity: There are frequent lapses in clarity and accuracy. **Relevance:** The student makes attempts to demonstrate relevance, but the relevance is unclear to the reader. **Analysis:** The student makes attempts to apply the learning experience to understanding of self, others, and/or course concepts but fails to demonstrate depth of analysis. **Interconnections:** There is a very superficial attempt to demonstrate connections between the learning experience and previous other personal and/or learning experiences. **Self-criticism:** There is some attempt at self-criticism, but the self-reflection fails to demonstrate a new awareness of personal biases, etc.	2–3
Clarity: Language is unclear and confusing throughout. Concepts are either not discussed or are presented inaccurately. **Relevance:** Most of the reflection is irrelevant to the student and/or the course learning goals. **Analysis:** Reflection does not move beyond description of the learning experience(s). **Interconnection:** No attempt to demonstrate connections to previous learning or experience. **Self-criticism:** No attempt at self-criticism.	1

The authors of the study also checked the validity of the reflective journal using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Table 4 represents the validity of the journals for both the second and third years of student participants in the study.

Table 4: The validity of journals

Cronbach's alpha coefficient		Number of criteria (clarity, relevance, analysis, interconnections, self-criticism)
Second year	0.959	5
Third year	0.930	5

According to the results shown in Table 4, the reflective journals can be considered valid. All alpha values of 0.80 and higher are considered standard and acceptable values of validity.

The third phase of the study

In the third phase of this study, students (from both the experimental and control groups) completed a reading comprehension post-test where the results of their reading comprehension pre-test and post-test are compared in order to find out their progress from the beginning to the end of the study in reading comprehension.

Additionally, all students filled in a metacognitive strategy questionnaire in which they expressed their opinion about metacognitive reading strategies in all three reading phases – whether they used them and to what extent. These results were also analysed, whereby the researchers compared the results of the experimental and control groups to see whether there was any difference in the results in favour of the experimental groups that could be ascribed to the fact that the experimental groups had used metacognitive strategy instruction within the *Textual Analysis* course.

The students' responses to the questionnaire were also used for determining any correlation between the responses to the questionnaire and the reading comprehension post-test.

The questionnaire consisted of 26 items, with three parts each relating to the strategies used within the three phases of reading, where students could indicate their opinion on a scale of 1–5 .

The results of Cronbach's alpha coefficient here too pointed to the validity of the questionnaire used in this study. Table 5 shows the results of the questionnaire validity analysis.

Table 5: The validity of the questionnaire

Cronbach's alpha coefficient	Number of items in the questionnaire
0.976	26

The authors of this study adapted the questionnaire according to the aims of the study, in which they were only observing reading skills. The questionnaire was a version of Chamot and O'Malley's (1990) classification of language strategies – a classification which is relevant to all language skills – so the authors had to leave out the items from the questionnaire that covered other language skills, such as listening, speaking and writing. Since the focus of this study was reading skills, the authors took into consideration only the items concerning reading skills.

Hypotheses

According to the division of groups into experimental and control ones, the researchers set out hypotheses comparing the results between experimental and control groups. The hypotheses of the study were as follows:

General hypothesis: All experimental groups (both the second and third years of studies), that apply metacognitive reading strategies during reading lessons (*Textual Analysis* course), will improve their reading comprehension more than the control groups;

Hypothesis 1: Both the second- and third-year experimental groups will have better results from the rubrics than the control groups;

Hypothesis 2: Both the second- and third-year experimental groups will have better results in the questionnaire than the control groups;

Sub-hypothesis 2.1: Both the second- and third-year experimental groups will have better results in the first part of the questionnaire than the control groups;

Sub-hypothesis 2.2: Both the second- and third-year experimental groups will have better results in the second part of the questionnaire than the control groups;

Sub-hypothesis 2.3: Both the second- and third-year experimental groups will have better results in the third part of the questionnaire than the control groups;

Hypothesis 3: Both the second- and third-year experimental groups will have better results in the reading comprehension post-test than control groups.

Analysis of results

The results were analysed in three sections:
- analysis of the reading comprehension pre-test and post test
- analysis of the rubrics
- analysis of the metacognitive strategy questionnaire.

The data collected through the abovementioned instruments was analysed using the SPSS 17.0 (*Statistical Package for Social Sciences*) program. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were carried out, where qualitative analysis was used for examination of the hypotheses.

Reading comprehension pre-/post-test

The results of the reading comprehension pre-test were compared with the results of the reading comprehension post-test in order to examine whether there is any difference in the level of reading comprehension within the groups which had metacognitive instruction (experimental groups) and those that did not (control groups).

In this section, we compare the results of the reading comprehension pre-test and post-test between the experimental and control groups in their second year of studies, as well as those in their third year of studies.

The following figure shows the scoring average and percentage results of students' responses to the reading comprehension pre-test and post-test and the differences in the results of these tests between the experimental and the control groups when it comes to the second year results.
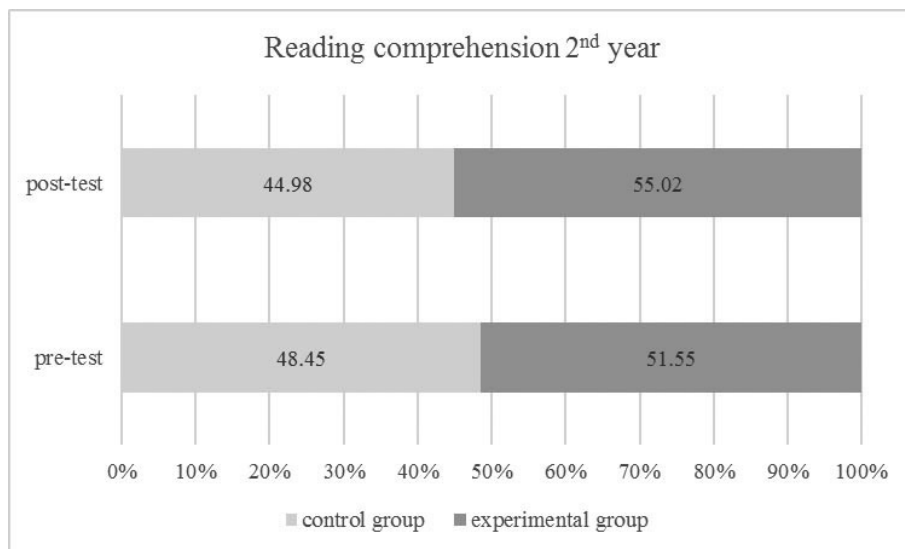
Figure 1: Pre-/post-test results, 2nd year

  As illustrated in the graph, as regards the second-year results, the experimental group showed better performance when comparing their results between the pre-test and post-test. 51.55% of the students in the experimental group answered the pre-test properly (according to the test key) while 55.02% of the same group answered the post-test properly, which suggests that the experimental groups improved thanks to the instruction they got within the *Textual Analysis* course throughout one academic year.

  Furthermore, the experimental group also had better results in the post-test in comparison with the control group. The experimental group had higher post-test scores than the control group, specifically, 55.02% of students in the experimental group answered the test properly in comparison to the control group, whose percentage was 44.98%.

  Figure 2 shows the scoring average and percentage results of students' responses to the reading comprehension pre-test and post-test and the differences in the results of these tests between experimental and control groups within the third year of studies.
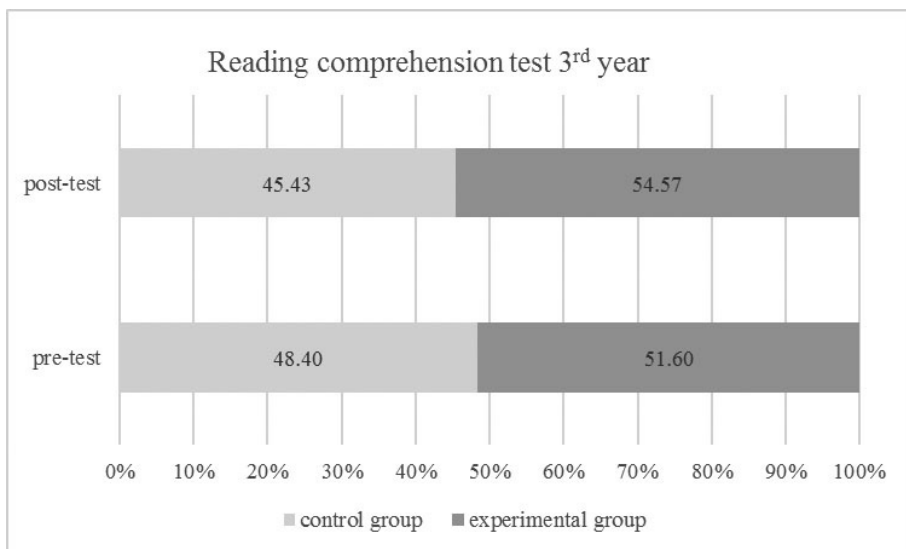
Figure 2: Pre-/post-test results, 3rd year

As illustrated in the graph, the experimental group had better results when comparing their own results between the pre-test and post-test. 51.60% of the students in the experimental group answered the pre-test properly (according to the test key) while 54.57% of the same group answered the test properly, which suggests that the experimental groups improved thanks to the instruction they got within the Textual Analysis course throughout one academic year.

Furthermore, the experimental group also had better results in the post-test in comparison to the control group. Thus the experimental group had higher post-test scores than the control group, specifically 54.57% of students in the experimental group answered the test properly in comparison to the control group whose percentage was 45.43%.

When we examine the overall results of the second and the third year of studies, we can conclude that hypothesis 3 – that both the second- and third-year experimental groups would have better results in the reading comprehension post-test than the control groups – was justified.

Rubrics

During this study, reflective journals were used in order to assess the students' reading comprehension, to compare the results of rubrics, based on five criteria,

between experimental and control groups as well as to make a correlation between the journal and the post-test. Rubrics were used for assessment and marking of the journals. The results we present here are the overall results based on the scoring results of rubrics where all five criteria (clarity, relevance, analysis, interconnection and self-criticism) were included in the statistical analysis and were taken into consideration. The analysis is based on the scoring average statistical analysis (M), t-test analysis (t-test) and hypothesis analysis (p). We present the results we obtained from this type of analysis in the following two figures and two tables (Figure 3 and 4 and Tables 6 and 7).
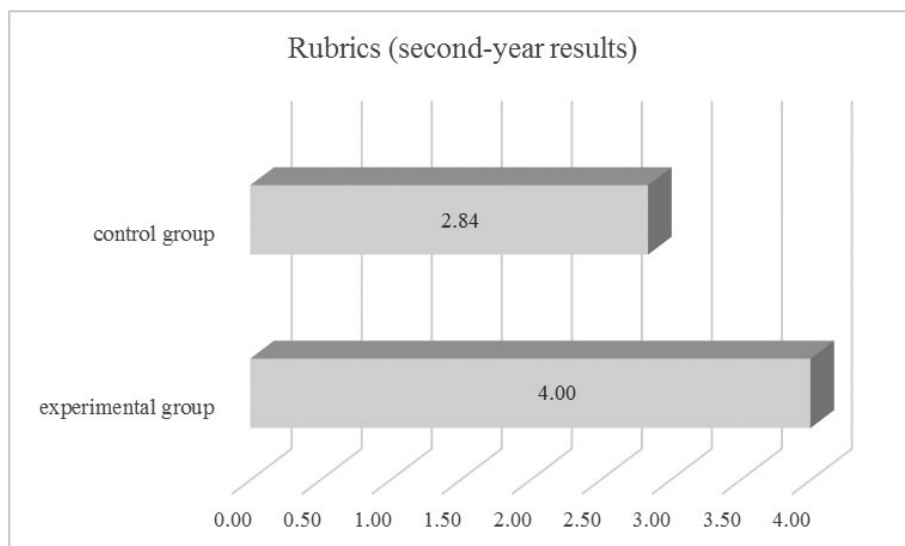

Figure 3: Results for rubrics, 2nd year

Table 6: Results for rubrics, 2nd year

	Experimental group	Control group
M	4.00	2.84
t	3.934	
p	0.001	

As illustrated in Figure 3 and Table 6, the average rubrics score for the second year in the experimental group was M=4.00 while the control group had an average rubrics score M=2.84. The t-test result, t(18)=3.934, p=0.001, means

that with 99% confidence we observe a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control group in favour of the experimental group.
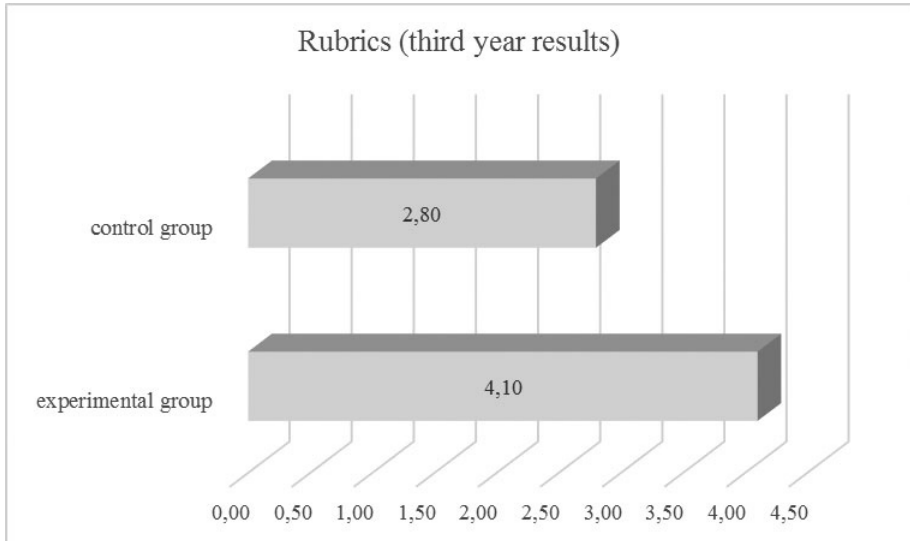

Figure 4: Results for rubrics, 3rd year

Table 7: Results for rubrics, 3rd year

	Experimental group	Control group
M	4.10	2.80
t	6.091	
p	0.000	

As illustrated in Figure 4 and Table 7, the average rubrics score for the third year in the experimental group was M=4.10 while the control group had an average rubrics score of M=2.80. The t-test result, t(18)=6.091, p=0.000 means that with 99% confidence we observe a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control group in favour of the experimental group.

When we examine the overall rubric results of the second and the third year of studies, we can conclude that hypothesis 1, that both the second and third year experimental groups would have better results from the rubrics than the control groups, was justified.

Metacognitive strategy questionnaire for students

The metacognitive strategy questionnaire for students was included in the study in order to examine whether and to what extent students used metacognitive reading strategies in all their phases of reading. The results we present here are the overall results based on the scoring results of all three reading phases (pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading). The analysis is based on the scoring average statistical analysis (M), t-test analysis (t-test) and hypothesis analysis (p). We present the results we obtained from this type of analysis, for the second year of studies, in Figure 5 and Table 8.
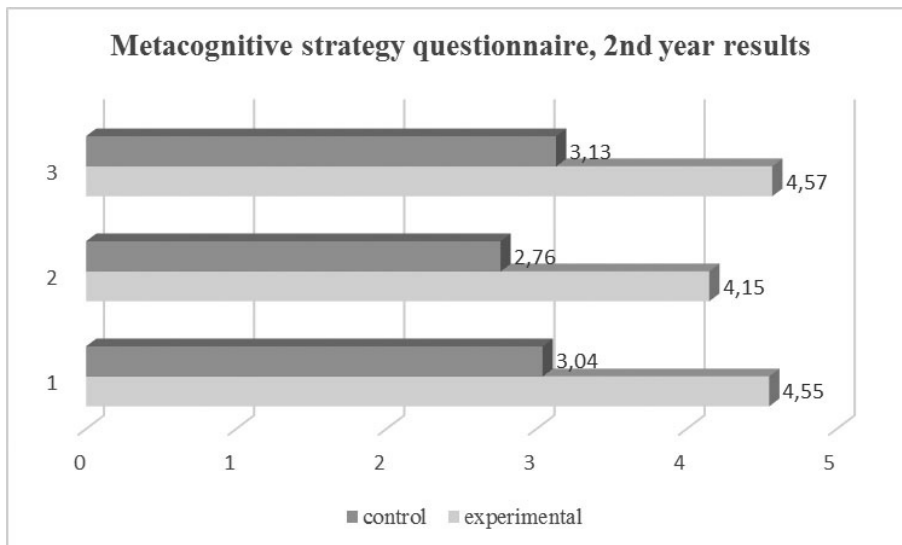

Figure 5: Metacognitive strategy questionnaire results

Table 8: Metacognitive strategy questionnaire results, 2nd year

		Experimental group	Control group
Pre-reading phase	M	4.55	3.04
	t	6.869	
	p	0.000	
During reading phase	M	4.15	2.76
	t	6.866	
	p	0.000	
Post reading phase	M	4.57	3.13
	t	7.024	
	p	0.000	

As illustrated in Figure 5 and Table 8, the average questionnaire score for the second year and the pre-reading phase in the experimental group was M=4.55 while the control group had an average questionnaire score of M=3.04. The t-test result, t(11.938)=6.869, p=0.000 means that with 99% confidence we observe a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control group in favour of the experimental group.

In the experimental group, the average questionnaire score for the questions related to the during-reading phase was M=4.15, while the control group had an average score M=2.76. The t-test result, t(11.424)=6.866, p=0.000 means that with 99% we observe a statistically significant difference between the experimental and the control group in favour of the experimental group.

Also, the average questionnaire score in the experimental group for the questions related to the post-reading phase was M=4.57, while the control group had an average score of M=3.13. The t-test result, t(10.132)=7.024, p=0.000 means that with 99% confidence we observe a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups.

In Figure 6 and Table 9, we present the questionnaire results for the third year of studies.
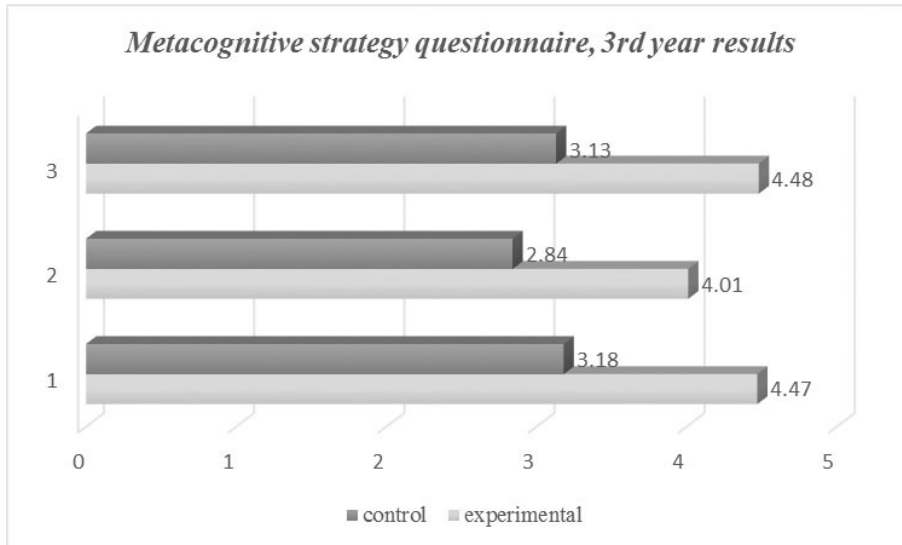
Figure 6: Metacognitive strategy questionnaire results

Table 9: Metacognitive strategy questionnaire results

		Experimental group	Control group
Pre-reading phase	M	4.47	3.18
	t	3.329	
	p	0.004	
During-reading phase	M	4.01	2.84
	t	3.318	
	p	0.004	
Post-reading phase	M	4.48	3.13
	t	7.024	
	p	0.002	

As illustrated in Figure 6 and Table 9, the average questionnaire score for the second year and pre-reading phase in the experimental group was M=4.47, while the control group had an average questionnaire score of M=3.18. The t-test result, t(18)=3.329, p=0.004, means that with 99% confidence we observe a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in favour of the experimental group.

In the experimental group, the average questionnaire score for the questions related to the during-reading phase was M=4.01 while the control group had an average score of M=2.84. The t-test result, t(18)=3.318, p=0.004 means that with 99% confidence we observe a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups in favour of the experimental group.

Also, the average questionnaire score in the experimental group for the questions related to post-reading phase was M=4.48 while the control group had an average score of M=3.13. The t-test result, t(18)=7.024, p=0.002 means that with 99% confidence we observe a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups.

When we examine the overall questionnaire results of the second and the third years of studies, we can conclude that hypothesis 2 – that both the second and third year experimental groups would have better results from the questionnaire than the control groups – was justified.

Also, sub-hypothesis 2.1 – that both the second and third year experimental groups would have better results in the first part of the questionnaire than the control groups – was justified.

Sub-hypothesis 2.2 – that both the second and third year experimental groups would have better results in the second part of the questionnaire than the control groups – was justified.

Sub-hypothesis 2.3 – that both the second and third year experimental groups would have better results in the third part of the questionnaire than the control groups – was justified.

When we examine all the results relating to the reading comprehension pre-test and post-test, rubrics and metacognitive strategies, we arrive at the conclusion that the null hypothesis, that all experimental groups (both in the second and third year of studies) that applied metacognitive reading strategies during reading lessons (*Textual Analysis* course) would improve their reading comprehension more than the control groups, was justified.

Pedagogical implications and discussion

From the results of the analysis of the corpus from the reading comprehension pre-test and post-test, rubrics and metacognitive strategy questionnaire for students, we can draw some pedagogical implications and draw some final conclusions.

Since the hypotheses were shown to be justified, we can conclude that the strategic approach to reading skill is effective, where the application of metacognitive reading strategies improves reading comprehension. These results could

also help in improving the syllabus of the *Textual Analysis* course as part of the university's teaching of reading skills, where teaching tasks for reading should be implemented with metacognitive strategies.

The results also suggest that metacognitive strategies are very useful and help to achieve effective reading comprehension, and could also be applied to different genres of text. Moreover, they help the reader to gain autonomy and self-confidence in reading, as the strategies help them plan and monitor reading tasks, as well as evaluate their own level of comprehension, promoting active reading. To put it another way, active involvement in a task improves memorisation and the preservation of this information in the long-term memory (Ausubel et al., 1978).

Since the results of this research imply positive effects from the use of metacognitive strategies in the development and improvement of reading comprehension skills, we consider it very important to raise awareness about the use of this approach in the foreign language classroom. Teachers also need to have background knowledge about the use of these strategies as well as the skills to transfer them in the classroom. So, it is not enough to teach different reading strategies, it is also necessary to know how to use them (Ling, 2012, p. 38).

During this research, the teachers gave instructions to students according to the improved teaching syllabus they received from the authors of this research, i.e. the authors of this research enriched the *Textual Analysis* syllabus with metacognitive strategies. Very often consultations and meetings between teachers and the authors of the research led to improved quality in the teaching of the syllabus. Also, both the authors and teachers worked on the lesson plan and procedure of each lesson in order to prepare for its realisation in the best possible way. In this way, and according to the positive results of the research, teachers realised that the Textual Analysis course was an important subject and could be improved on in the future, whereby teachers could receive this instruction in the form of literature analysis, approach to literature reading, training events or monthly seminars.

A strategic approach, in the case of our study, embodied in the use of metacognitive reading strategies, is considered a very important and basic element in the modern foreign language classroom. It is more effective, when a different method of assessment accompanies metacognitive strategy instruction. It means that, in the case of our research, reflective journals and rubrics as a method of assessment are more than welcome in the foreign language reading classroom. These methods of assessment help teachers to assess students' work in a completely objective way. The rubrics were based on five criteria that helped teachers to assess students' journals in an objective way where they could assess

the journal from the perspective of its clarity, relevance, analysis, interconnections and self-criticism.

Since assessment is a very important teaching aspect in the FL classroom, journals and rubrics can be regarded as valid and reliable instruments for tracking students' knowledge and improvement in a continuous way. With this method of assessment, especially when it comes to university level teaching and learning, we wanted to emphasise that the reading comprehension test alone, carried out at the beginning or the end of a semester, is not enough to gain an insight into the students' real knowledge. Students' knowledge and its improvement must be assessed continuously and throughout the whole academic year, which is made possible by the students writing journals and the teachers assessing them with rubrics, specifically when it comes to reading comprehension assessment.

Conclusion

According to the results we obtained, we recommend journals and rubrics as essential methods of assessment, and metacognitive strategies as integrated instructions for reading tasks in order to improve students' reading comprehension.

We believe that the results of this study could bring about a positive impact on the improvement of the Textual Analysis syllabus in terms of the use of metacognitive strategies as methods of active reading and journals and rubrics as methods of assessment, in order to lead students towards active reading in the wider sense and learning in the general sense. These results also point to the fact that these methods reflect current tendencies in the 21st-century foreign language classroom in Montenegro.

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Uticaj metakognitivnih strategija na efikasno razumijevanje teksta u univerzitetskoj nastavi stranog jezika

Apstrakt: Razvijanje veštine čitanja putem korišćenja raznih metakognitivnih strategija vodi do razvoja čitanja sa razumevanjem, što nas dovodi do krajneg cilja ovog rada, a to je da otkrijemo značaj metakognitivnog strateškog pristupa u razvijanju veština čitanja što bi, zauzvrat, moglo pozitivno da utiče na čitanje sa razumevanjem. Cilj istraživanja je bio ispitati da li je korišćenje metakognitivnih strategija u okviru kursa *Analiza teksta* donelo bolje rezultate u sposobnosti čitanja kod grupa koje su koristile te strategije. Analiza pitanja u istraživanju je zasnovana na korpusu koji su činili studentski test razumevanja pročitanog, studentski dnevnici, procene studenata po rubrikama i upitnik za metakognitivne strategije. Četrdeset studenata univerziteta koji uče engleski kao strani jezik i poseduju znanje nivoa C2, bilo je raspoređeno po eksperimentalnim i kontrolnim grupama, na osnovu rezultata u čitanju sa razumevanjem koje su ostvarili pre testa. Rezultati pokazuju da je razumevanje pročitanog značajno poboljšano kod eksperimentalnih grupa, što je direktna posledica upotrebe metakognitivnog strateškog pristupa u poučavanju veštinama čitanja.

Ključne reči: metakognitivne strategije, čitanje sa razumevanjem, autonomija učenja, procena.

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